

**THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE  
CONGREGATION OF THE COMPANIONS OF SAINT ANGELA  
MERICI IN THE DIOCESE OF JOHANNESBURG**

**PATRICIA OUMA NTOAGAE**

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**University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg**

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**SUPRVISOR: Rev. Mervyn Abrahams C.Ss.R., S.T.L.**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby state that this research paper, except where specifically indicated to the contrary, is my own original work.

Patricia Ouma Ntoagae

Signed 

Pietermaritzburg  
November 2003

As supervisor, I have agreed to the submission of this research paper.

Rev. Mervyn Abrahams C.Ss.R., S.T.L

Signed 

Pietermaritzburg  
November 2003

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## ABSTRACT

The study investigates the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici a Catholic women religious community. This religious Congregation was founded in 1954 in the diocese of Johannesburg, to serve the needs of the indigenous people. The person who founded this Congregation was Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI, with the encouragement and support of Father Jean Verot OMI.

At first the Catholic Church was a settler Church taking care of the needs of the settlers. It is only later that the Catholic Church became a missionary Church, outreaching to indigenous people. It is in the 1950's when the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela was founded, during the apartheid time. The history and the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici are looked at. The first members of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici were trained and guided by the Ursulines, of the Roman Union in Munsieville, Krugersdorp.

Some of the elements of the spirituality of this women's religious Congregation that are explored are mutual love, hospitality, prayer life and education. The Sisters of the religious Congregation looked to Saint Angela Merici, their foundress and model, an Italian Saint who lived in the sixteenth century, and learned from her spirituality. The Sisters living in the twentieth century look at how relevant Saint Angela Merici's spirituality is to them, and how they as black women, in townships, can live this spirituality. Interviews were conducted to get some information about the religious Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. A questionnaire was sent to two Sisters who belong to this religious Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici but only Sister Mary Modise CSA responded positively to being interviewed. Father Thomas O'Dea, a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate gave some direct information that he remembered regarding this particular Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

A final conclusion to be drawn from this study is that the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici is faced with the challenge to inculturate some of the elements of

this spirituality and re-look at their charism at some General Chapters. Lastly, some of the challenges that face the present Congregation of Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici are formation and a way of practically living the charism and their prayer life.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BA	Bachelor of Arts
Cor	Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians
EA	Ecclesia in Africa
EN	Evangelii Nuntiandi
Eph	Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians
CMM	Congregation of the Missionaries of Marianhill
CSA	Companions of Saint Angela Merici
GE	Gravissimum Educationis
Is	Prophet Isaiah
Jn	Gospel of John
LG	Lumen Gentium
Mk	Gospel of Mark
MR	Mutuae Relationes
Mt	Gospel of Matthew
no.	number
OMI	Missionary of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate
OP	Order of Preachers (Dominican Order)
OSU	Order of Saint Ursula
PC	Perfectae Caritatis
SACBC	Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference
St	Saint
YCS	Young Christian Scholars

## INTRODUCTION

My interest in the study developed over the years as I have reflected on the origin of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici novices we never had anything written down.

To gain the knowledge of the proposed study I began to read about Saint Angela Merici and looked at the archival records of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. I was surprised by the lack of information from both archives of the Ursulines of the Roman Union and the Companions of Saint Angela Merici and this stimulated me to search for further information about the history and spirituality of the Congregation.

The purpose of this research is two- fold. The first aim is to make a detailed study of this religious Congregation of Sisters, in the diocese of Johannesburg to understand why the Congregation was founded solely for black Sisters.

The second is to understand the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici as they received it from the Ursulines, also to look at the relationship between spirituality, charism, and inculturation.

Lastly, I am to assess the contribution of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici to the spirituality of their Congregation and the challenges they are faced with, to accept them and do something about these challenges.

## CHAPTER ONE

### METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 1.1 Introduction

As a member of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici my interest in this study developed over the years as I reflected on the importance of the existence of this women religious Congregation of black Sisters in the diocese of Johannesburg. I was challenged by the fact that the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici does not have any written material on the spirituality that can be used in the formation of Sisters.

I began to read about Saint Angela Merici and looked in the Congregational archives and was surprised by the lack of information about the history as well as the spirituality of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. This stimulated me to search for the history as well as the spirituality of the Congregation. Fortunately there were some letters written by the founder, Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI and the Ursulines of the Roman Union who nurtured the early years of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. This motivated me to do further research in the archives.

#### 1.2 The purpose of the study

Writing about the key elements of the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici the author hopes to contribute to the identity of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici by describing the key elements of the spirituality and the history and charism of this Congregation. It is also hoped that the study may demonstrate the usefulness of having a written document of the spirituality of this diocesan religious Congregation.

In order to formulate in writing the spirituality of a Congregation like that of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici, the past must be retrieved. The writer believes that the more the past is understood the better it will be to find a way about the present. Looking back at the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici, one is able to decipher the strengths and weaknesses of that spirituality. Spirituality is not lived in a vacuum but within the context of history, therefore, the

changing historical context of the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici will also be discussed. The Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici were founded when there was a need for indigenous priests and religious Sisters to serve the local people. Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI feared that the work of spreading the good news that the missionaries started might come to an end.

It should be borne in mind that the study of the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici would be limited by the existence of only a few primary sources and the fact that there is, to date, no written interpretation available. By attempting to construct the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici the writer is aware that she is initiating a process that will facilitate future studies on this topic.

### **1.3 The Research Method**

Any academic study that does not engage in social analysis misses one of the vital aspects of human experience. Similarly, this study acknowledges the need for social enquiry in order to acquaint itself with the concrete life situation of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. Therefore, the study has drawn on oral sources in the form of interviews with some of the first members and those closely associated with the founding of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. In this regard the interview with Sister Mary Modise CSA, one of the oldest members of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici, proved especially useful because she could share her personal experience. Some interviews with close associates did not afford me with enough evidence due to fading memory. To cite an example, Father Thomas O'Dea OMI, could not remember much of the needed information due to old age, but offered instead, a sermon he gave at Father Jean Verot OMI's funeral. He used to give retreats to the first Sisters of the Companion's of Saint Angela Merici. Sister Gemma Lawlor OSU was also consulted about her knowledge of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici because she used to give Afrikaans lessons to the Sisters who were studying. The principal sources however would be the archival materials. These involve documents outlining the history, spirituality and charism of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

The Johannesburg Catholic Diocesan Archives at Victory Park were a useful source because they stored articles on Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI, the founder of the

Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici, as well as Father Jean Verot OMI who was the first spiritual director of the Sisters and also The Southern Cross Newspapers, containing articles on the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

The writer must admit that it was not an easy task searching for material in archives not set up for research purposes. The archives of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici were in a disorderly state, they were not properly arranged, and therefore it took time to go through most of the materials and to decide which ones were useful for the thesis. Although some materials such as Congregational minutes, letters and some newspaper articles that were found in the archives of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici were useful. The writer did not have access to the Ursulines of the Roman Union archives; instead the little material that was found in them on the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici was given to her.

#### **1.4 The Interviews**

To strengthen the research the writer chose to conduct tape-recorded interviews. There is certain freshness and originality about recorded interviews and they could be revisited for verification of data. The writer could contact the interviewees and ask questions and clarification of ambiguous statements. This made the process of data analysis easy for the writer.

The type of analysis used in this study is both qualitative and quantitative in order to get more information and to try to give a better picture of the research. Qualitative data analysis gave the writer the opportunity to use the mother tongue of the respondents. "Qualitative research usually results in verbal descriptions, and might use quotations from people you interviewed" (Bailey 1996:50).

In the following chapter the writer has tried to present an unbiased account about the history and spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. The writer does not claim in any way that it is a complete reflection of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. There might be some areas that she did not cover, as the research was based on the religious Diocesan Congregation only. On the other hand this allowed the writer a clearer insight into the history and spirituality of the Congregation. As a member of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela

Merici, she further enriches the study inside knowledge of the Congregation.

### **1.5 The Structure**

The First Chapter is on the research methodology and the writer gathered information on this religious Diocesan Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. In Chapter Two the history, formation, the transformation and membership of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela are discussed. We also look at all the people who were involved in the formation of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. In Chapter Three, the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici is looked at and some of the elements of this spirituality are discussed in details. Chapter Four, which is the heart of the research paper, is based on the key elements of the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. Chapter Five is on how the Sisters of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici can inculturate some of the elements of their spirituality. Lastly, Chapter Six looks at the challenges that the Companions of Saint Angela Merici are faced with to live the authentic call of their spirituality.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE COMPANIONS OF SAINT ANGELA MERICI**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The general historical background of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici is of vital importance because “the history of the past bears powerfully on the present and may constitute a signpost to the future” (Hinchliff 1968:IX). To have the history of the Congregation of Saint Angela recorded is necessary, so that it may be transmitted to the new members to know their roots as members of this Congregation. Therefore, history deals with the past and present in order to build the future life of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

Included in this chapter is the historical background of the country at the period in which the Congregation was founded, focusing especially on the education system of that time. The Catholic Church then used education as a means of evangelisation. The founder’s vision and the origin of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici will also be discussed. The role that the Ursulines of the Roman Union played in the initial formation of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici will be looked at. The ministries that the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici are involved in and the struggles that they have gone through are discussed. We will see the growth into independence of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici and also its fluctuating membership.

#### **2.2 Historical background of the Catholic Church in South Africa.**

Before presenting the history of the Catholic Church in the diocese of Johannesburg I would like to give a summary of the history of the Catholic Church in South Africa. The Catholic Church arrived relatively late on the scene in the country. Catholics were forbidden to practice their religion until “25 July 1804, the Commissioner-General of the Batavian Republic at the Cape, General de Mist, published an ordinance promising religious toleration. ‘All religious societies which for the furtherance of virtue and good

morals worshipped an Almighty Being' were to enjoy equal protection from the laws, and no civil privileges were to be attached to any creed" (Brown 1960:6). However religious freedom for Catholic was short lived. In 1806 Cape Town was recaptured by the British force under Major General Sir Blair, who was a Scottish Presbyterian. "He lost no time in expelling the three priests who had so recently arrived; the first prefect Apostolic of Cape died at sea on his way home" (Brown 1960:6). Though the British Colonial Office permitted no Catholic Bishop to take up residence at the Cape until 1837, Tom Slater, a Benedictine Bishop was appointed vicar apostolic of the Cape in 1814. He took up residence in Mauritius but managed to call at the Cape on his way there in 1819. He left Father Scully at the Cape to minister to the needs of Catholics. It was not easy for Father Scully since he experienced many difficulties and great deal of opposition.

In 1838 Reverend Patrick Griffith became the first Bishop of Cape Town. This marked the beginning of the Catholic Church in South Africa. "The Catholic Church is the third largest Christian Church among blacks, who constitute 75% of its total membership" (Carraro 1992:370).

In the nineteenth century the Catholic Church of South Africa was predominantly a settler church in mission to the immigrant minority from Europe. The Catholic Church's first concern was to provide for the needs of the Catholic community. The change occurred during the first half of the twentieth century when the Church began to grow as a result of evangelisation among the indigenous people and this shift has a direct bearing on the founding of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

### **2.3 The effect of Apartheid in the Catholic Church**

The 1950's were stressful years for many leaders who did not agree with the ideas of the government that was in power. The National Party introduced and passed a number of laws that affected the Churches and institutions. The two laws in particular that affected the Church's mission outreach are the Group Areas Act and the Bantu Education Act.

Apartheid meant "separation of races physically, politically, culturally, socio-economically and religiously (Nolan 1982:2). This fact hampered the missionary outreach of the Church because most of the personnel were White and foreign, hence the need for Black Sisters who could take over this new evangelisation program that Pope Benedict and Rome wanted in South Africa. The urgency for this was especially to be felt in

Johannesburg because of the forced resignation of one of its Bishops because he did not want to put money aside for this new evangelisation. The Bishops of Johannesburg were therefore very sensitive to show Rome that they were involved in evangelisation among the Black people- all this contributed to the founding of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference protested against the injustices of apartheid, hence Catholics were called "Roomse gevaar", because the Catholics were seen as a threat to the government. In 1957 the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference wrote a pastoral letter condemning apartheid and recommended a change. The Group Areas Act might have meant the end of what the missionaries tried to do since they arrived to live in this country, especially among Black people. Most of the missionaries "taught in townships and ran clinics, and yet they were not allowed to live there" (Abraham 1989:34).

