

Two Simple Agreements

The women later moved to a house near the Cancer Hospital which Mother Alphonsa Lathrop (daughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne) had founded. Here they (*Mary Louise Wholean, Sara Teresa Sullivan, Mary Augustine Dwyer*) signed two simple agreements with Father Walsh:

① *We, the undersigned, receiving each from the Rev. James A. Walsh, a salary of \$25.00 a month, with house-rent, kitchen service, light, telephone and heat free, hereby agree to merge our interests until July 1, 1912, sharing expenses, household and personal. These will be met from a common fund to be made up of the above money and any other monies that may come to any one or all of us in view of our union.*

② *In consideration of \$25 a month, for each as salary, and free rental, with light and heat, of a suitable house, we hereby agree to give to the Rev. James A. Walsh our services, to be directed by him for the good of foreign missions. The agreement to hold until July 1, 1912.*

The Secretaries

The women had to overcome many hardships to do all the clerical work involved in the publication of *The Field Afar*. They sent out circulars, did the literary work, as well as the bookkeeping and typing. The women became known as the *secretaries*, a name covering many activities.

In the early issues of *The Field Afar* in 1912 they were referred to by the all "too poetic" title, *The Marys of Maryknoll*. A few years earlier Father Walsh had coined the word, *Maryknoll*. He had vacationed in a beautiful resort in New Hampshire called *The Knolls*. This designation was combined with Father Price's profound devotion to Our Lady. Father Walsh told the secretaries:

"Maryknoll will be the name of the knoll on which we shall locate permanently our seminary building."

Mollie's First Visit

For some years Mollie had offered all her free time to assist Father Walsh in the Boston Office for the Propagation of the Faith, and later at *The Field Afar* Office. Father Walsh had spoken to his *secretaries* so often of Mollie's interest in the work and her untiring devotion to it that the women felt they already knew her. They knew she was prevented from joining them only by the fact that her assistance was necessary at home. Mollie visited the secretaries on February 22, 1912, and stayed until the following Sunday. The diary account reads:

"We had felt from the beginning that Mollie was one of us and so we were truly glad to have her with us for a few days. Of course, these days were happy ones. They could not be otherwise, brightened as they were by her merry good humor and sweetened by her constant self-forgetting helpfulness. We were so sorry to have her go as she was to leave us, and we resolved to pray with her that she might soon be able to come back and remain with us."

Mollie's visit had in truth uplifted the spirit of the secretaries!

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Question for Reflection

Realizing we are not the sole authors of our stories or our lives, how has God's Spirit (often through others) influenced our lives?

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April 2011

The above Reflections were adapted from *To the Uttermost Parts of the Earth* by Camilla Kennedy, MM; *Maryknoll's First Lady* by Jeanne Marie Lyons, MM; 1912 Teresian Diary; *Hearts on Fire* by Penny Lernoux; *Maryknoll in China* by Jean-Paul Wiest; and Archival Documents.

Maryknoll Contemplative Community and the Sisters Centennial Retreats-Reflection Committee

#4 Mollie's Legacy of Love First Three Women Volunteers



Wholean

January 6, 1912

Left to Right:
Mary Augustine Dwyer, Sara Teresa Sullivan, and Mary Louise

Mary Louise Wholean

(Sr. M. Xavier)

In 1904, when Mary Louise was a student at Wellesley College, she heard Father Walsh speak about foreign missions in a nearby parish church at Natick, MA, and she spoke with him afterwards. There was no other communication till September 1911, when Father Walsh found two letters from Mary Louise, after he returned from Rome with the permission to start the Catholic Foreign Mission Seminary with Father Price. She asked in her letter if there were any way in which she could serve the cause of mission.

Father Walsh wrote to her that day in the Pennsylvania town where she was teaching, inviting her to come to see him. She made a quick trip to Boston. Her first words were: *"I do not know why I have come, or what I can do, but something has been urging me for several years to give my life-work to the interests of the foreign missions."* Fr. Walsh learned to his surprise that Mary Louise had not heard of the existence of *The Field Afar* and knew nothing about the newly projected Society. The Holy Spirit had inspired her!

Father made it clear that he could offer her only the opportunity to serve with no assurance that she would ever be a Sister. Mary Louise was satisfied under any conditions. She had a good grasp of languages, French, Italian and German, which were especially

helpful in translating missionaries' letters for articles in the *Field Afar*.

