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### Mother Stephanie Mohun, OP

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## MOTHER STEPHANIE MOHUN, O.P.

RUTH CASPAR, O.P.

ROSALIE GRAHAM, O.P.

*Dominican Sisters, St. Mary of the Springs*

*It is often stated that Catholic schools in the US were built on the foundation of the poverty of vowed women religious. Dozens of communities fit this description, none more so than the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs. Sister Stephanie Mohun's service as mother general spanned a period of tremendous growth in Catholic education at every level. Seeing to the ongoing education and professional preparation of the sisters, Mother Stephanie founded colleges, staffed schools, established missions, and provided leadership for Catholic education that continues to have an enduring legacy today.*

If prudence is the virtue most closely associated with cautious progress, Stephanie Mohun, O.P., was deficient. She was a courageous risk-taker; her 24-year tenure as leader of the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs was marked by a succession of educational and missionary ventures that defied conventional wisdom. The defining quality of her own character was trust, an abiding trust in Divine Providence, a trust so great that caution and anxiety never prevented her from undertaking any endeavor which she believed was the will of God. Among these endeavors were significant contributions to the Catholic school system in the United States at every level: elementary, secondary, and higher education.

### THE MOHUN-DORSEY FAMILY

Stephanie Mohun was born Florence Lee Mohun on April 26, 1868, at the family home, Woodreve, near Baltimore, Maryland. The third of seven children of Clare Hanson Dorsey and Richard Barry Mohun, "Lee," as her family called her, came from an old Maryland family noted for patriotism and literary talent. John Hanson, her maternal ancestor, was active in Revolutionary War politics, and in 1781, following the signing of the Articles of Confederation, was elected by the First Continental Congress as "the President of the United States in Congress Assembled" (Grant, 1996,

p. 230). Her grandmother, Anna Hanson Dorsey, was a prolific writer of the Civil War era, producing many light fiction works with Catholic themes. In 1889, the University of Notre Dame awarded her the Laetare Medal. This award, the oldest and most prestigious honor given to American Catholics, was established at Notre Dame in 1883 (Garvey, 2005). Anna Hanson Dorsey was the seventh recipient, and the second woman to be so honored (University of Notre Dame, 2005).

Literary ability continued in the family line. Stephanie's mother wrote for both secular and Catholic publications. As a young religious, Stephanie, under the pen name of "Lee," composed *Driftwood* (Mohun, 1911), a volume of 27 religious and inspirational verses. As the author explains in the Preface, these poems represented "fragments from a human heart, gathered – like driftwood – on the shores of human life, and sent forth to warm and cheer some other human heart" (p. 9). She also authored a children's book, *Claire Lorraine* (1910). As mother general, her private correspondence and numerous letters to her congregation reveal a graceful, touching, and intimate prose style.

## EARLY LIFE

The Mohun family moved to Washington, DC, in the year following Lee's birth. Her childhood education was under the supervision of a governess, and at the age of 8, Lee, along with her two sisters, attended Madame Burr's French School in Washington. In 1881, Lee's parents, influenced no doubt by John Watterson, then Bishop of Columbus, Ohio, and a good family friend, sent her to St. Mary of the Springs Academy in Columbus, a boarding school conducted by the Dominican Sisters (Rice, 1988). This academy had been located in Columbus since 1868, and had by that time gained a wide reputation for scholarship.

The Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs are a daughter congregation of the Dominicans of St. Catharine's, near Springfield, Kentucky, the first congregation of Dominican women in the United States. They came to Somerset in 1830 at the request of Cincinnati Bishop Edward Dominic Fenwick, O.P. The Dominican friars, members of the Order of Preachers founded by St. Dominic, were already established in Somerset, having founded a priory and parish in Perry County. The sisters were requested to start an academy there for the education of frontier girls. This enterprise flourished in Somerset until 1866, when a fire destroyed the convent and academy. After operating for 2 years in quarters furnished by the Dominican friars, the sisters moved to Columbus, Ohio, where a benefactor had offered them land to build anew their convent and academy (Mullay, 2005).