#### **2.4 The Catholic Church in the diocese of Johannesburg**

From 1850 the "territory of the Transvaal was under the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of Natal" (Catholic Directory 2000-2002: 224). In 1904 Bishop Miller OMI became the first Vicar Apostolic of Transvaal. The Vicariate was then subdivided into the northern part, with the Benedictines responsible, and Lydenburg Prefecture was formed in 1923. The Pretoria Vicariate and Western Transvaal Vicariate were also erected.

When South Africa became a Union on 11 January 1951, "the ecclesiastical hierarchy was created and Johannesburg became a diocese with William Patrick Whelan OMI as Bishop" (Brain 1991:227). At present the diocese is made up of the following districts: "Johannesburg, Alberton, Balfour, Benoni, Boksburg, Brakpan, Delmas, Germiston, Heidelberg, Kempton Park, Krugersdorp, Nigel, Oberholzer, Randburg, Randfontein, Roodepoort, Springs, Vereeniging, Vanderbijlpark and Westonaria" (Catholic Directory 2000-2002: 224).

Johannesburg is the largest city in South Africa because of the gold mines and better facilities for education and employment. The Catholic Directory of 2001 –2002 states that the total population of Johannesburg is 7000 000 and the Catholic population is 700 000.

#### **2.5 Education**

The Bantu Education Act passed in 1953 was a serious attack on the mission structure. It meant the withdrawal of the financial grants to mission schools by the government. The Nationalist Party gave the following reasons for educational changes for blacks: “to develop the occupational skills demanded by the increasingly complex industrial sector, but so that the 'rightful place' of the white worker was not threatened, and to provide an ideological formation geared towards short and long term social control” (Flanagan 1982:85). This Act wanted to make sure that a black person knows that a white person is always superior to him or her.

## **2.6 Early history of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici**

In 1964 there were approximately sixty Congregations of Sisters in South Africa, of which forty-eight still had most of their personnel from Europe. It can be said that in the 1950's and 1960's most of the women religious Congregations were from outside the country, that is, missionaries from Europe.

The Holy Family Sisters, Holy Cross Sisters, Nazareth Sisters and Assumption Sisters were already working in the diocese of Johannesburg. Some of them were involved in the teaching field, nursing in hospitals and running clinics in a number of townships and rural areas.

The Catholics always felt oppressed by the Afrikaners and were never sure if the government would not expel all missionaries. Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI saw the need of founding an indigenous religious Congregation of black Sisters in the diocese of Johannesburg. It can be said that Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI was worried about the pastoral needs, like teaching catechism in Catholic schools and the parishes, in the diocese, especially in townships. During that crucial time in the history of South Africa he saw the need for a black Congregation in the diocese of Johannesburg and thus he founded the religious Congregation, Companions of Saint Angela Merici. This Congregation was founded for black Sisters who would serve their own people in townships, in their own language. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici are different from other religious women because they were founded around Johannesburg to live and minister to people in the urban area.

The Companions of Saint Angela Merici are a religious community of diocesan right and

are consciously part of the local Church. Religious Congregation “is said to be of diocesan right if, after having been erected by a diocesan bishop, it has not obtained a decree of approval from the Apostolic See” (Code of Canon Law 1983:224-225). The Bishop of the diocese is the leader and shepherd of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. Imitation of Saint Angela Merici, obedience to the Pope and the Church form an essential part of their life. Their motherhouse and all their houses are in the diocese of Johannesburg.

## **2.7 The founder: Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI**

The founder, Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI, was the person who initiated the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici, although Father Jean Verot OMI was the man behind the idea, he conceived the idea but because he was not the local Ordinary he could not found it. Only a bishop can found a diocesan Congregation. Some of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate priests were involved in the growth of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici because they gave retreats and talks to the Sisters.

### **2.7.1 Background**

William Patrick Whelan was born in Wakkerstroom in April 1907. His father was from Ireland and his mother was an Afrikaner. William Patrick Whelan received his early education at the Loreto convent in Pretoria and thereafter attended Saint Aidan's, a Jesuit College in Grahamstown, where he finally matriculated. In May 1924 he left for Ireland to join the Oblates. After his novitiate and first vows, William Patrick Whelan went to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate Scholasticate in Ireland. He then continued with his studies at the Dublin University, where he obtained an Honours BA in Philosophy.

### **2.7.2 Priesthood**

William Patrick Whelan OMI was ordained to the priesthood on June 21, 1931 at All Hallows College in Dublin. He returned to South Africa in early 1932 and was appointed to the staff of the Cathedral in Johannesburg. He worked at the Cathedral of Christ the King parish for over fifteen years, in the last three years being both superior of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and parish priest. During these years of parochial work he won the hearts of many people in different walks of life, both Catholics and non-Catholics.

Besides the pastoral work he did he also served as the editor of the 'Catholic News' and was responsible for changing the title of that paper to 'Catholic News of South Africa'. The purpose of that paper was to inform Catholics about what was happening in the Church. He had great influence on the paper's direction and became admired by many Catholics. He also had a special interest in the spiritual welfare of Catholic students at universities. "The prime mover in introducing the movement (YCS) into South Africa was Bishop William Patrick Whelan, who encouraged a young layman, Eric Tyacke, to study the movement during a two year sojourn in England where he studied the British experience." (Brain 1991:229).

In March 1948 William Patrick Whelan was appointed as the auxiliary Bishop of Johannesburg. The ceremony of consecration was on 27 May 1948, the feast of Corpus Christi, at the Cathedral in Kerk (Church) Street, Johannesburg.

### **2.7.3 Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI's transfer and his death.**

Bishop David O'Leary OMI resigned and retired on 8 December 1950 and Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI succeeded him as bishop of Johannesburg. It was during this period that the Companions of Saint Angela Merici were founded. In July 1954 Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI was translated to Bloemfontein as Archbishop, the metropolitan See of the Orange Free State. Bishop Hugh Boyle in turn succeeded him in the diocese Johannesburg. It was not easy for Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI to "accept the assignment of the Holy See in an area which was yet new to him and to a completely new kind of work in many ways" (Brady 1966:3). He eventually went to the archdiocese of Bloemfontein and worked there. He was a man for all people with an ecumenical vision because he worked not only with Catholics but Methodists and Anglicans as well.

"In 1957, in response to the intensification of apartheid legislation, the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference became the first church body to reject theologically apartheid in its entirety" (Villa Vicencio 1988:36). The bishops felt that they needed to take a stand by condemning apartheid as evil. In February 1964 there was a differing perception within the Bishops' Conference about the role of the Church and the nature of South African society that emerged in public. In 1964 Archbishop Denis Hurley gave a talk entitled 'Apartheid: a crisis of the Christian conscience' and in it he offered a severe criticism of race attitudes among white South Africans. This provoked a response from

Archbishop William Patrick Whelan OMI, and he gave a statement that was interpreted by many as a qualified acceptance by the Catholic Church of the government's policy of apartheid. In 1964 the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, released a press statement that re-affirmed the anti-apartheid official policy that was issued by the Conference in 1952, 1957 and 1962.

Archbishop William Patrick Whelan OMI died suddenly while attending a meeting of the Administrative Board of Bishops' Conference in Pretoria on Thursday, 10 February 1966. He was the first South African born Archbishop to die in the service of the Church in this country.

## **2.8 The beginning of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici**

Sister Mary Modise CSA said that the initial vision of Bishop William Patrick Whelan “was to have some black Sisters who would minister to their own people in their own language, since the government, with the policy of Group Areas Act, would not let the white Sisters into the townships”(Modise1999: 1). The Ursulines lived at Saint Mary’s Mission, in Munsieville, Krugersdorp, working among the black people for years.

It was during the 1950s that the foundation of a religious Diocesan Congregation of black Sisters, under the authority of the Bishop of Johannesburg, came about. Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI’s request for black Sisters was granted in a reply from the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide. The Congregation “hereby grants the necessary permission to issue a “Decretum Erektionis” and would like to have the constitutions when possible” (Bishop William Patrick Whelan, Vatican City, Rome, June 18,1952). In 1955 before starting his term of office in Bloemfontein, Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI spent ten days compiling the constitutions for the Congregation. The Rule of Saint Augustine was to be followed. The order of the day and religious exercises were based on those of the Ursulines of the Roman Union.

## **2.9 Postulancy in the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici**

Some Sisters mentioned that the first six months did not receive any instruction on religious life. They were eager, impatient and ready to take up the cross to follow Jesus, about whom they had heard from their families, friends and the people they consulted before entering. During their postulancy they tried to outdo each other in prayer, devotions

and penance. They prayed loudly while they were doing their chores, and on laundry days they prayed, sang and danced while they washed and ironed. They used irons that were placed on a coal stove to heat, and when an iron was put back on the stove for reheating, the postulant whose iron it was would dance to her favourite song.

They did not use any book but came with their personal backgrounds to prayer, and spontaneous prayers flowed easily. The scriptures captivated them and they held debates on them. The novice mistress read stories to them. She was English, very articulate and used expressive language. They said that just listening to her they could visualise the incidents and characters in the stories from the Bible, because the inflections in her tone made everything so graphic. Some Sisters were influenced by her love for reading.

Community life is a way of life for Africans and it was not taught, it came naturally. The Sisters were always together, shared and did things together. A friendship developed as they got to know each other, including the novice mistress. They knew each other's strengths and weaknesses. "They argued, sulked, teased each other, played and celebrated together" (Modise 1999:2). The first postulancy house was at Saint Mary's Mission in Munsieville, Krugersdorp.

Mother Spinola McKeigney OSU designed and guided the making of the bridal clothing outfits for the official entrance into the novitiate. It was a Western custom for young women who entered religious life, to wear bridal clothes and this was applied to these African Sisters. In retrospect, it is questionable whether an appropriate African outfit could not have been found to suit the occasion, rather than completely foreign attire.

Bishop Hugh Boyle accompanied by his secretary, Father. Martin Gerald OMI and Father Jean Verot OMI were present at the ceremony of clothing. In his sermon, the Bishop said that the future of the Congregation depended on the foundation members. He emphasized that if the foundations were solidly laid the future would be secure, but if the foundations were not solid the Congregation would disappear. He also told the Sisters that the founder was Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI who had received all the graces necessary as founder. "His Lordship Archbishop Whelan paid his first visit on the 31 July 1955" (Chronicles). The Sisters said that it was always a joy to have him visit because he never left them without saying words of encouragement.

## **2.10 Spiritual life in the novitiate of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici**

The novices were given the Rule of Saint Augustine, which they learned by heart, and they prayed the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Everything was formal and was carefully planned by the authorities. The novices became familiar with prayer leaflets, prayer books and novenas, and spontaneous prayer dried up. They were also given instructions on the vows and spirituality of religious life and read about Saint Angela Merici.

The greatest problem for some novices was keeping silence but they soon overcame this difficulty by keeping quiet. They could no longer sing or dance on washing days. At times they would sing with low voices. One day they got carried away by a beautiful Xhosa song with an exquisite rhythm, called "Deborah". Some novices started dancing and the sound rose two octaves higher. The Prioress General whose room was just above the ironing room came down looking very worried. She told the novices that the song and dance sounded like a witchdoctor's, and the disappointed novices stopped singing. Things were really changing quite drastically. The novices used forks and knives and were compelled to communicate in English. Here were young South African women who were being immersed in a culture that was foreign to them. The Ursulines who were responsible for formation of the first members of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici brought Western form of religious life without regard to Inculturation.