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Over the years, Mary Louise was ill and came to accept pain as a normal companion. She wrote the *Teresian Diary* from 1912-1916, giving us a wonderful glimpse into those precious early days. Her illness turned into terminal cancer. Among Mollie's duties was being the Infirmarian and she lovingly cared for her. In early February 1917, Mary Louise's mother sat at her bedside reading the February *Field Afar*. Mary Louise's eyes turned toward the paper and asked if it could be read to her. Her mother said she was looking for something interesting to read, and Mary Louise whose death was imminent, said "*Why it is all interesting!*" On February 21, 1917, Mary Louise, who chose the name, Sr. M. Xavier, died peacefully at St. Teresa's Lodge, the first Maryknoller to die.

Sara Teresa Sullivan

(Sr. M. Teresa)

Sara Teresa was born in County Kerry, Ireland, in 1874, and came to the States in 1879. She attended schools in Nashua, NH, and a business school in Boston, MA. For twelve years she was secretary to the Dean of the Medical College at Harvard University.

Hearing a sermon by Fr. Thomas F. Price, her mission interest was kindled. In September 1911, she agreed to do typing for Fr. James A. Walsh, and in October she left the Dean's office at Harvard Medical School. Sara came to 242 Dover Street in Jamaica Plain several times a week to help Nora Shea, Fr. Walsh's secretary, who later became Sr. M. Theophane. This was a room rented in the same place where the Washington Press printed the *Field Afar*. She was appalled at the dingy, noisy store-room which Nora insisted upon calling an office. She found typing 8,000 names for the next issue of *The Field Afar* anything but absorbing. She was somewhat aghast at what she had done but would say to herself, with a little thrill, "*This is the life I choose,*" and she had no intention of turning back! Sara be-

came Sr. M. Teresa and was in the 1st group professed at Maryknoll on February 15, 1921.

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She was an Assistant to MMJ during the formative years of the Maryknoll Sisters, and led the first group to Korea in 1924. She died peacefully at Bethany on March 13, 1957.

Mary Augustine Dwyer

In October 1911, the same day that Father Walsh accepted the applications of Mary Louise and Sara, he happened to go into the City, and went to the office where Mary Augustine Dwyer was working. She was a clever, generous and complex woman and owned and managed a business office in Boston, often doing work *gratis* for Father.

Being a public stenographer, she gave generously of time and materials in duplicating appeals for Fathers Walsh and Price, even sending them out for them. When Father Walsh saw her in the office that day, he asked her if she would like to go to New York with the other two women. She said she would go, and she made up a third in this trio of volunteers!

The offers of these women seemed providential to Father Walsh who needed help for his new work. Mary Augustine brought to Hawthorne different office equipment which proved invaluable in their work. In 1913, she went to the newly-opened Venard in Scranton, PA, to assist with the bookkeeping and other tasks. In April 1916, Mary Augustine chose to leave and she re-established her former business in Boston.

Retreat at the Cenacle~January 1912

Mary Louise, Sara and Mary Augustine were strangers to each other, differed in age, training and disposition, and were bound by a common interest in foreign missions. A beginning experience of a five-day retreat at the Cenacle Convent on Riverside Drive in New York City, given by Mother Filippi, was arranged for them by Father Walsh. The retreat closed the morning of January 6, 1912, with a conference by Father Walsh, a talk which increased their sense of the

importance of the undertaking and gave them practical advice for their new life.

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Arrival at Hawthorne

On the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 1912, Mary Louise wrote in the diary, "*We left New York for Hawthorne. 'Hawthorne, Hawthorne,' shouted the conductor, and, looking out the window, we saw Father (Walsh) waiting for us. We walked through the little village until we came to a cottage perched on top of a snowy terrace. At the door we were welcomed by Father (John I.) Lane and a moment later, Father Price came to greet us. Then we looked around: uncovered floors, bare tables, cheerless rooms in which the furniture had been stacked, not arranged, and over all, the fading light of a cold, midwinter sun. I do not know what the others thought, but I know that I almost stopped thinking for a while and merely repeated over and over the words that Father had given us for a motto, 'For God and souls.'*"

"The motto worked its magic, however, and when some minutes later, I found myself making beds, however unskillfully, it had in some way sung itself into a joyful refrain."

The morning light did not improve the women's impression of the cottage which was so cold that they ate breakfast with their coats on and sat on the radiator in the evenings. The plumbing was primitive, reducing them to a quick splash from a basin half-filled with murky water. Sometimes there was no water for drinking, cooking or bathing – more than once they resorted to "washing" their hands on the dew-covered grass. Yet, they rose every morning at six for a long day of work on *The Field Afar*, interspersed with prayers and manual labor.

Father Walsh tried to help: he hired a cook, a boy to unfreeze the pipelines and pump water, and a laundress willing to wash with almost no water. But their work was erratic and short-lived. The first cook departed, convinced the house was haunted. The group tried to maintain their enthusiasm. The

glorious adventure for God *“did not feel so
glorious after all!”*