Lee Mohun distinguished herself scholastically at St. Mary of the

Springs Academy. Archival records indicate that she won honors annually for public speaking and piano. After graduation, Lee, having made a promise to her parents, deferred for a year her decision to enter the convent. Then, on July 2, 1888, she entered the novitiate of the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs, pronouncing her final vows as Sister Stephanie on December 19, 1889.

## **DOMINICAN SISTERS AND THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

At the time of her entrance into the community in 1888, St. Mary of the Springs was one of the American congregations assisting the bishops in the fulfillment of the mandates from the Baltimore Councils regarding parochial schools. The Third Plenary Council of 1884 had decreed the absolute necessity of Catholic schools to serve the immigrant population. From their earliest years, the traditional ministry of the Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs had been teaching. Their earliest rule and constitutions adapted from Second Order congregations in Europe specified prayer and teaching as the special apostolate for the sisters of the order. Shortly after Stephanie's entrance, work was begun on securing papal approval for new constitutions and confirmation of the community as a pontifical congregation. These new constitutions, approved by Rome in 1903, stated:

The primary object of the Congregation is its members' sanctification....The secondary and special object is teaching; for since the Order of Saint Dominic was founded for the salvation of souls, all its members should tend to that end...the Sisters of the Order...should tend to that end not only by prayer, but also by such active works as breathe the spirit of the Order....In this spirit the Congregation embraces teaching as its special vocation. (*Constitutions*, 1904, p. 29)

In 1889, the year of her profession as a vowed member of the community, in addition to their academy in Columbus, sisters from St. Mary of the Springs staffed several parochial schools in the newly created diocese of Columbus, Ohio, with missions in Somerset, Zanesville, Newark, Lancaster, and Steubenville. They had just accepted their first mission outside of Ohio: St. Vincent Ferrer parish in New York City.

In 1891, the community elected as its prioress, Mother Vincentia Erskine, a woman noted for her commitment to Catholic education and to the professional development of her sisters. For the next 26 years, this extraordinary woman would lead the Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs. Some would refer to her as a second foundress (Gallagher, 1954). In 1893, having guided them through the successful process of obtaining pontifical status,

she was elected first mother general under the new constitutions. To this office she was re-elected in 1899, 1905, and 1911. Mother Vincentia missioned sisters to new schools in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut. In addition to her commitment to parochial schools, she established three additional academies: Dominican Academy in New York City (1897), St. Mary's Academy in New Haven, Connecticut (1901), and Mary Immaculate School in Ossining, New York (1915). It was in these academies that Stephanie developed the qualities that would mark her as an inspiring educational leader for the Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs.

## **EARLY FORMATIVE YEARS**

Stephanie's first assignment was to her alma mater, the academy in Columbus, in which she served as a teacher and prefect. Here, at the age of 25, she suffered a painful accident. The students were presenting a series of illuminated tableaux when a spark ignited a pan of powder used for lighting effects. Stephanie grabbed the pan to prevent the fire from spreading to the stage curtains. The resulting injuries led to the amputation of her right forearm. In spite of what others might consider a handicap, Stephanie never became an invalid. She followed the advice of her mother, who told her: "Lee, you must live your life as though you had two hands" (C. Mohun, personal correspondence, 1893), and she fulfilled the prophecy of her grandmother: "You will do more with that one hand than most people can do with two" (A. Dorsey, personal correspondence, 1893).

In 1897, after 2 years at St. Mary of the Springs Academy, Stephanie was sent as teacher and prefect to the newly established Dominican Academy in New York City. Six years later, she returned to teach at St. Mary of the Springs Academy for a period of 5 years. St. Mary's Academy in New Haven, Connecticut, was Stephanie's next place of ministry from 1908 to 1913. At that point, she was chosen as prioress of the Motherhouse community at St. Mary of the Springs; then in 1916, she was missioned as teacher and sub-prioress at Mary Immaculate School in Ossining, New York. When she returned to Dominican Academy for a second time from 1920-1923, in addition to her teaching duties, she was appointed sub-prioress and then prioress.