Religious decorum and deportment, namely how one walked, talked and behaved in general, was stressed. Only certain topics were allowed for discussions during recreation, and this really affected some novices because they were no longer encouraged to be creative and outgoing. They played Chinese checkers, "snakes and ladders" and other 'respectable' games. It could be noted here that these novices were formed in a typical Western religious life style with little regard for their black identity. It must be acknowledged that the meeting of two cultures always results in one being more dominant than the other. Moreover, the two Ursulines, who were English, were suddenly given the task of educating a group of black Sisters and they had to do their best with what they had. The novices prayed the rosary together everyday. They had the Stations of the Cross every Friday in Church.

On 10 July 1956 all novices except Sister Paul who was ill, completed the one- year

novitiate. Permission by Bishop Hugh Boyle was granted for the novices to commence studies towards the Junior Certificate, which is standard eight, during the second year novitiate. One novice left the Congregation. The remaining eight novices made their profession on "10 July 1957" (Register of the Congregation) presided over by Bishop O'Leary, without the presence of Bishop Hugh Boyle who was on a visit in Europe. Archbishop Joseph Gotthardt OMI, Father Erasme OMI, who was the Oblate Provincial, and twenty priests, attended the ceremony. On the 29 July 1957 Sisters Mary and Paul went to Saint Thomas Teachers Training College, Village Main, Johannesburg, which was directed by the King Williams Town Dominican Sisters. The six Sisters completed their standard eight in 1958. In 1959 the Government closed Saint Thomas Teachers Training College, therefore, the Sisters were admitted to Saint Mary's Teacher's Training College, conducted by the Holy Family Sisters, in Roma, Lesotho.

Sister Mary Modise CSA mentioned that as the first group of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici they were all happy and eager to learn and become Sisters. It was only later, after some years; that there was some dissatisfaction, because everything was done for them. They were not taught how to be responsible and to take initiatives. They wondered therefore, what would happen to the Congregation if the Ursulines of the Roman Union decided to go back to their own Congregation, besides, Mother Gertrude herself was now getting on in years.

## **2.11 Bishop Boyle**

In November 1954, Bishop Hugh Boyle of Port Elizabeth was installed as the new Bishop of Johannesburg, the successor of Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI. Thus, Bishop Hugh Boyle took over the work of the new foundation founded by Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI. During the first twenty years of his episcopacy, 1955-1975, Bishop Hugh Boyle helped the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici by his kindness, unfailing support and encouragement. He devised a scheme by which the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela received financial help from American benefactors. Sister Mary Modise CSA also said that Bishop Hugh Boyle was very good to the Sisters of Companions of Saint Angela Merici because as students furthering their studies the bishop got each Sister a benefactor in America. By way of appreciation, the Sisters would write to these people once a year to thank and tell them about their progress.

“Bishop Boyle used to come at least once a year to visit us in our houses, and whenever he

came he brought us something. Every year at Christmas we knew that we would get a cheque of thousand rands” (Modise 1999:2). Bishop Hugh Boyle took the responsibility of being a true father to the Companions of Saint Angela Merici by showing his care for them. As the bishop of the diocese he was in charge of the Diocesan Congregation.

Although Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI was the founder, the Ursulines of the Roman Union, especially Mother Gertrude Moran OSU and Mother Antoinette Carroll OSU, were the ones who initiated and trained the members of the new Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. As Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI had said, “the novitiate and the new religious family will be under the guidance of the Ursuline Sisters” (Southern Cross 1954:1). Mother Gertrude Moran OSU who died on 13 April 1972 will always be held with respect and permanent remembrance. Mother Antoinette Carroll OSU took over as Prioress General after Mother Gertrude's death. Sister Eugene Masoga CSA helped her in the novitiate since she was also still very occupied as principal of Mofumahadi School, Kagiso I.

## **2.12 Father Jean Verot OMI**

Father Jean Verot OMI was born in Monistral, France and joined the Oblates of Mary Oblates in 1929. Father Jean was ordained in 1934 and arrived in South Africa in 1935. His first assignment was to Saint Mary's Mission in Munsieville, Krugersdorp, where he returned in later years and greatly contributed to its development.

Father Victor Whelan OMI said, “among the missionaries who served Saint Mary's, one stands out as a real giant. Though small in stature Father Jean Verot OMI was dynamic, a holy man with an overload of energy and enthusiasm, all of it kept in proportion and balance by a delightful sense of humour” (Whelan 1989). Saint Mary's Mission and Jean Verot OMI were synonymous. He served at Saint Mary's for nearly fifty years. Father Jean Verot OMI built Saint Mary's Mission into a vibrant Catholic centre. His home became a centre of hospitality for the missionaries throughout the vicariate and especially for those who had also come from his native France.

At Saint Mary's Mission there was a large school as Father Jean Verot OMI who attached a tremendous amount of importance to Catholic education. He realized that more children would benefit by Catholic education if boarding facilities could be provided at Saint Mary's Mission, so he set out to build a boarding hostel, which as foreseen, has served a

very useful purpose.

Father Jean Verot OMI began producing plays, which became popular and were well supported. He wrote many plays and translated some of them from French into English and the parishioners at Munsieville performed them guided by his training.

There was one undertaking, which held first place in his heart, the establishing of the Diocesan Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. Father Jean Verot OMI with Archbishop William Patrick Whelan OMI established the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. Father Jean Verot OMI supervised the building of the novitiate at Saint Mary's Mission. Father Jean Verot OMI became the first spiritual director of the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici

At the funeral of Father Jean Verot OMI, Father Thomas O'Dea said "Father Jean brought the message of Christ to his people, a message which he himself first accepted. He kept close to Christ in and through prayer and he served the Lord well in those committed to his care. Father Jean Verot's input into his priestly and religious life included plenty of prayer and a lot of hard work" (Homily 1985).

### **2.13 A brief history of the Ursulines of Southern Africa 1895-1995**

"In the year of Our Lord 1895, Ursulines, daughters of Saint Angela Merici, first set foot on South African soil: six sisters arrived from Sittard, Holland. Their first school was in Barberton; in 1897 they moved to Johannesburg. The Anglo-Boer war necessitated their return to Europe in 1899, but Ursuline roots had gone deep and another group of six came to open school in Johannesburg in 1902, moving to Krugersdorp in 1904. In the years that followed there was always the sign of the Cross, but God's work flourished and they joined the Roman Union in 1921, under the far-sighted leadership of Mother Mary Overbeck. There were by then already three additional foundations: Roodepoort, 1912; Kensington, 1914; Saint Peter and Paul's school, 1914. The faith and apostolic enterprise of the pioneering forebears is witnessed to in the succession of foundations that followed: St Mary's Mission, Krugersdorp, 1926; Simonstown, 1926; St Patrick's Mission, Randfontein, 1932; St Angela's Mission, Roodepoort, 1934; Randfontein, 1935. Later foundations were the two communities in Botswana: Mahalapye and Serowe, 1973; Bryanston, 1966 and Subiaco, Pietersburg, 1983.

The Companions of Saint Angela Merici, were co-founded by the Ursulines and Bishop

Patrick William Whelan OMI of Johannesburg in 1955.

Ursulines from Holland, Germany, Ireland and France comprised the community of 1902 and since then missionaries of other nationalities have joined the South African Ursulines in bringing the wealth of the nations to the Province: England, Belgium, Slovenia, Australia, Austria and the United States of America” (Pearson 1995:8-9).

## **2.14 The influence of the Ursulines of the Roman Union**

After Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI left the diocese of Johannesburg for Bloemfontein, the Ursulines had to take full responsibility for forming the first members of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici as true daughters of Saint Angela Merici. Formation has always been considered very important in the Ursulines religious family because on it depends the spiritual depth and the effective apostolic influence of religious in the service of the church. Formation was and still is a dynamic and continual process by which the Sister responds to the call of Christ, to follow him and develop in the service of his Kingdom, the gifts she has received. Therefore it was very important that the sisters received a good formation.

The Companions of Saint Angela Merici also consider formation very important. A Sister had to understand from the beginning and to remember, that she joined the Congregation to serve in the Church. First, the sisters are called to the 'fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity' (LG 40) as individuals and a community. “It is a consecrated life which gives fuller expression to their baptismal consecration, and has for its fundamental norm the following of Christ, as lived in an apostolic religious community” (PC 5:2).

The Ursulines believed that their vocation is influenced by the spirit of Saint Angela Merici, and would integrate the authentic values of the tradition of a profound life of prayer and of apostolic service and so do the Companions. Sister Mary Modise CSA remarked that Mother Antoinette Carroll OSU was a prayerful woman, and they use to pray together using the Bible texts. At times they would pray on the passion of Christ, and the way Mother Antoinette Carroll OSU read the Bible put everyone into the mood for prayer. This challenged the Sisters as individuals to have a personal response. Mother Antoinette Carroll OSU was exemplary to the young Sisters in living what she taught them. Even today some of the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela follow the ways in which she taught them.

Sister Mary Modise CSA said during their time of formation they used to read a lot about Saint Angela Merici. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici still read and study Saint Angela Merici's writings to rediscover her spirituality and charism, so as to live them as black Sisters, in the diocese of Johannesburg.

### **2.15 Important events and expansion of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici**

The growth of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici was slow. Between 1956 and 1959 a few joined the Congregation but then left. Six remained from the group of the above-mentioned period. On 13 July 1960, three postulants received the habit; three novices pronounced their first vows for one year and eight of the original group had the happiness of renewing their vows for three years. Bishop Mabathoana OMI of Leribe, Lesotho, preached in Sesotho on that day and many black people who were present, both relatives and friends, appreciated the sermon. The priests, mostly Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who were acquainted with these sisters, had occasionally remarked with great appreciation on the spirit of prayer evidently possessed by the early Companions of Saint Angela Merici. "I remember Sister Bernard, she was a prayerful woman; you know for all of us, all the ten, there was something very special, when it came to prayer" (Modise 1999:2).

From the original eight who had renewed their vows three left as temporary professed and two left later as finally professed Sisters, leaving only three Sisters. The years 1965-1971 were lean years. Only one person entered the congregation. Two years later the Companions of Saint Angela Merici were blessed with nine new postulants, and the total number in the Congregation was thus nineteen. The period 1974 to 1981 was a dry season again because only one entered. In 1982 the congregation opened a pre-novitiate at Payneville, Springs, with Sister Augustine Kunupi CSA as postulant mistress. Three pre-novices entered and did two years pre-novitiate and two years novitiate because the Congregation decided that young people of these days needed more time to make the right decision. This marked a change in the formation because before postulancy was six month and novitiate period was two years.

The 5<sup>th</sup> January 1980 saw the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici at Saint Mary's Mission, Munsieville,

Krugersdorp. On 10 July 1982 the surviving pioneers of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici, Sisters Bernard Ncube CSA, Mary Anne Nkolongwane CSA and Mary Modise CSA, celebrated their silver jubilee of profession at Saint Mary's Mission. It was a big celebration and the Sister's relatives, friends and past pupils from near and far came to congratulate them.

Sister Bernard Ncube CSA, one of the jubilarians, was detained several times because of her conviction to fight unjust laws. She was always with the people and for the people in the struggle to fight apartheid; she was always there for the people and with the people, and never feared to be arrested. She had the poor at heart and when imprisoned she really suffered, because she was immediately put into solitary confinement. She never lost hope and gave her hope to the people, that some day apartheid would be defeated.

In 1986 Sister Michael Sechokgela CSA was appointed novice mistress. In the period 1986-1990 one young woman joined the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. During the years 1994- 1997 four joined and the total number by then was twenty-six. Some joined and left, because presently (2003) there are twenty-eight professed Sisters, two novices and two pre novices.

The reasons why some Sisters left the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici have varied from one individual to another. They might have felt that the formation structure of the congregation was too formal: the transition from postulancy to novitiate was too abrupt and the new system completely different. For example, during postulancy they could sing and dance when they washed and ironed: all this was forbidden when they started the novitiate. Some felt they were not themselves because they had to behave in a Western way. Some were attracted by the apostolate the Sisters did at first but later felt they could do something better or different from what the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela did. Some left because they lost the spiritual vision of their religious life. However, there is hope for the future of the Congregation in its younger members, small though their number may be.

