

# WOMEN OF VISION – A REFLECTION BY MARIA IGOE

‘Recently in his homily, Fr Jim Walls mentioned Dorothy Day, who founded the Catholic Worker Movement in America. This led me to think of other women of impact in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**ST TERESA OF KOLKATA (Mother Teresa)**, whom most of us know quite a lot



about. She was Albanian – born in Skopje in 1910. At 18 she joined the Sisters of Loreto in Ireland. In 1929 she arrived in India and taught geography for 20 years. She was disturbed by the poverty there, and on a train to Darjeeling for a Retreat, she felt a call from within to serve the poor, while living among them.

In 1950 she received permission to start her congregation, which became the Missionaries of Charity. In 1952 she opened her first hospital for the dying in Calcutta. From these small beginnings her work grew and spread throughout the world.

She saw beauty in every human being and helped those who were rejected by others. She did not want a person to die without knowing love.

She and her Sisters lived very simply with only two saris each. I told my children that a person does not need fancy showers to wash. Even in Edinburgh, as all over the world, the nuns wash by using a jug to pour water over themselves, then apply soap and finish by pouring more water from the jug. My children are reluctant to follow this method!

Mother Teresa received many awards. She was given the Nobel Peace Prize for her humanitarian work and used her acceptance speech to give a strong pro-life message. She died in 1997 and was canonised by Pope Francis in 2016.

She had a wonderful way with words :

“Peace begins with a smile”

“A life not lived for others is not a life”

“If you judge people, you have no time to love them” and so many more.

**SR MURIEL GEISLER** died in July, one hour before her 96<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her story was



published in the Newsletter a few weeks ago. She served the most poor around Medjugorje and founded an Old Folks’ Home, a Hospice and a Day Centre for those with handicaps and learning difficulties. At the time of her death her work was almost completed. Her friend, Mary Walsh, has decided to stay in Medjugorje until November 2021 to finish the work and hand it on to Jacov, one of the visionaries, who has founded a charity - ‘Mary’s Hands’. Jacov works with young

people and they will be able to continue to take the food parcels to the poor in the hills.

I know many of you enjoyed hearing about Sister Muriel, and if you did, I recommend you 'Google' - "The Little Angel of Colombia". You can get it on 'You Tube'. This is a story with many similarities to Sr Muriel's, but is about a nine year old boy. It is truly wonderful.

**MOTHER ELVIRA** is an Italian nun, who is still alive, but after several strokes, is now unable to talk. She was born in 1937 in the south of Italy. She was one of 8 children and her father was addicted to alcohol and cigarettes. She always called herself 'the daughter of poor people.' She said feeling hungry taught her sacrifice. Her mother found her strength in the Cross. Her constant prayer was, "Holy Cross of God, do not abandon me".. Her father taught her how to love and serve everyone with dignity. He was the first broken person she had to love and serve.



She said, "I loved my father and served him faithfully."

She had a serious boyfriend at 17, but felt the call from Jesus to be **his** spouse. At 19, with none of her family supporting her, she entered the Sisters of Charity of St Jeanne Antide Thouret. For many years she blamed herself for leaving her mother, who needed her, but later a young man said, "Elvira, thank God you got on that train. Otherwise all of us would still be desperate and waiting! All of us were on that train with you."

She remained in the Convent for 28 years, mostly as a cook. She was drawn to young people and kneeling before the Eucharist, she could feel their cries of pain, their need for help. The Holy Spirit lit a fire within her.

In 1983, at the age of 46, she was given an abandoned house in Italy and the Cenacolo communities were born. The most hopeless of addicts came and, through friendship, work and prayer, these young men, who were dying, slowly came back to life. They do not have TV, mobile phones, cigarettes, money and the other trappings of our modern life. The best results are achieved by those who stay 3 years or more, living in community.

There are over 70 houses in the world, the nearest to us being in Kendal. The largest is in Medjugorje, where those of us who go have heard many testimonies from the youth. Houses have opened for girls. There have been marriages and vocations to the priesthood and religious life. These young people have completely changed their lives around and have a very deep love for Mother Elvira, who always said, "Nothing is impossible to God."

If there is similarity in these stories, it is that these women became nuns and lived in convents, forming a deep relationship with God, until the Holy Spirit inspired them to take a different path, leading them to change the lives of so many for the better.

When we hear bad things about what is going on in the world, it is good to remember that God is still inspiring his people, especially to work with the poor.'