## **MOTHER STEPHANIE'S FIRST TERM 1923-1929: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SISTER-TEACHERS AND THE FOUNDING OF TWO COLLEGES**

The General Chapter of 1923 elected Sister Stephanie to a 6-year term as mother general on July 8, on the second ballot. Her abilities as teacher and

administrator, as well as her personal qualities of optimism and courage, must have convinced them of her leadership capabilities. She was to fulfill her potential to a marked degree for four consecutive 6-year terms as mother general, serving in that office from 1923 to 1947. Sister Evangela Schilder, one of the early historians of the community, reflects the affection and respect which the congregation felt toward their newly-elected leader: "She was a child of St. Mary's, one of our own graduates, and, as a pupil and a member of the Congregation equally beloved, hence there was much rejoicing on the day of her election" (1930, p. 28).

The education of young people, whether poor or wealthy, on the primary, secondary, and college level, was an overriding priority throughout Mother Stephanie's four terms of office. She immediately turned her attention to all of the components of the educational apostolate: teacher preparation, classroom supervision, conformance with state standards, and adequate facilities.

When she began her first term, the number of teaching sisters in the congregation numbered approximately 260. These sisters staffed four academies and 21 parish elementary and secondary schools. It is significant that, in spite of these many commitments, and with a limited number of teaching personnel, one of the first acts of Mother Stephanie and her council was to offer to staff a poor school in the Columbus diocese, without salary. Columbus Bishop James Hartley made the choice, and the sisters taught at St. Anthony School in Steubenville, Ohio, without stipend until 1944, when the parish was able to pay a salary (Mullay, 2005). Between 1923 and 1925, four more parochial schools were accepted: St. Andrew in Flushing, New York; St. Mark in Brooklyn, New York; St. Brendan in Braddock, Pennsylvania; and St. Clare in Grosse Pointe, Michigan.

One of the major concerns of the General Chapter that elected Mother Stephanie was that the sister-teachers receive adequate preparation for their ministry. A proposal was discussed by the Chapter stressing that it was "of vital importance to have our younger Sisters [fulfill] State requirements for teachers...for our parochial and private schools" (*Acts and Minutes*, 1923, p. 90). The proposal requested the establishment of "a Normal Training School for the Sisters, up-to-date in the curriculum and equipment" (p. 90). The Chapter responded to this request by legislating that a sister be appointed as supervisor of education, and accordingly, Mother Stephanie named Sister Gregory Barry to serve in this capacity. One month after the General Chapter mandate, Mother and her General Council voted to send 19 sisters for further study in their teaching field (*Council book, 1893-1935*, 1935).

Undoubtedly, the act that was to have the greatest impact on the congregation's ministry of teaching and teacher education was Mother Stephanie's decision to open two colleges, in two different states, and within a year of

each other. The older of the two was the College of St. Mary of the Springs, an outgrowth of the Ladies' Literary Institute that had been chartered in 1911 to offer college-level classes on the motherhouse property. This venture, established by Mother Vincentia, had provided summer and Saturday classes, but had never offered degrees. The new college, a 4-year liberal arts institution, opened on September 24, 1924, with a Solemn High Mass. In 1925, it received the authorization to grant the Bachelor of Arts degree, and in 1928, the name was changed to the College of St. Mary of the Springs. Until the building program initiated by Mother Stephanie, the college shared property and facilities with St. Mary of the Springs Academy in the motherhouse. In 1928, Hamilton Hall, a spacious dining room was completed. By 1929, on the brink of the Depression, an academic building named Erskine Hall and a dormitory named Sansbury Hall were under construction. Erskine contained classrooms, offices, a library, science facilities, a gymnasium, and a large auditorium; Sansbury provided 150 dormitory rooms, a chapel, and a large social hall. The oldest academic building other than the motherhouse was Wehrle Art Memorial, a three-story building completed in 1912, gift of the Wehrle family of Newark, Ohio. Built in the style of the Italian Renaissance, Wehrle provided studios, an exhibition gallery, a museum, a statuary hall, and a photography laboratory. All of these buildings, in addition to many others, are operational in 2006, on the campus now known as Ohio Dominican University. The college was accredited by the North Central Association in 1934.