Sisters who died during these years were Teresa Mtyale CSA who died on 26 February 1964, Raphael Molokwane CSA who died on 12 April 1987 and Mary Anne Nkolongwane CSA who died on the 30 June 1994. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici will always remember them.

The year 1986 was a sad year for the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici because the motherhouse in Munsieville, Krugersdorp was demolished, as the founder had predicted when the building was erected. The government wanted to build the K17 highway and Saint Mary's Mission Complex was an obstruction. It was expropriated to make way for the road. Father Victor Whelan OMI stated that the Mission "had been a bridge between black and white; and this link of love was now doomed to destruction" (Whelan 1989). The motherhouse of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici had to move to Power Park, in Johannesburg. This convent at Power Park had belonged to the King William's Town Dominican Sisters and Bishop Reginald Orsmond bought it for the Companions of Saint Angela Merici to serve as the motherhouse.

The Diocesan Authorities undertook a visitation on 15th November 1969 because the Sisters were not satisfied with the way the Congregation was governed. The letter from Prioress General of the Ursulines in 1971, forwarding the Sisters' complaints to Bishop Hugh Boyle failed to draw a response. He saw it as an effort to remove Mother Gertrude Moran OSU from her position as Prioress General. So he asked her to remain in office until the updating of the constitutions had been completed. This was not done and instead when Mother Gertrude OSU died in 1972 Bishop Hugh Boyle appointed Mother Antoinette Carroll OSU to the office of Prioress General. The appointment was for a period of three years as from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1972.

During Mother Antoinette Carroll OSU time, things did not go well in the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. The Sisters felt that Mother Antoinette Carroll OSU did not have their interests at heart. She continued being principal of the school and a number of Sisters left the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. Bishop Hugh Boyle turned down representations made to him by some Ursulines to help and assist Mother Antoinette Carroll OSU. Although in 1974 some members were appointed to a Council consisting of the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici and some Ursulines, this Council never operated.

The hope of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici was Archbishop Joseph Patrick Fitzgerald OMI who became the new bishop of Johannesburg on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1976. On the 12<sup>th</sup> December 1976, Mother Antoinette Carroll OSU was relieved of her duties and preparations started towards making the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici autonomous. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici taught together with the Ursulines in schools. The Vicar General of the diocese, Monsignor Anthon Kelly

assisted by the superiors of the houses, acted as Prioress General. A team of Ursulines, under the leadership of their provincial superior, started to revise the constitutions in collaboration with the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

The first official General Chapter of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici was held from the 4<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> July 1977, dealing with renewal, updating of the constitutions and election of the first Prioress General and the council from the ranks of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici themselves. Sister Mary Modise CSA became the first Prioress General. There remained close ties between the Ursulines and the Companions of Saint Angela Merici and they are still working together in schools. The Ursulines gave two Companions of Saint Angela an opportunity to go to Rome and do a renewal course on the spirituality of Saint Angela Merici.

Sister Mary Modise CSA was in office as Prioress General for twelve years, 1977-1989. Sister Eugene Masoga succeeded her, from 1989-1995. Sister Mary Modise CSA was re-elected as Prioress General in 1995 and she is in office at the time of writing until the next General Chapter, June 2004.

## **2.16 The ministries of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici**

“We will engage in Education in whatever form it may be required” (Constitutions 1977: 109) "Among all the means of education, the Church considers the school important" (GE 1965:8). By aiming at the cultural and human formation of young people, schools contribute greatly to the promotion of human dignity of man and woman and the preparation of a more humane society. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici, in their work of education have also helped to raise the status of woman and enhance her dignity in the world of today in which she has acquired "an influence, and effect and a power never before achieved" (GE 1965:8). In African society a woman has had to defer to the man who is considered the head of the family.

The schools in which the Companions of Saint Angela Merici and the Ursulines teach have had to be adapted to the needs of the people and of the country. Religious education is the priority. All the teaching is updated and the Sisters try to give the pupils the best, because they are dedicated people. They have the interest of the child at heart.

The first members of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici were

trained as primary school teachers. They all taught with the Ursulines in Catholic schools. They also ran catechetical programmes both at schools and parishes where they were found and some were sacristans. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici also taught at Saint Angela's school, in Dobsonville and Saint Peter's school in Kagiso I, Krugersdorp and helped in catechesis in the parishes attached to the schools. As a diocesan Congregation, they have always been under the bishop of the diocese and "perform whatever apostolic works he may consider necessary, for the greater glory of God" (Constitutions 1977: 109). If the bishop sees some pastoral needs in the diocese, he has the right to ask the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici to do these within the diocese.

Sister Mary Anne Nkolongwane CSA left teaching and was a catechetical coordinator, in the diocese of Johannesburg and later Sister Michael Sechokgela CSA succeeded her. Sister Bernard Ncube CSA was "a field worker of the bishop's Justice and Reconciliation commission" (Southern Cross 1983:3), and later was involved with the Young Christian Students. Sister Bernard Ncube CSA also worked with the people in Kagiso, Krugersdorp to fight for their rights during the apartheid time. In 1983 Sister Bernard Ncube CSA was arrested in Kagiso township and "charged with possession of banned literature" (Southern Cross 1983:3). Now one Sister is working at the Catholic Institute of Education, one at the Bible College in Johannesburg. One is a nurse in a private hospital in Johannesburg. One is in the catechetical office of the diocese of Johannesburg. Others are still teaching in Catholic schools. Some Sisters work with the youth in various parishes, and still assist in teaching catechism. The Sisters "must remember that it is the quality of our love, rather than the nature of our work, which gives fruitfulness..." (Constitutions 1977:114). As few as they are, they are trying to show the love of God where they can.

As Companions of Saint Angela Merici, they have a grave duty to seek ways of answering the repeated appeals of the local Church. Whatever the field of their apostolate, they have to decide to give priority to the promotion of justice and to full human development. Their responsibility as educators is first within their own mission. After Sister Mary Modise's election as Prioress General, Sisters could do the Senior Teacher's Diploma or further their studies at universities in the field of education or social science. Some now are studying theology because of the need in the Congregation and in our society, for people to have some theological expertise. One Sister is counselling people who are HIV-positive in the Vaal Triangle, and another Sister is running a project of sewing and cooking for women and men. It is evident from the different ministries of the Sisters that the Congregation seeks ways of responding to the needs of the time.

## **2.17 Struggles and progress of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici**

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference was requested the Sacred Congregation for Evangelisation of the Peoples to appoint an Apostolic Visitor in respect of all Congregations of Religious Women of Diocesan Right. "Being concerned with the vitality and progress of Religious life in our countries, the Bishop would see his task as to investigate the life, spirituality and apostolate of the Religious Congregation, to exchange ideas on the future orientation and of the place of Religious Life in Africa's Church and society, to foster responsibility and religious leadership among the Sisters and to offer all possible help towards these goals" (Fitzgerald 1978).

In June 1980 Father Josef Anthofer OMI was asked to do the apostolic visitation of Diocesan African women religious in Southern Africa. "The Apostolic Visitation was an awareness-process: Firstly, for the Visitor, and then, for the sixteen Congregations involved" (Anthofer 1980:38). In his general remarks he stated that it was "remarkable that nearly all the Sisters come from urban areas, mainly around Johannesburg. They master several languages and are well equipped for the life in and around Soweto. They are conscious of the aspirations of their fellow-citizens and have developed a good sense of responsibility, normally not so easily found in sisterhoods. One would only wish them to be spiritually stronger to give more effective Christian witness" (Anthofer 1980:4). He felt that an ongoing spiritual formation was needed for the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

The Visitor observation at "the graph of the development of the Congregation over the past twenty-five years shows rather an erratic growth, no steady, constant flow of vocations, and stagnation and declining numbers at present. Although this helps, in no way, the morale of the sisters, it is felt that the numbers will further dwindle. It should seem justified to take in candidates only when the house has been put in order sufficiently, making a united group of however small number might be. If this can be achieved, then there is no reason to doubt why the congregation should not pick up strength again" (Anthofer 1980:5).

Although the Visitor saw a great role of the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici as committed women and religious in the diocese of Johannesburg as well as in the country, the Sisters needed to face the challenge of correcting some weaknesses within the

Congregation.

In 1985 Bishop Reginald Orsmond asked Father P.M Khumalo CMM to make another visitation of the Congregation of the Companions of Angela Merici. In his report Father P M Khumalo recommended that Bishop Reginald Orsmond should appoint a full time Spiritual Director for the whole Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. Father Albert Nolan OP was asked to be the spiritual director and he agreed. He started giving talks to the Sisters from the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1990 at Power Park. This helped the Sisters first to work on reconciliation in their communities and then to build community life.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1990 Sister Francis Wigley, King Williams Town Dominican, shared about her visit to the United States of America with some of Companions of Saint Angela Merici. She had met Sister Martha Buser, an Ursuline from Kentucky, who was interested in the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici, and was willing to share Angela Merici's spirituality with the Sisters. She came and held a workshop for the Companions of Saint Angela Merici from the 27<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> December 1990.

Sisters May McCreath and Gemma Neuling, both King Williams Town Dominicans, conducted a leadership workshop for the leadership team of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici from 12 to 14 June 1990. The team learned some skills of leadership and how to work together, the successes and difficulties of participative leadership style.

In January 1990 Sister Michael Sechokgela CSA, a member of the leadership team was asked to invite Father Eddie O'Neil, a Canon Lawyer, to help the Sisters with the revision of the constitutions. The Sisters met with Father Eddie O'Neil on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1990 at Power Park and went through a paper on revision of constitution with all the Sisters. A constitution committee was formed that would communicate with Father Eddie O'Neil. Several workshops were held and community meetings in preparation for the revision of the constitutions and Father Eddie O'Neil made some suggestions concerning the matter.

The General assembly of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici was held at Good Shepherd Centre in Hartebeespoort from the 9 to 11 December 1994. Sisters Gemma Neuling and Justina Priess, King Williams Town Dominicans, facilitated the General assembly. The following were the purposes of the assembly:

- To reflect on the basic values of Religious life as embodied in the vows
- To establish the basic boundaries of the vows within which they agree as Companions of Saint Angela Merici.
- To address the future of the congregation in response to Bishop Ormond's proposed action.
- To reconnect through sharing, prayer and relaxation
- To share on the progress made on issues of unity, communication and finance
- To create a climate of loving respect and honesty

On the second day of the assembly, the 10<sup>th</sup> December Bishop Reginald Ormond addressed the Sisters and described the "crisis in the Congregation as a KAIROS" that is it was time for the Sisters to change (General assembly 1994:3). Bishop Reginald Ormond spoke of his love for and appreciation of the Sisters Companions of Saint Angela Merici and how they as women from the townships could speak with authority to the people in the crucial time in the country. He also spoke of his serious concerns, because some Sisters were not living the vowed life as asked of any religious throughout the world. He proposed that the Congregation get a Prioress General from another Congregation. He asked the Sisters to ponder the seriousness of the situation. He wanted the response from the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Merici not later than June 1995. He was open to consider other alternatives.

The majority of Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici were very reluctant to consider constitutional change; they volunteered other alternatives from within the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici to make a new beginning. Sister Eugene CSA, the Prioress General, and her team said that they were prepared to resign from office to ease a process of new initiatives. However, the Sisters preferred the present leadership team to continue until their term of office was up in December 1995. Some Sisters spoke up to say that all members need to take responsibility for the problems in the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici .

The Sisters of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici turned a new page and became accountable and responsible because in 1996 they had the new leadership team from among the members themselves and not an outsider. This showed that the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici had its own difficulties and that it is made up of human beings.

