

Reflection for the Feast of the Founding of the Congregation
October 30, 2016
By Sister Shirley Krull

Clara Pfaender

I was imagining Theresa Pfaender, the child, the teenager and the young adult and Sr. Clara. Her journey to the day in her life that we are celebrating today. My imagination centered around contemplation, prayer, love and friendship. I want to emphasize a life lived with the charism, with the special understanding of the spirit that each of us is. For Clara Pfaender this spirit, this charism was written into the Constitution that was approved on this date in 1860, when Clara was 33 years old. This becomes the base, the foundation of the life of those of us who have in the past named and are naming ourselves at present as Daughters and Sons of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Now for my imaginations of the life of Clara, Theresa, who she was as a child. As I'm taking this journey of imaginations, they may lead to remembrances from your own life that have brought you to the special charism and spirit that you are living.

What were Theresa's childhood and teenage places of prayer and contemplation? Where did she find her quiet place? Was there a special place that she loved as she was walking to school? Was there a specific pew in the church that was hers? Did it allow a particular light that came through the windows or from the tabernacle when she was in the Catholic Church? Was there a statue that took her to a place of conversation with a sainted one? Was there a statue of Francis or Clare, whose spirit she felt inside herself?

Did she learn from her mother quiet, reflective ways of prayer? How many days and nights did she and her mother pray together, so that she came to recognize and desire prayer in the depth of her soul. Was her drive to become Catholic not only because of her mother's practice of Catholicism, but because of Theresa's depth of contemplative desire to be in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Did she know already the words from Paul's letter read today: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."

When she was at home did she hear special messages in her father's voice? Were there specific encounters in her father's mayoral office, when she served as his secretary, that assisted her to know her gifts? While working there did she receive affirmations that helped to clarify her path in life?

Did her friendship with Father Lessor, Regina Lessor and Aline Bonzel bring her to an understanding of the relational ways of the Trinity? Did they spend their time in praying the holy office? Did the steps of friendship with them bring her to a new understanding of wanting to be in community?

Was her friendship with Sr. Pauline the impetus she needed to complete her desire to enter the religious life? Is this friendship what attracted her to enter the Sisters of

Christian Charity? What in that community's charism fit her that she brought with her to the writing of her constitution for our community and to an understanding of her charism? Who in that community was a good friend who helped her to come to the new step of leaving and starting all over? Was it only Sister Pauline? Did Clara do it all on her own. Were there others who were her companions on this journey and whom she had to leave behind in order to continue in her way?

When she left the Sisters of Christian Charity, did she come home, in a way, to Aline and Regina? Had they been with her in spirit through all of her time with the Sisters of Christian Charity? How did all of this bring our Mother Clara to the expression of the charism that is given to us in the constitution? How did all of this assist her to know the salt and light of the gospel in her life?

How did the friendship with Bishop Conrad Martin consolidate her firmness in writing the constitution. How many important conversations did they have? What virtues and vulnerabilities, came to light in herself as she opened herself on her spiritual journey with him.

I believe we each find our own charism in relationship to the friendships, the loves, the meditations, the prayer in our lives.

For those of us who are Wheaton Franciscans, in the relationship we have with Clara Pfaender, we come to know her in both contemplation and action, her expression of the love of the Trinity, of Jesus Christ in her life. It is our relationship with Clara Pfaender, with all of the sisters who have been a part of our community, with all of our companions who are with us now, with the Church of Our Lady of the Angels gathered each Sunday, with family, friends and loves that bring us to this expression, this charism of the Christ that we live and celebrate today.

From our most recent General Chapter, our charism is said this way "we are a blessing in the heart of the world."