In the fall of 1925, the congregation opened a second college for women, Albertus Magnus College, in New Haven, Connecticut. Dominicans were well-known in the New Haven community. The sisters had founded St. Mary's Academy in that city in 1901, and the Dominican fathers had a priory near Yale University, where they staffed the parish church, St. Mary's. Permission from Rome was needed for the congregation to borrow \$500,000 to purchase the Louis E. Stoddard estate on Prospect Street. The colonial mansion was renamed Rosary Hall and became the main academic building. The stable, with its adjoining carriage house, was designated the student building and renovated to include a theatre, laboratory, and recreation room (Rice, 1988). On March 10, 1925, the state of Connecticut granted a charter to Albertus Magnus College. Classes began on October 10, after an opening Mass attended by Connecticut governor John H. Trumbull and Yale University President James Angell. In 2006, Rosary Hall remains the jewel in the crown of the many Albertus Magnus campus buildings. Albertus was accredited by the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1931.

At the end of Mother Stephanie's first term, in 1929, Sister Gregory Barry, supervisor of schools, was able to report to the General Chapter that

the congregation staffed and administered two colleges, four academies, and 26 parochial schools, with a total enrollment of 12,268 students. State accreditation of the schools was a necessity, and to that end the sister-teachers were sent to the congregation's two colleges as well as to Fordham, Columbia, Duquesne, Notre Dame, Yale, and The Catholic University of America for certification and for advanced degrees. As general supervisor, Sister Gregory made an annual visitation of every school that the congregation staffed. In her report to the General Chapter in 1929, she stated:

[My objectives] are the encouragement of good work, the elimination of ineffective effort and misapplied energy; the gathering of the best from each school and the passing of it on to others....In this way the office becomes an educational exchange bureau. It keeps the teachers growing and producing to the limit of their capacity. (as cited in Kennedy, n.d., p. 24)

Mother Stephanie summarized her first 6 years in office in a letter to the congregation, giving credit to her council and her sisters:

You have been generous to me in your expressions of what has been done for the community in the last six years; but please remember that I did not do it alone, nor do I dream of taking the credit to myself. The power and authority to do this work belongs to the members of the Council, and without their advice, approval, and consent nothing could have been accomplished. Furthermore, without the cooperation and encouragement of the Congregation the work could not have been carried on. So you see, my dear Sisters, that under God the credit is due to the Council for planning and executing the work and then to yourselves for your prayers, labors, and sacrifices for the success of the great undertakings. (S. Mohun, personal correspondence, June 17, 1929)

## **MOTHER STEPHANIE'S SECOND TERM, 1929-1935: FINANCIAL MELTDOWN AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION**

The economic prosperity of the early 1920s faded as the Great Depression widened, and brought financial hardship to St. Mary of the Springs. The congregation had raised \$800,000 by mortgaging the Columbus property, and still carried a debt of \$275,000 for the New Haven college. Since practically everyone in the United States was affected by the Depression, pastors were forced to reduce, or sometimes eliminate, the stipend the sisters received for teaching in the parish schools. The seriousness of the situation was brought home to the sisters by Mother Stephanie's personal attempt to raise funds:



In New York City, the pastor of St. Vincent Ferrer thought he could best help the community by having the sisters take up a collection after Sunday Masses. On a Sunday in March, 1930, Mother Stephanie and some of the other sisters stood at the church doors from 6:00 a.m. till 12:20 p.m. to receive donations....The collection was \$1,565.20. (Mullay, 2005, p. 199)

In July 1934, the congregation was no longer able to pay what was due on the debt, and defaulted on both the principal and the interest.