In 1998 Bishop Reginald Orsmond could not attend the Chapter of election but was represented by Father Finlayson, the Vicar General of the Johannesburg diocese, and Sister Timothy Pinner OSU was the facilitator. Sister Mary Modise CSA, Prioress General made the following remarks:” Looking at the calls we made to ourselves at the last General Chapter, there is far too much emphasis on ourselves” (General Chapter 1998). She challenged the Sisters to an awareness or focus on the other person, that is, the people the Sisters are called to serve. The Sisters tried to shift the emphasis in their lives by being involved in parishes: helping the Children of Mary, the youth and teaching catechism in different parishes.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2002 a special celebration united the Companions of Saint Angela Merici and the Roman Union Ursulines in a formal association. Cardinal Eduardo Martinez Somalo, Prefect of the Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome, signed the decree of approbation, after a review of the Statutes of the Association. These had been represented to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2001 by Mother Colette Lignon, Prioress General of the Roman Union and Sister Mary Modise, Prioress General of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

In this type of Association, each Institute keeps its own autonomy, but with the possibilities of closer collaboration in matters of formation, temporary exchange of subjects, mutual assistance in apostolic work and in other varied matters according to the institutes in question. This Association is established for a period of five years and can be renewed.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> June 2002 the Ursulines and the Companions of Saint Angela Merici celebrated the golden jubilee of the foundation of the Congregation. Monsignor Kelly, Father Kataka OMI and Father Shomang OMI were there to celebrate the thanksgiving mass with the Sisters. This occasion took place in a tent, in Munsieville, Krugersdorp where Saint Mary’s Mission was built.

## **2.18 Conclusion**

It is always good to look at the past history of a Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici and get a sense of its identity, where it comes from, to be able to build the future. This chapter was devoted to exploring the history of the Congregation to stress the

fact that unless the Sisters look back at where they have come from and acknowledge their roots, they are not going to discover their mission in the present world. If they do not know what they were created for, it would be very difficult to find any meaning in their lives. Instead, once they become more familiar with their roots then they will be able to dream their own dreams and build the future.

This chapter explored the beginning of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici in the early 1950's. The key role players in the foundation of the Congregation were highlighted: Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI, Father. Jean Verot OMI and the Ursulines, until its independence.

It should be borne in mind that history always has good events as well as limitations as has been indicated with a number of Sisters leaving the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. The Sisters did not know anything about the running of their Congregation because those in authority did everything for them.

The significance of 1977 was shown, as it marked a new milestone with Sister Mary Modise CSA, as the first Prioress General of the independent Congregation. Finally, the association with the Ursulines was discussed and the golden jubilee of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

Every religious Congregation has an identity, which is its particular spirituality and charism. The next chapter will focus on the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici and this is the heart of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE COMPANIONS OF SAINT ANGELA MERICI**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI took the initiative for the founding of the religious Congregation called the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. He admired the spirituality of Saint Angela Merici, the founder of the Ursulines, that is why he placed the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici under the care of the Ursulines. In this chapter the key elements of the spirituality of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici will be discussed. It is important to start with an outline of the historical background of Saint Angela Merici.

#### **3.2 Brief biography and social background of Saint Angela Merici**

##### **3.2.1 Historical background**

Saint Angela Merici, like each one of us, cannot be separated from her historical backgrounds. For an understanding of the meaning in God's plan of events in her life and work, these must be situated in the time when she lived (1474-1540). It is important to look carefully at the situation of the world at the end of the fifteenth century and in the first half of the sixteenth century.

The lights and shadows of the Italian Renaissance shaped Saint Angela Merici's life. The word Renaissance means rebirth. The age of the "Renaissance was perhaps the greatest creative period in history, and it is generally understood to cover the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" (Glazier 1994:739). There was no political unity in Italy during these centuries, because Italy was divided and dominated by five regional States: "Naples, the Papal State, Florence, Milan and Venice" (Meek 1973:1). These States were not the same but different in organisation and character.

Saint Angela Merici blazed a new trail for women who did not accept the alternatives of

marriage or cloister, who did not feel called to either of the two. These women preferred to work as Christians in the society, because they lived with their families, something unheard of in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Saint Angela Merici's plan gave another option of pursuing useful work in the world among other people while maintaining a religious identity

Therefore, having recalled the era in which Saint Angela Merici lived, times both of sadness Very little is known and glory, sinful and holy, so similar to our own in many respects, we now enter her history.

### **3.2.2 Biography of Saint Angela Merici**

Little is known about Angela's infancy and childhood. Her date of birth is uncertain, although 1474 is the traditional date engraved on the base of her statue in the old harbour at Desenzano. She was born in a little town of Desenzano, on Lake Garda, in Northern Italy. She grew up close to town in a farm -house called La Grezze. Angela's father Giovanni Merici was married to Caterina Biancosi. Giovanni received some education because he used to read saints stories to Angela and her sister.

The Merici family was Christian and spiritual reading in the home was the origin of Angela's vocation, which soon flowed into a life of penance and prayer. Angela loved the story of Saint Ursula and she became her patron saint. Legend depicts Ursula as a young Christian British princess who went on pilgrimage with many young women, her followers. On their arrival in Cologne, a band of pagan men attacked them. Ursula and her followers gave up their lives even to the shedding of their blood for Christ instead of following the pagan ways. They were the fourth century martyrs of Cologne.

Angela Merici lost both her parents and sister in a short period of time. She was a young girl "between the ages twelve and fifteen" (Caraman 1963:10). She had to go and live with her maternal uncle Biancosi in Salo where she spent several years.

As a young girl Angela Merici longed to know whether her sister who had died was in heaven. She was favoured with a vision, which was to decide the form of her vocation. According to one biographer she saw heaven open and a procession of angels and virgins coming towards her, and a bright light surrounded them. The young girls sang to music played by the angels on their instruments. As the procession passed by she recognized one of the young girls as her sister. Looking to the future Angela Merici understood that God

wanted to make use of her to establish a community of dedicated young women. During Angela Merici's stay with her uncle at Salo, she became a member of the Third Order of Saint Francis, a "Tertiary". The Third Order is an organization, which goes back to Francis of Assisi and gives lay people an opportunity to dedicate themselves more fully to the service in the Church. As a Tertiary, Angela Merici committed herself to life according to the Rule of the Third Order and to certain patterns of prayer. She had the opportunity to receive Holy Communion frequently because during her time it was not easy for lay people to obtain permission for frequent communion. It is mentioned that even the religious received Holy Communion only three times in a year and the rule of the Third Order prescribed not more than that. It is not known how long Angela Merici stayed at Salo with her uncle. At the age of forty she went back to Brescia.

In 1524 Angela Merici went on a pilgrimage, which was organized by the Franciscans. The trip was peaceful up to Candia, now known as Crete. Angela Merici became almost blind and she was led from place to place during the pilgrimage. The peculiar illness remained with her for the whole stay in the Holy Land and left her as suddenly as it came. She had another pilgrimage to Rome during the Holy Year in 1525. Pope Clement VII heard of Angela Merici's reputation and wanted to keep her in Rome to start the Catholic charities there, but Angela Merici refused and went back to Brescia. She also undertook pilgrimages to Cremona and Varallo.

She eventually settled in Brescia and lived in a small apartment beside the Church of Saint Afra. At Saint Afra, Saint Angela was near the place where according to tradition, the Bishops who founded the Church in Brescia were buried and also the first Brescian martyrs. She gathered a group of young women and widows. Isabetta Prato offered Angela a big room in her house on the Cathedral Square and the room was converted into an oratory. From the beginning of 1533 the group gathered in the oratory for prayers and instructions. These women consecrated themselves to the Lord. They lived at home, took no vows, and did not adopt the identity of a religious community. Being aware of the need to shape an entirely new way of life, Saint Angela dictated the Rule for the group to Gabrielle Cozzano. Cozzano presented it to the Vicar of the diocese who approved it in 1536.

Saint Angela Merici received a vision to found a society of virgins in Brescia. In 1535 Saint Angela Merici formed about twenty-eight followers into the Company of Saint Ursula, the first order for the teaching of young girls. The young women did not take

formal vows but their rule prescribed virginity, poverty and obedience. Each member remained with her family evangelising their families and friends. The founding ceremony was simple, all members attended the Mass, and each member wrote her name in the book of the Company of Saint Ursula.

When it became a Company of Saint Ursula the members started living as a community. Saint Angela Merici went to Cremona and became ill. During her illness she dictated two other documents: the “Arricordi” (Words to remember or Counsels) and the “Legati” (Legacies or Testament) to her secretary Cozzano. Both documents were addressed to those who would assume leadership in the community.

Before Angela Merici died the Council of Trent was ready to begin. The Company was not a religious order but women who lived the consecrated life staying with their families. The Company “was forced to accept the monastic cloister, solemn vows and habits” (Arbuckle 1996:26). Saint Angela Merici died on the 27 January 1540, and is laid to rest in the crypt of Saint Afra. Her successor was Lucrezia Lodrone.

### **3.3 Definition of spirituality**

The term spirituality refers both to a lived experience and an academic discipline. For Christians it means “one’s entire life as understood, felt, imagined, and decided upon in relationship to God in Christ Jesus empowered by the Spirit” (Komonchak 1987:973). Spirituality is a way of living the Christian life. It is a life in Christ and in the Spirit, which is received in faith. Spirituality entails one’s entire life that is expressed in love and lived with hope within the Church community. Spirituality is not only concerned with thinking about attitudes but with living them. Thoughts are not as important as life that is the centre of interest. The important things are the way people relate to one another everyday, and the environment they create among themselves. It is important that spirituality is lived within history and not separated from it.

“Spirituality is therefore a kind of integrative orientation which penetrates and channels energies, as a person seeks for meaning and lives out life’s choice” (Perino 1987:77). The Christian life guided by the Holy Spirit is implemented by the commandment of Christ: to love God and neighbour, and this love is extended to the whole of creation. Thus Christian spirituality at its most authentic level includes in its scope both humanity and nature.

Sometimes the life and example or teaching of an outstanding person, like Saint Dominic or Saint Clare, “becomes a pattern for others; sometimes such influence comes from the writing by a person judged to be gifted with insight into spiritual development” (Principe 1986:933). Therefore the spirituality of a religious Congregation is based on the life and example or teaching of the founder, as we shall see with Saint Angela Merici and the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

### **3.4 Saint Angela Merici’s spirituality**

The basis of Saint Angela Merici’s spirituality is set forth in her writings: the Rule, Counsels and Legacy. Saint Angela Merici combined religious commitment and open mindedness in a way which was not possible for women of that time. The members of the Company of Saint Angela Merici remained integrated in their families or stayed where they worked. They saw themselves as religious committed to an ascetic life with regular prayers, fasting and Holy Communion.

Saint Angela Merici’s spirituality was Christ-centred because the basic motivation of her whole life was her personal relationship with Christ. It was in Christ that she found the life shaping energy for her Sisters. In her fifth Counsel she said, “Let them have Jesus Christ as their only treasure”.

Saint Angela Merici’s freedom of spirit resulted in a wonderful social apostolate. She was available to all, bringing peace to souls, comfort to the disheartened, advice to those seeking perfection and all these came from her personal sanctity. Men and women of all classes sought her, venerated her and called her “mother”.

The members of the community lived according to the Evangelical Counsels, committed themselves to a life of virginity and practised chastity, poverty and obedience. In this observance, Angela had in mind all the spiritual dimension of their lives. Therefore, her Rule emphasizes that any woman who wishes to make this commitment must give her heart to God voluntarily. Living purely means total spiritual dedication. “Above all, let her keep her heart pure and her conscience clean of every evil thought, of every shadow of envy or ill will, of every discord and evil suspicion, and of every other evil appetite and wish. Rather, be happy, and always full of charity and faith and hope in God” (Rule chapter 9) “Each one should also preserve holy virginity, not on account of the vow made through human persuasion, but willingly making to God the sacrifice of her own heart;

virginity..., is the sister of all angels” (1985:41). She was determined that the promise should entail a total gift of self, no matter its exterior expression. It was the sacrifice itself she regarded as most important and not the form of the sacrifice. She chose this consecration because she hesitated to bind by a formulated vow “as she visaged the members of the community living in the world, principally with their own families” (Downey 1993:53).

For Saint Angela Merici virginity is a mystery, it is an expression of an exclusive, undivided, perfect love that presupposes liberty of the spirit and the adherence of the person to Christ. Virginity is closely connected with joy and flourishes where there is love of neighbour: “Total consecration to God, the source of joy, is also a mainspring of generosity” (Rio 1989-1990:42). Imitation of Christ out of love is for a consecrated virgin her first duty as a spouse, her first need and one she is longing to fulfill. This love must thirst for intimacy with Jesus and “the original basis for consecrated chastity is the living example of the man-God, Jesus” (LG 43).

Saint Angela Merici’s idea of virginity was to be identified with the sixth beatitude “Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God” (Mt 5:8) because their hearts are burning with love and longing. The virtues are necessary stepping-stones, “intellect and will are spiritual powers that reach God, if they are organs of the theological virtues” (Divo 1981:19). Without faith, hope and love God remains pure mystery. Virginity is an essential element of Merician spirituality and “obedience and poverty are only the manifestation and progressive realisation of love” (Divo 1981:12).

Chapter eleven of the Rule of Saint Angela Merici states that all are urged to “welcome poverty, not only as regards deprivation of temporal things, but above all to practice that true poverty of the spirit by which man strips his heart of all attachment, of all created and passing goods and, ultimately, of himself” (Rule Chapter 11). Her daughters should strip themselves of all things to have only God. Therefore, to accept this gift of poverty means to empty oneself of everything and rely on God’s providence, and have trust in Him. Though Saint Angela was a Franciscan Tertiary she does not speak of material poverty but she wants freedom of heart that sees, loves and knows only God.

The requirements of the Rule and the Counsels in the matter of obedience arose directly from Saint Angela Merici’s concept of its true nature: theory and practice were closely linked together in her mind. “Obedience is like a great light in man, making all his works

good and acceptable in the eyes of God” (Divo 1981:23). A fundamental value is here involved, which provides a starting point for all spiritual activity.

Obedience is a challenge and not easy, it can only be practiced in faith. Mother Theresa of Calcutta says: “submission for someone who is in love is more than a duty, it is a blessedness” (1996:27). Saint Angela Merici stresses obedience to God’s commandments first, and then to the Church, and finally too individual spiritual and secular authorities. “Above all, obey the Counsels and inspiration which the Holy Spirit continually sends into the heart ... obey God and each creature for the love of God, as long as nothing is commanded against the honour of God and against one’s own integrity” (Rule, Chapter 8). The individual’s obedience to the Holy Spirit and to God’s guidance as well as her personal integrity, takes priority over obedience to all earthly authorities.

The spiritual understanding of the Evangelical Counsels distinguishes the first Ursulines Rule. Saint Angela Merici included traditional characteristics of religious life, but she interpreted them anew and thus created a freer, more independent, yet committed way of life for women. The independence of the new way is also visible in the leadership structure, which Saint Angela intended for her community. The spiritual leadership lay in the hands of four women elected by the community.

With its self understanding and its spirituality, the Company of Saint Ursula opened up for women a way of life which broke with the prevailing conventions, even at that time in early modern Italy. For women it was either a husband or cloister, and the majority of contemporaries applied this to women. Saint Angela Merici challenged the mentality of the image of women with a different view. She assumed that women could act and live in the world completely on their own authority. They were women who preferred to work as Christians in the society.

### **3.5 The main elements of the spirituality of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici**

Saint Angela Merici did not leave specific directions concerning the evolution of her institute, nor did she identify its mission. Saint Angela’s spirit is communicated to her followers through her writings: the Rule, Counsels and Legacy. These writings transmit mainly the ideal behind the spirit, that is, the gospel vision intimately related to her Spirit. Saint Angela Merici’s spirit is also transmitted to her followers through her life. These two sources she wrote and her life are so rich that the Companions of Saint Angela Merici can

draw from them.

Most Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici who come from townships, are called to be women of vision, moving with the signs of the new post-apartheid times. Their simple life style, their warmth towards and solidarity with oppressed characterize their educational, health and pastoral services.

### **3.5.1 Simple life style**

The Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici was founded in the diocese of Johannesburg to serve the poor, township people. The Sisters live in convents that are situated in townships, and commute like other people in taxis or buses to town or schools where they teach. In this way they mix with the people. The Sisters live among the poor in order to fulfil their evangelical mission through the witness of a simple life style without material means. They aim at a total devotion to their brothers and sisters, for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, effectively sharing in the sorrows, anxieties, joys and the expectations of the poor.

They are trying out a new form of genuine community life in which simplicity and sharing with others are evident. They do this because they believe that they can help to bring about a change, where there is no longer oppressed or oppressor but only brother and sister.

In living together in solidarity, the seeds of a new history are being sown. This grows when they share together in novena prayers; rosaries said together, conversation and discussions, in exchanging news and opinions during Bible study groups or during long vigils. When there is birth or death, there are always opportunities of meeting each other. In all these encounters hopes are raised in a new and better future.

The Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici convey hope to the people more through their way of life than through their words. Their ability to feel the needs of others helps them to take an ever-increasing share in the lives of those among whom they live. And that opens to them the chance of preaching Jesus Christ and to speak of the hope in the Kingdom of God. The tiny seed of corn that is sown will one day, by the grace of God, bear fruit for a new world.

### **3.5.2 Prayer life**

Bishop Patrick William Whelan OMI said that it must be remembered that the primary aim of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici is not to have teachers, nurses etc, but that its members devote themselves to the complete service of God. Thus prayer should be of primary importance to the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. "You will find no other recourse than to take refuge at the feet of Jesus Christ, because if he directs and teaches you, you will be well taught" (Seventh Council 1985, 27-28). The Companions of Saint Angela Merici believe that prayer is an expression of their union with God who lives in the depths of their being. It is a way of listening to the Spirit in them and also what the Spirit asks them to bring into their daily living. Prayer gives them wisdom and courage to continue with ministries they are involved in.

Each Companion of Saint Angela Merici makes an hour's mental prayer daily. She assumes the responsibility for choosing the time and place most suitable for her prayer. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici participate daily in the celebration of the Eucharist since it is the source of unity, either in their community or with other groups if circumstances make it desirable. The Eucharist "Sacrament of love, sign of unity and bond of charity" (LG 11) is at the very centre of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici religious life. It unites the Sisters to one another and with the people of God manifesting in this way the unity of the Body of Christ.

It is important in an apostolic congregation to establish a balance between involvement and withdrawal. It is mentioned in Constitutions no. 67 that "To renew ourselves in our consecration and to deepen our life of prayer, we periodically imitate Christ in his withdrawal from active involvement in the apostolate to go aside for a while to a 'desert place'" (Mk 6:30-32). Once a month there is a day of recollection in each community. The organisation of the day of recollection depends on the circumstances and needs of the community and of the individual.

The annual retreat that each Sister has to make every year, will ordinarily be eight days. "There may be inter community or private retreats, and the sisters may participate in inter Congregational retreats" (Constitutions 1983:67). From time to time and depending on the circumstances an individual Sister may withdraw from her habitual activities for some days of recollection and renewal.

When people in townships meet to pray together the Sisters join them, e.g., "Women's

Day” or whenever there is a prayer event that needs solidarity. When people are in trouble or in need of something, they often ask the Sisters to join them in prayers. The presence of the Sisters is a sign of hope to the people.

### **3.5.3 Mutual relationships**

Saint Angela Merici’s last word was that her daughters were to “live united together, all of one heart and one will. Be bound to one another by the bond of charity, esteeming each other, helping each other in Jesus Christ” (Last Counsel 1985:1-2). The Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici are living together in different communities around Soweto and Kagiso townships. In this world that is torn by so much division, separation and strife, the Sisters should give witness of unity, peace and hope. They try to live in harmony with one another, despite the fact that they are from different cultures. It is said, “each Sister should know that she is loved, esteemed and valued because of her personal human worth and her dignity as a child of God” (Constitutions 1983:77). The Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici share a bond of religious dedication and a commitment to common ideals. Each Sister should feel at home in her community, she should be “special” as a member of the congregation. Charity begins at home, therefore the Sisters need to be kind, supportive and build each other. Each Sister will find joy and aid in her personal development and growth in holiness. A Sister’s gifts and talents will be the source of enrichment to the community and readily placed at the service of others.

Being convinced of their need for conversion of heart inherent in gospel living the Companions of Saint Angela Merici call themselves to be a gospel community through listening to and reflecting together on the Gospel. They call themselves and others to awareness, education and action of justice.

Saint Angela Merici always emphasized relationships, both personal and communal. Her example shapes the way the sisters work with their partners. Her teaching might be called “tough love”, for they involve speaking the truth. She spoke the truth in love and encourages the Sisters to use gentleness and kindness in their interactions and different judgement. Saint Angela Merici’s wisdom leads the Sisters to a love that can result in reconciliation and peace. The Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici are from different ethnic groups in the communities: Sotho, Zulu, Tswana, Xhosa, Ndebele and Shangaan and from different backgrounds. At times there are misunderstandings among themselves. Therefore, they need to forgive each other, making forgiveness the centre of

their communities.

#### **3.5.4 Hospitality**

Hospitality has to do with openness and a willingness to focus on the guest. There is a wonderful phrase in Italian, “Siate piazzevole”. Saint Angela uses the phrase in her writings, and it roughly means, “be kind or be gracious”. “A spirit of hospitality should be evident in our houses. Guests should be warmly welcomed and treated with kindness and consideration” (Constitutions 1983:94). Hospitality is one of the notable traits among the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. The Sisters live in townships and have as their neighbour’s different families, and the Sisters are always hospitable, open and focussed on others. The Sisters’ value people because they have time to listen and being with others. Visitors are made comfortable at any time when they come to see the sisters. They are available, generous and listening people.

Through their hospitable behaviour, the Sisters come to know others and gradually they begin to find access to the story of these people’s lives and their habits.

#### **3.5.5 Education**

The Ursulines tradition has always emphasized education rather than instruction. Education is a very broad concept. The field of education is so extensive that it ought always to be possible to find new approaches. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici will “engage in education in whatever form it may require” (Constitutions 1983:109). Therefore the first Companions of Saint Angela Merici were teachers in black schools, because it was the need of the time when they were founded.

The Church considers the Catholic school to be of great importance and she recognises that education is an essential dimension of her mission. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici strive to make the schools where they teach, faith communities committed to the work of Christian education. By aiming at cultural and human formation, schools contribute greatly to the promotion of the dignity of people and the preparation of a humane society.

The Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici who teach in schools, aim not only at producing young people with good academic results and qualifications, but also strive to

help them develop their Christian conscience and initiate them into the apostolic Spirit of the Church. Sister Mothibe, one of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici said, “We are not only interested in the academic side, the conscience of the pupil is just as important. Each child formed in Catholic education serves as a ‘role model’ in the wider society” (Alan 1994:1). The Companions of Saint Angela Merici try to produce young Christians with solid faith especially in the world of today where most people reject and oppose anything that their rational intelligence cannot comprehend. This truth is evident today with its scientific, social cultural changes that have not left people unaffected both in their material and spiritual life.

In schools when the Sisters correct young people they try to be gentle as recommended by Saint Angela Merici. In this way the correction becomes an aspect of love, leading to more love. An active relationship between school and family is necessary for the sake of educational continuity. The parents of the students are involved in the educational progress of their children. Whenever there’s a function at school all parties, teachers, parents and students are involved. Each group plays its role.

Among all the means of Christian education, catechetical activity in particular furthers the pastoral aims of the Church. Therefore catechesis and the training of catechists hold a privileged place. The insertion of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici in the pastoral mission of the local Church enables them to pursue other forms of educational work such as parish activities youth and adult movements. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici participate in different forms of basic education, and are open to the desires of those Sisters who wish to serve the poor more directly.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter an attempt was made to link the present Congregation with Angela Merici. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici take Saint Angela Merici as their spiritual mother. These Sisters mostly come from townships, are called to be women of vision, moving with the signs of the new post- apartheid times. Their simple life style, warmth towards and solidarity with the oppressed, characterize their spirituality.