Cincinnati Bishop Joseph H. Albers, consulted during this crisis, advised reorganizing the debt. Mother Stephanie's trips to Washington, Chicago, and New York in an attempt to find a company to take over the entire mortgage proved fruitless. Nevertheless, her indomitable optimism and trust in Divine Providence never wavered. Her letter to the community in October 1934, states:

Though we have defaulted and are in a critical condition, yet I must still say that I have never for one minute lost faith. I still believe as I've always believed that Our Lord will help us in His own way. (S. Mohun, personal correspondence, October 1934)

Sister Mary Charles Gallagher, a young sister during this period, reflected on this crisis many years later in her historical essay, *Our Heritage*:

The panic of 1929 resulted in hardship in the congregation that seems almost incredible now. Private schools lost pupils, music classes ceased, accounts could not be collected. We returned to the poverty of pioneer days....Mother prayed, but she did not worry. She never doubted that God would help, how or when she did not know, but she was willing to wait the fulfillment of His will. (1954, p. 9)

The Lord's way was ultimately made known. By the fall of 1936, with the help of the trust officers of the Provident Bank of Cincinnati, an agreement was reached that satisfied the bondholders while avoiding bankruptcy and reducing the interest. A sinking fund for repayment was established, and for years each sister contributed every cent she could save to this fund. Home visits, needed clothing, and gifts were sacrificed for the common good.

In spite of the heavy financial burden, Mother Stephanie met with the provincial of the Dominican Fathers and agreed to send sisters to support the work of the Dominican priests at their mission in Fukien, China. On March 21, 1935, five China-bound missionaries left St. Mary of the Springs. Mother Stephanie and Sister Miriam accompanied them as far as San Francisco, and thus another courageous venture was undertaken.

## **MOTHER STEPHANIE'S THIRD TERM, 1935-1941: HARDSHIPS ENCOUNTERED AND SURMOUNTED**

Mother Stephanie's election for a third consecutive term had to be approved by Rome, since the congregation's constitution allowed for only two terms. Papal approval having been received, the General Chapter received the report of the General Supervisor of Education: 37 sisters had received academic degrees since 1929, bringing the total of degreed sisters to 96 (Kearney, 1936). No new schools were opened or accepted during this period.

The deaths of two of the missionary sisters sent to China within 2 years of their arrival only intensified Mother Stephanie's desire to visit the mission and to bring additional sisters with her. This plan had to wait until after the Sino-Japanese war. In December 1938, Mother Stephanie and five sisters left St. Mary's for China. Four of them would remain there as missionaries. On April 26, 1939, while in China, she celebrated her 71st birthday at the mission. While there, she traveled from Kienow, where the sisters were located, to the outlying missions of the Dominican friars. She and her companions made this trip under rugged conditions, journeying sometimes by sampan, sometimes overnight. The hazards and hardships of her 6-month visit only served to increase Mother Stephanie's enthusiasm and love for the China mission (Mullay, 2005).

While Mother Stephanie was in China, the superiors of Dominican congregations in the United States held their biennial conference. This Conference of Dominican Mothers General had been instigated by the master general of the Dominican Order in 1934. Two representatives from St. Mary of the Springs attended the meeting held at Adrian, Michigan in 1939. At the meeting's conclusion, Mother Stephanie, in absentia, was unanimously elected president of the U.S. Dominican Mothers General Conference, a position she held until 1941. St. Mary of the Springs hosted the seventh conference in 1947, during Mother Stephanie's last term in office. Attending this 4-day event were 64 Dominican sisters, including 28 mothers general, representing over 12,000 sisters in the 30 Dominican congregations in the US (Kiefer, 1958). These early efforts at cooperation among American Dominican women have continued and have borne fruit in recent time, giving impetus to such collaborative ventures as the Dominican Alliance (10 congregations focusing on sharing resources and personnel), the Dominican Federation (24 congregations committed to strengthening relationships for their common mission), and the Dominican Cluster (seven congregations presently discussing a process for reconfiguration).

In the meantime, the China mission was suffering the hardships of war. Two days after Mother and her companion left in 1939, the Japanese bombed

the mission and buildings were burned. America's entry into World War II brought intensified military action, and the sisters were temporarily withdrawn from China in mid-year 1944. They were to return in 1946, but after the defeat of the Japanese, civil war broke out between the Chinese Communists and the Nationalists. With their mission once more under fire, the sisters were unable to carry out their duties. They were permanently withdrawn in 1949 (Mullay, 2005).

It was during her third term in office that Mother Stephanie helped secure for Dominican Academy its most spacious home in New York City. In 1936, the congregation was blessed with a generous gift of the mid-town Manhattan mansion of Michael J. Friedsam, where Dominican Academy stands today at 44 East 68th Street. Founded by the Dominican Sisters in 1897, the academy has through the years enjoyed a reputation for academic excellence. In 2001, the school was honored as a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence for the second time in 5 years, and was named an Outstanding Catholic High School in Manhattan by the Blackboard Awards (National Catholic Educational Association, 2005).

### **A FOURTH TERM, 1941-1947: PROGRESS IN EDUCATIONAL GOALS**

As the congregation was preparing for the General Chapter of 1941, Mother Stephanie informed the sisters that she did not wish to be considered for any leadership position. She was 73 years old and had borne the burdens of congregational administration for 18 years. The Chapter, however, manifesting their trust in Mother Stephanie's qualities as a courageous, visionary dreamer, re-elected her on the first ballot. Bishop Hartley, who had presided at the election, reminded Mother Stephanie that such was the will of God, her sisters having re-elected her after knowing her wishes. Again, approval from Rome to confirm the election was requested and received.

The report of the General Supervisor of Education to the Chapter revealed that marked progress had been made in the education of the sisters. Since 1935, 40 sisters had received the Bachelor of Arts degree, and 11 the Master of Science. Additionally, three were working on doctoral studies, 24 the Master of Arts degree, and 39 the undergraduate degree. The number of students being educated by the sisters was 11,936 (Kearney, 1936). Membership in the congregation in 1941 was 479.

Since the Chapter delegates, as representatives of the entire congregation, had by their votes affirmed Mother Stephanie's policy of expansion, she began her fourth term by accepting another parochial school in New York, a hospital in Cincinnati, and missions in Texas and New Mexico. Within this 6-year period, she extended the ministries of her sisters to include healthcare,

education of African Americans in Texas and the Mexican and Indian populations of New Mexico.

In 1944, the congregation sent four sisters to open its first mission in the Southwest, Blessed Martin de Porres in Amarillo, Texas. The sisters worked with the Dominican pastor in caring for the needs of the Black families in that area. The little mission school, which initially served eight pupils, was soon teeming with over 100 children. The second mission in the Southwest opened in 1946 in Abiquiu, New Mexico. In addition to their missionary work, the four sisters assigned there taught catechism at several outlying missions. The congregation provided a car, and Sister Irma Walker became the first sister in the congregation permitted to drive (Mullay, 2005).

Scarcely had the congregation recovered from the adventure of accepting the Amarillo mission than Mother Stephanie disclosed another surprise: she and her council had accepted the offer of Archbishop McNicholas of Cincinnati to administer and staff a convalescent hospital. A benefactor had turned over to the archbishop a 12-acre property with two houses in the Western Hills section of Cincinnati. Permission from Rome had to be sought for this venture, since nursing was a departure from the traditional apostolate of teaching. Once this permission was obtained, the archbishop deeded the property, free of debt, to the congregation (Mullay, 2005). The sisters ministered there until 1992. After subsequent mergers, it became the Mercy Franciscan Hospital.