The seed that Saint Angela Merici planted has become a great tree, branching into the whole world. The Companions of Saint Angela are part of the Merician family and continue to draw spiritual nourishment from Saint Angela Merici’s Writings. They get

courage also from the final message of the daughters of Angela in Africa, which states: “The longer we look at this woman, the more she becomes a prophetic sign and presence for us, a challenge that we cannot resist” (African Ursulines Conference:1997).

Some elements of the spirituality of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici were discussed and the challenge to develop these elements as Black South Africans. It must be acknowledged that this remains a contentious issue as it touches on issues of identity and culture. The Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici continues in the struggle to keep balance between the demands of the present day and the original spirituality they inherited from Saint Angela Merici. It becomes incumbent upon the leadership of the congregation to revisit this aspect of spirituality from time to time, in order that the congregation continues to draw from the rich inheritance and creatively seek new ways of cultivating the spirituality.

Since spirituality and charism cannot be separated we will look at the charism of the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CHARISM OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE COMPANIONS OF SAINT ANGELA MERICI

#### 4.1 Introduction

As has already been mentioned, charism and spirituality are related to each other and cannot be separated, although they are distinct. Therefore, to understand the spirituality one has to know the charism of the founder or foundress because spirituality is the living out of the charism. The Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici must develop the spirituality that corresponds to its charism.

Like all Christians it is important for the religious to constantly re evaluate their lives in the light of the gospel. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici must identify their particular charism if they are to be effective in their ministry.

#### 4.2 Definition of charism

A charism “is a gift, an ability, a talent, an inclination to be of service in a particular way” (Bouchard 1978:351). Futrell says that a charism is “simply a graced way of seeing and of following Jesus for the service of the whole Church, which can cease to exist if and when this vision and this service cease to be a true good for the Church” (1971:63). The Spirit is given to all and the same Spirit give these people the power to do something for the good of the Church.

Like any other Congregation, the Companions of Saint Angela Merici’s spirituality cannot be properly understood apart from the original charism. Saint Paul uses the term charism both as a gift of God such as salvation, charity or faith, and in a more restricted sense of the gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the common good. Saint Paul mentioned that the “particular manifestation of the Spirit granted to each one is to be used for the general good. But at work in all is one and the same Spirit, distributing them (gifts) at will to each individual” (1 Cor 12:7, 11).

Lumen Gentium 12 speaks of charisms as given by the Spirit for the renewal and the building of the Church. *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Council document that treats ‘Adaptation

and renewal of religious life', has the same elements, but the word charism does not occur in it. The document states:

From the beginning of the Church there were men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty, and to imitate him more closely, by practising the evangelical counsels. They led lives dedicated to God, each in his own way. Many of them, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, became hermits or founded religious families. These Church by virtue of her authority gladly accepted and approved. Thus, in keeping with the divine purpose, a wonderful variety of religious communities came into existence. This has considerably contributed towards enabling the Church not merely to be equipped for every good work and to be prepared for the work of the ministry unto the building up of the Body of Christ, but also to appear adorned for her husband, and to manifest in herself the multiform wisdom of God. (PC 1)

From this statement it can be learned that the call is seen as coming from God through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is also in touch with the divine purpose. Secondly, the gift is given for the spread of the Kingdom, and thus it exists for the good of the Church and contributes to her good works.

Pope Paul VI was the first one to use the term in relation to religious life, in his first exhortation on the renewal and adaptation of religious institutes of 1971. Pope John Paul II also uses the term several times, in his document of 1983 on "Essential Elements of the Church's teaching on religious life as applied to institutes dedicated to works of apostolate. The term also appears in "Vita Consacrata", his apostolic letter in response to the 1994 Synod on religious life.

#### **4.3 The charism of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.**

Saint Angela Merici's charism cannot be understood in any one way. It has always been possible to interpret the Ursulines charism in several ways, and this is happening even today in the different branches of the Merician family. Saint Angela Merici's charism unites contemplation with apostolic zeal. In the beginning Angela's daughters were impressed by the way she lived her consecration in the midst of secular people, and they wanted to follow her example. Later they formed a branch from the Ursulines family, what would now be called a secular institute. Saint Angela Merici's daughters had no

determinate apostolate. They witnessed by their example to Christ's love for each human being. They did not live community life as in the convents of the time. They were free like Saint Angela Merici and dedicated themselves to different ways of serving the Church and others, each according to her capacity and individual vocation.

Today there are different religious Congregations named Ursulines but who do not keep the Spirit of Saint Angela Merici. In France during the Napoleonic era, only Ursulines were allowed to teach, and other congregations named themselves Ursulinse but without taking on the spirit of Saint Angela Merici.

The founders of religious Congregations were persons committed first to Christ and his mission. Their reading of the gospels has been concretised in their constitutions that are the safeguards of the charism they have received from Christ. That gift turned them into callers in their turn to transmit that charism to others. Since the first members of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici entered religious life it was their desired to be clear about the charism of the Congregation.

The founder of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici, Bishop William Patrick Whelan OMI, did not necessarily found the spirituality but is a person who took the initiative for the existence of the congregation within the Church. He placed the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici under the care of the Ursulines, because he loved their spirituality and he wanted the Sisters to follow Saint Angela Merici's spirituality.

The charism of the founder as an experience is "transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them in harmony with the Body of Christ" (MR 11). Some preparations on renewal, updating the Constitutions and election of the first Moderator General and her Council were made before the first General Chapter of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. Sister Marie de Lourdes, an Oakford Dominican, guided the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici in a discernment workshop in June 1977. The Sisters then produced the following charism statement: "We are proclaiming the Good News and serving the needy. In a Spirit of reconciliation we will work to develop all people of our country by promoting co-operation". This satisfied the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici for a time and gave them enough confidence to continue as an effective presence in the Church.

It is not one person or a congregation that can manifest all the characteristics of the Lord. Each religious institute reflects a particular aspect or a combination of aspects of the Gospel. Therefore, each religious congregation “needs its own special gift or specific combination of the Gospel attributes or gifts from the spirit to give it its own identity” (Renfro 1986:526). Each religious congregation shares its gift in the Church, and the role played by each Congregation cannot be replaced.

After sometime the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici started again to look critically at the above statement. The Sisters asked themselves several questions and whether their charism was still relevant for them. A charism is a living reality and not a written statement that remains the same forever. They also looked at how the charism manifested itself in their lives as Companions of Saint Angela Merici, was it seen, felt and placed in the life of the Church then, particularly in the diocese of Johannesburg. As they know that charism live in people and not in writings.

Zago mentioned that the “General Chapter plays an important role in the Congregation’s journey. It is the supreme authority and has a special grace to discern the needs and challenges” (1997:78). The examination helped the congregation to discern its needs as well as the needs of society.

In May 1983 Father Converset, a Comboni priest from Lydenburg, did a charism workshop with the Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. After much reflection the Sisters came up with a statement that stated that the Sisters “are sent to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom by making the compassion of Christ present to the poor” (Is 61:1). They responded to the needs of the Church especially in striving for justice and reconciliation according to the signs of the times. Compassion is the capacity to suffer with and to share solidarity with the others. Because of the interdependence between the sisters and the society the Sister learned that the healing presence is most possible in the context of mutuality. Thus, the Sisters live with the people in townships and co-operate in activities taking place in the community they live in.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

As it was mentioned before, spirituality is intricately intertwined with charism. Sometimes it is difficult to speak of one without the other. In this chapter, the charism of the Congregation was explored with a special reference to Saint Angela Merici. It is worth

noting that the sisters continued to seek new ways of broadening and living the original charism by way of general chapters where they collaborated with other key leaders to forge a charism statement. Once again this remains an area that needs constant renewal and reflection as it is a lived experience rather than a rule that is written on paper. It remains the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici's desire to remain faithful to its charism, hence the resolve to seek help and guidance from other people to facilitate a clear-headed life style. Once again, this calls for an action-reflection process in which they constantly look back in The next chapter will attempt to explore some of the elements of the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici and to seek ways to inculturate them. order to move forward.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### INCULTURATING SOME OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE COMPANIONS OF SAINT ANGELA MERICI

#### 5.1 Introduction

Religious life faces new challenges in every generation because every culture undergoes changes that might be caused by external or internal factors. Religious life being lived within a culture and as part of culture is affected by change. It is constantly challenged to respond to the gospel values.

The aim of this chapter is to challenge the Sisters of Companions of Saint Angela Merici to develop a more African identity as religious in South Africa. As we have seen the model of religious life is from the West, there is a need to re-look at some issues to be authentic black religious women.

Firstly, the word Inculturation will be defined and also there will be a discussion about the Church's teaching on Inculturation. We will look at the link between spirituality and Inculturation. Finally, some of the elements of the spirituality of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici that might be inculturated will be looked into.

#### 5.2 Definition of inculturation

“Inculturation is the process by which individuals learn their groups culture through experience, observation and instruction; and also the process by which the gospel is adopted to a particular culture” (Arrupe 1977:12). From this definition we learn that culture is something that is handed over from generation to generation because it is learnt from the elders. The second element of culture is that it can be purified by gospel values. Another short definition of inculturation is “the ongoing dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. More fully it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures” (Shorter 1988:11). Therefore, inculturation is a two-way action. We can deduct from this that inculturation is a process that never ends but it develops and takes into consideration the dialogue between two ingredients: faith and culture. The results is that there should be transformation in comparing cultural values with those of the Gospels, that is taking the good and doing away with the undesirable or

the bad. True inculturation should be based on a correct and constructive mentality. This is not an easy process because tension between the Gospel and culture brings results that are painful.

The Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici are the ones who should inculturate their spirituality and face the reality genuinely. The Sisters must be aware of the fact that by inculturation it is the faith, the Christian message, that inserts itself in another culture, and not any given culture.

### **5.3 The link between spirituality and inculturation**

When we ask about the relation between spirituality and inculturation, then we presuppose a modern historical consciousness of the diversity of spiritualities and cultures. Inculturation is the way of living in terms of culture and not in a vacuum. One's way of thinking about God is conditioned by one's culture. In this regard spirituality and inculturation cannot be separated they are integrated. It can be held that genuine spirituality should be inculturated spirituality so that it suits the people.

The Merician spirituality is generic and the Companions of Saint Angela Merici should live it as black people in their own context.

### **5.4 Inculturating some of the elements of spirituality of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici**

Religious life remains one of the greatest strengths of the Church in its mission. It contains within itself, Gospel values which are the basis and object of evangelisation. Religious life remains inseparable from the life of the Church, especially here in South Africa, where it is still largely a mission territory. Throughout history it has been clear how religious life has contributed to the mission of the Church, by radically proclaiming Christ who often counteracted the negative tendencies of the society he lived in.

#### **5.4.1 Mutual relationship**

The traditional values that were guiding the society in the past are gradually fading away. The youth today are unsure of where they are going and are totally lost. There is a need of role models who will be able to correct them and the religious can do that. The Sisters of

the Companions of Saint Angela Merici are the light of the people in South Africa, more especially in the diocese of Johannesburg. It is their duty to help the people to experience Christ who accommodates everybody.

The whole issue of family in the African sense shows that there is no person who is an island; we are dependent on each other. The idea of church as a family, meaning that the family is not just mother, father and children but also extended family and one's neighbours. An elderly person has the right to correct any child because we belong to each other. In Setswana we say "Motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe" meaning, "People are people through other people".

Mutual understanding is important in the community of the Sisters, and this has to be shown by the spirit of reconciliation among the Sisters. Jesus, in one of the parables maintains that wheat and weeds have to grow together until the end of time (Jn 13:24-30). This is the call to accept the painful situation in every experience. "In many ways forgiveness is the acid test of any group that wants to be known as a Christian community"(O'Reilly 1996:127).

This is a challenge for the Sisters because it is not easy to live with others in a community. It is difficult to accept some members as they are, there is the tendency to change them the way we want them to be.