## **THE TENTH GENERAL CHAPTER, JULY 1947: RE-ELECTION AND RESIGNATION**

Although many sisters thought that age and physical infirmities should indicate another selection, the day after the General Chapter opened in July 1947, Mother Stephanie received a majority of the votes on the fourth ballot. But now, at the age of 79 and in poor health, this vote of confidence was to be only symbolic. Prior to the required request to Rome for confirmation, Mother Stephanie presented her resignation to Bishop Michael J. Ready. On August 5, Mother Stephanie wrote to the community with her characteristic love and humility:

I am grateful to the community for its cooperation during these years and hope that you will forgive all my mistakes and any suffering which I might have caused you in the exercise of my office. I hope that God will bless you and that you will continue to give loyal support to whoever may be elected to bear the burdens of the office. (S. Mohun, personal correspondence, August 5, 1947)

Subsequently, Sister Bernardine Lynam was elected. She gave Stephanie

the choice of where to live out her retirement, and Stephanie chose the St. George Convalescent Hospital, where her sister, Laura, was a resident. In 1950, after suffering an attack of thrombosis while visiting Dominican Academy in New York, Stephanie was assigned to the motherhouse infirmary. There, during the final years of her life, “her greatness burned itself out quietly, giving light and warmth to her children who must remain behind” (“College mourns loss”, 1954, p. 1).

Death came at age 86 on September 19, 1954. Crowds came to St. Mary’s to pay their respects. To accommodate the large number of mourners, two Requiem Masses were sung, one in the convent chapel, and one in the college chapel. Presiding at the solemn Requiem Mass was Bishop Michael J. Ready; the celebrant was Father James McLarney, O.P., whom Stephanie had prepared for his First Communion. Father Robert Brennan, O.P., professor of philosophy and theology at the College of St. Mary of the Springs, knew her well and summed up her life:

Mother Stephanie’s was a most illustrious record, both as subject and as superior. Her natural gifts as ruler were matched by the far more important virtues of humility and simplicity. I have never been privileged to know a woman with more constructive vision – or a broader culture – or a finer perception of the principles that lie at the base of a wholesome religious life. I’m sure she never commanded or counseled any act of obedience that she herself would not perform with her whole heart and soul....She was an age and an era in her own person; carrying on the high traditions that she received from the past; enlarging upon them with insight and the strictest fidelity to duty; then passing them on. (R. E. Brennan, personal correspondence, September 25, 1954)

## HER LEGACY

Mother Stephanie Mohun’s legacy lives on today in the institutions she founded for higher education of women. Today both are co-educational, offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Both remain under the sponsorship of the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs, and are proud to claim their heritage as Catholic liberal arts institutions. In Columbus, after two name changes, the College of St. Mary of the Springs continues this tradition as Ohio Dominican University, serving over 2,000 students (Mullay, 2003). In New Haven, Albertus Magnus College also enrolls over 2,000 students in both traditional and non-traditional programs. There exist today two stone-and-mortar memorials named in honor of Mother Stephanie Mohun – one, originally a residence building at Albertus Magnus, now houses its President’s Office and other administrative offices; the other, the skilled-care nursing facility for sisters and priests at St. Mary of the Springs, Mohun Health Care Center. Although the China mission was

closed during her lifetime, in the congregation that legacy is evident in the person of the Chinese sisters who entered as novices in China or came with the returning missionaries to the US where they entered the novitiate.

Statistically, Stephanie Mohun's contributions to the American Catholic school system during her 24 years in office yield impressive figures: with her sisters, she founded two colleges, staffed 26 parochial elementary and secondary schools, and opened missions in the Southwest for the education of poor children. In addition, more than 300 sisters received undergraduate or advanced degrees. Numbers, of course, tell only part of the story.

Stephanie Mohun's legacy lies in her prodigious human endeavors in the Dominican religious life – endeavors that comprise her spiritual influence, the leadership of her congregation, and the contributions to its mission of preaching the Gospel through education.

Recurring throughout the tapestry of Mother Stephanie's life are threads of unquenchable optimism and courage. Mother Stephanie and her council, during a time of financial instability, incurred a debt of over \$1 million and arranged for and accomplished its eventual liquidation. Sisters were missioned to China during times of war and upheaval, and Mother Stephanie visited them for several months, sharing their hardships and providing inspiration.

It is this latter quality – the ability to inspire – that will remain her lasting legacy. Here is a guide who courageously led by example, who never demanded more of others than she herself was willing to give.

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