Respect for individual differences, to let people be who they are and feel accepted by other members in the community. They should be free to have different views and behaviour as well as looking at reality. They should be able to say what they feel and think.

There is a need to deepen the spirit of prayer among the Sisters. "The strength of an African individual prayer, is in proportion to the amount of community prayer going on around him or her ..." (O'Reilly 1996:139). From this it can be said that for an African there is no division between personal prayer and community prayer. When a Sister is waiting for transport to go somewhere she prays and not as an individual but as a community person.

#### **5.4.2 Hospitality**

Doors are always open to all people, because guests are important. It is said in Setswana

that “bana ba motho ba kgaogana tlhogo ya tsie”, meaning children of the same family share what ever is there no matter how small it may be. In African culture, whenever there is food to be taken, everyone present is invited to share even if the food was prepared for a far less number of people without expecting visitors. It would be a big mistake or bad manners for one to eat in front of someone without sharing or expressing the intention to do so.

The Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela living in townships with people who are poor and unemployed have to share whatever they have with the needy. They have to show people that they are there for the people by showing their availability to the people.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter an attempt was made to explore the relationship between inculturation and spirituality, and two elements of the spirituality of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. It was acknowledged that inculturation, as a relation between faith and culture, cannot be separated from spirituality. This chapter tried to demonstrate therefore, that the members of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici need to internalize some of these key spirituality elements and reinterpret them in an African understanding. This in effect, forms a link between spirituality and culture and as a result, destigmatises culture as something to be celebrated rather than shunned.

The chapter has sketched three elements: mutual relationship, hospitality and education as the key features that could be inculturated. Regarding mutual relationship, the congregation is urged to foster a spirit of reconciliation among its members so that they in turn, could influence the society around them. The element of hospitality fosters a need to cultivate a culture of sharing as something originally African. This is enshrined in the saying ‘A person is a person through others’. Finally, education is seen as vital, especially in these days of many challenges. The Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici is urged to help young people to deepen their self-understanding in order to become responsible adults.

The next chapter sketches out some of the challenges facing the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici today as it lives its spirituality.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE CHALLENGES FACING THE CONGREGATION OF THE COMPANIONS OF SAINT ANGELA LIVING THEIR SPIRITUALITY TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE

#### 6.1 Introduction

By and large each member is called to radical renewal at personal level, and to enrich the Congregation with her gifts and affects its future as she makes its spirit and charism her own. Bearing in mind that the ways of God are many. That is why responsibility for incorporating new members should rest in a special way with the professed Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. They play an essential part in the work of formation through their openness to growth, their willingness to share their experience of vowed life and their effort to live the apostolic ideals of the congregation. The Sisters of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici should offer to those who join them, the security and insecurity of the life of faith and the certainty that God calls them to be holy and be His messengers.

As a community the Sisters are called to be a consecrated community and their task is that of being “Prophets”. Like the prophets of old the sisters are called to challenge all people to change from passivity to sharing and become an authentic Christian community. The Companions of Saint Angela Merici should challenge the church because the wider the credibility gap between the church life-style and the Gospel she preaches, the harder it will be for people inside and outside the fold to become fruitful branches of the true vine. The weaker will be the church’s participation in the mission of God to renew the face of the earth. As the proverb says: “When words point north and the feet march south, which way do camp followers go?”

The Companions of Saint Angela Merici are a consecrated prophetic community serving humanity, by challenging Christian communities to become one large prophetic community. The Sisters are called to speak out not only by statements, preaching or praying but also by way of life or actions. They should stand for something different from what their society stand for. They are called to be controversial since they have no other model but Christ.

## **6.2 Prayer life**

The Companions of Saint Angela Merici live in noisy townships of television, music and many other noises but they are challenged to remember that they need time and space for prayer in the midst of that noise. They have to contribute to a spirit of quiet and calm in their living situation. Both personal and communal prayer is necessary for each Sister, because prayer is a way of life for her. Communal prayer should be a source of concern and that would be a sign of hope.

## **6.3 A way of living the vows**

People living in townships do not understand the Sisters' mission because they see them as people who have adopted a foreign way of life. This is a challenge for the Sisters to give religious life its own South African character and make it more meaningful to the people.

The Sisters are to be seen as a community of liberated women in townships. Thus, they should witness against the misuse of sex and, especially, against the exploitation of women. They should witness in the whole area of women liberation. Growth in their life of celibacy requires that they continue to develop their understanding of: the gift of their womanhood, the psychology of the various stages of life, human sexuality and men-women relationships.

The Sisters are called to find a way of living poverty that does speak to the people and that does not pass unnoticed. They must search for a life-style that is simple and somehow shouts out to people and a way of sharing and dependency that contradicts what other people think. They should share their limitations, sorrows and daily hardships too.

The money that is received by an individual Sister, be it a salary or pension, is put to common use. Thus poverty should be lived in sharing and calls for the use of the goods to enter into relationship and encourage justice.

Obedience should be the search for the will of God. It should not be a matter of passive submissiveness to superiors, where they should witness to being oppressed people. This would not be prophetic. Their vow of obedience should be a deep commitment and dedication to a way of life, to their constitutions and to community. To a co-operative working together that would be indeed a criticism of the township people or the country

with its selfishness, individualism and competitive spirit. The Sisters should be a community that really serves the humanity.

#### **6.4 Charism**

The charism of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici is the gift of the spirit begun in the call of the patroness. It is not something that can be taught but it has to be caught, sensed and breathed in through community participation. The unity of the Sisters should be “like different beads from the same pot, different shapes, sizes, colors, uses, ever changing pattern strung on new strings” (Oduyoye 1995:209) and forming a beautiful pattern.

It is through experience and prayer that the Sisters together will discover their charism as daughters of Saint Angela Merici. “Charism of foundation, by its very nature, implies a certain continuity. Formed by the common spirituality and mission of the group, inheriting their common past traditions, the present generation comes to maturity in faith and freedom by assuming and integrating that past, and not by denying it” (Miligan 1979:56). The past has formed the Congregation of the Companions, this will strengthen the Congregation once there is clarity for the Sisters to be responsible and have freedom in the present. Spirituality needs time for prayer, reading and reflecting so as to get new understanding and become more sensitive to the movements of the spirit around.

“The original intention and the vision of the community are extremely important in assessing today’s presence among the poor”(Miligan 1979:55). The Sisters have to be clear about the people they are meant to serve and minister. Both the original intention and the signs of the times are important.

The first symbol of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici is central to their life-style, commencing with the insignia of their founder Archbishop William Patrick Whelan OMI, which reads thus: ‘Unity of Spirit by the peace that binds you together’ (Eph.4: 3), and the counsel of their patroness Saint Angela Merici: ‘If all of you are living together united in heart you will be like a mountain fortress like a tower of strength’. Another symbol, the African hut, gathers all the Companions of Saint Angela Merici together giving them a common identity, a certain wholeness and openness. It radiates peace and harmony, it is a home for all its members but at the same time it is hospitable and welcoming to all God’s needy people. Compassion is its distinguishing mark authenticated by the open door and

the open windows. The interior is simple, transparent and at peace in the Lord.

## **6.5 Formation**

The formation of members is a fundamental commitment that lies at the basis of the life and evangelisation activity of every congregation. The qualified presence of the Sisters in various fields of work in which they are placed depends on their spiritual and apostolic formation.

It is important that young people are helped through the process of self-reflection, so that they may accept their own African values in the light of the Gospel values. This will help to bring about conversion of heart and this will help an individual to choose Jesus and others.

It is necessary to plan the formation that will lead members to know, grow in and identify with the Congregation's special charism so that it may be that gift that God wanted to give the local Church. The Companions of St Angela Merici, a diocesan Congregation, was founded to answer particular needs in the diocese of Johannesburg. The founder proposed the spirituality of Saint Angela Merici that could motivate and sustain its commitment and apostolic zeal.

The Companions of Saint Angela Merici should always be pointing to the future, trying to express what the future holds for society. This will be one of the ways of contradicting the people and pointing to new values, a new country or world, and a new page of hope for the future. This includes good news of reconciliation.

All the above-mentioned should reveal God to the people around the Companions of Saint Angela Merici. This cannot be done unless they are women of prayer, faith and love. They should be constantly searching for God in scripture and in the signs of the times. Moreover they would not be prophetic unless they reveal God to the people they serve. People looking at the Companions of Saint Angela Merici should be able to give glory to God as they see what he is like and what belief in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit means. So that those who were about to abandon God may be challenged to use their eyes of faith by the sisters' prophetic witness.

## **6.6 Union for Mission – Ministry of Government**

The Sisters should give their apostolic service not simply as individuals, but as members of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici that received its mission from the compassionate Christ through the Church. “May they all be one ... so that the world may believe”(Jn 17:21). United in the Spirit they should constitute a strong prophetic apostolic community, ready to move forward (having a clear vision) through decision and action in the service of others.

To maintain unity and direct the apostolic moving force generated by their union in the lord, they need the ministry of the government. All the Sisters should take the responsibility to join in the discernment of God’s will for the Congregation, and this contributes to find decisions made by their superiors. Those to whom the task of government is entrusted derive their authority from the constitutions as approved by the church. Faith in the loving providence of God should enable the sisters to exercise authority and to respond to it in obedience for the sake of apostolic effectiveness. This faith-inspired obedience is expressed in fidelity to principles and practices that can keep the government of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici true to the Gospel and to their Spirit and constitutions.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

Having reflected on the key elements of the spirituality of the Congregation of the Companion of Saint Angela Merici we discovered that it is made up of certain elements. The research was limited to certain elements that are lived by the congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici and how these elements could be inculturated in the context of the Sisters. Saint Angela Merici invites the Companions of Saint Angela Merici to nurture new life and to be a leaven in the African bread, to be a blessing, “pula”(rain) for the world, among the people of South Africa.

Saint Angela Merici spirit is one of charity and Christian love, a spirit of joy that is filled with apostolic zeal. But hers also is a spirit of evangelical radicalism, a spirit of prayer, of renunciation and penance. Saint Angela’s spirituality flows from her experience of God. She puts great emphasis on “the three evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience as seen from a very exigent perspective” (Buser 1990:68).

The Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici is still in search of a full picture of Saint Angela Merici in their own context. The writer hopes that more research will be done in this field in the future.

The Sisters of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici have to return to their sources and face the challenges of the society today. There is an urgent need for ongoing formation in order to revisit the spirituality of their own religious Congregation.

For the Sisters to attract new members to the Congregation they must first experience interior renewal and unity of purpose. They must unite together as a Congregation renewed in their purpose to pursue conversion. As individuals and as a community they will be strengthened to spread the good news as Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

Saint Angela Merici’s spirituality is Christ-centred. The Sisters are pilgrims on a journey to Christ, through Christ. As we have seen, the history of the Congregation is important for the Sisters to know their roots and who they are. In the development of their history it was not easy because there were times of difficulties and discouragement, but the Congregation succeeded. Although it is important for the sisters to continue looking back at their history and learn from it in order to grow.

The study mainly focused on the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici by looking at issues of identity, composition of the Congregation and lifestyle. This has been expounded in the different chapters by firstly, analysing the historical background (chapter 2) of the Congregation and then, listening to what older members of the Congregation understand their spirituality to be (chapter 3). This chapter also recognized the need for the Congregation to review its' self understanding in relation to its history. Chapter 4 attempted to integrate charism and spirituality as two hallmarks of any given religious Congregation. The study further explored the need to integrate faith and culture by looking at tenets of its lifestyle in chapter 6. Finally, an array of challenges facing the Congregation today were sketched and possible solutions were explored in order to attempt to paint the varied spirituality of the Congregation of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici.

The main findings of this study centre upon how hidden the history and spirituality of a religious diocesan Congregation can be. These findings should provide insight and information for particular and more general studies of spirituality of a Congregation.

The spirituality of the Companions of Saint Angela Merici is made up of several elements, the author has only dealt with some in my work; she hopes that more research will be done in the future.

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