

*On Earth
as in Heaven*





May He give you a humble love which expends itself;
a generous love which forgets itself;
a strong love which is not afraid of pain;
a stable love which does not change;
a patient love which can bear everything;
a fervent love which never weakens;
a constant love which never falters.

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On Earth as in Heaven

The Life Story of Blessed
Mary Angela Truszkowska
Foundress of the Felician Sisters

SR. MARIE JOANN LEWKO, CSSF

The Sisters of Saint Felix of Cantalice
Our Lady of the Angels Convent
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Enfield, CT 06062

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PREFACE

Everyone has a life story; that wondrous place where chronological time and personal history encounter vision, hope, disappointment, heartache, faith, trust, and countless other spectacular moments that make living miraculous. *On Earth as in Heaven* is the life story of one woman, Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska, who with courage and faith walked beside the people of nineteenth-century Poland and bestowed a legacy of innate graciousness, humble strength, and boundless compassion that spanned class distinctions, rigid systems, and time itself.

Born in the city of Kalisz in 1825, Blessed Mary Angela spent the seventy-four years of her life's journey in the service of her God and the people of Poland. She came into the world at a time when a woman's place was bound solely to her husband and children. Society clearly delineated the distinctions between wealth and poverty, the peasant and the nobility. Likewise, the Church itself had very definite boundaries for religious life. Nuns were found behind cloister walls and rarely about the city's alleys.

Yet, in her own uniquely humble, soft-spoken stubbornness Angela refused to accept the limiting restrictions that society and history expected

and courageously changed the perceptions of the world around her. She had a profound influence not only upon the women who came to walk beside her as the first Felician Sisters but upon an entire people who struggled, lived and died in nineteenth-century Poland. That same influence colors not only the past but the present and the future as well. It is hopefully evident in each Felician sister's witness of Blessed Mary Angela's charism and in the mission of the institutions which her sisters staff today.

Midnight had just tolled, and soft chimes still echoed down the narrow corridors into the silent, empty chapel. Mother Joseph barely raised her hand to knock on the superior's door when Mother Magdalen opened it. No words were necessary. Magdalen closed the door behind her, and they hurried to a tiny room at the far end of the hallway.

Nearing the turn of the corridor, both were startled by the sudden dark shadows cast upon the white-washed walls. There in candle light knelt the entire house of sisters. The superior weaved her way past the figures and hesitated at the door. Reaching down among the sisters who knelt beside the threshold, she found Mother Anna's hand. Then, with Joseph close behind, she led them in.

Two slender candles stood like sentinels beside a brass crucifix and illuminated the room. A young sister, bending over the dying patient, straightened as she removed the damp cloth from the woman's blistered lips. Watching her superiors draw closer, she reluctantly left the bedside.

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Magdalen made her way to the edge of the low wood-framed cot, gently knelt beside it and, sensing a peace-filled calm in Angela's cancer ravaged body, wondered if she had not already died. But as Magdalen lifted the woman's frail hand to her own cheek, Angela's eyes opened, eyes that even now caught the light and smiled back at her with recognition.

The silent room gradually filled with soft crying and the whispered Hail Marys of the rosary recited in the corridor. As if she were suddenly aware of the sisters' presence outside the door, Angela stirred. Could she hear them? Now, after so many agonizing years of deafness? Magdalen rose to close the door, but the hand she held stopped her. Unable to speak, Angela's eyes turned to the threshold, and then gazed upon each of them. They had come so far together ...Magdalen, Joseph, Anna. There had been so many painful good-byes in the past that sorrow no longer had a place here. It was truly a time for rejoicing in the blessedness of life shared and spent in total love, a time for remembering the gracious holiness of a woman who brought them far beyond their own fears and hopes, a time for thanksgiving.

Mother Magdalen stood, moved to the door, and ushered the kneeling community into the room. Together, they would all stay, and wait~ and remember.

Sophia Camille Truszkowska, Mother Mary Angela, was no stranger to waiting. Indeed, perhaps the only life experience she was not obliged to wait for was her premature birth on May 16, 1825. The evening hush of the family estate in Kalisz shattered when the nineteen-year-old Josephine Truszkowska suddenly went into labor and at 4:30 A.M., gave birth to a daughter. (1)

The midwife and two frightened parents wondered if this firstborn infant would survive. Josephine's own frantic efforts to keep the baby alive included a make-shift incubator. She wrapped her daughter in wads of cotton, lined the cradle with soft quilts, and kept a pouch of warmed coals nearby. When doctors advised getting a wet nurse from Cracow to care for the frail infant, Joseph Truszkowski readily agreed. However, the parents' anxieties further increased when those same doctors predicted that the baby would suffer lung disease and probably not live beyond her childhood years.

Married in 1822, Sophia's parents hoped for a large family. Her father, Joseph, was born at the turn of the century on his parents' estate in Kruszyn, a village owned by the Truszkowski family and located in the Bialystok area between the villages of Tykocin and Kruszyn. Joseph was the son of a landowner and citizen, particularly significant facts because Poland's class structure was firmly entrenched. Land meant partnership with the nobility and, consequently, a share in political status and educational opportunity.

This was true in 1800, even though Poland did not exist as a country. Russia, Germany, and Austria had in effect obliterated Poland from the international map. These three countries confiscated Polish lands and divided what was left of the country among themselves at the last partition in 1795, just four years prior to Joseph's birth. And yet, although Poland disappeared geographically and suffered countless political and cultural deprivations, the nation through its people refused to die. Land still entitled the nobility to citizenship in the new ruling countries; and the citizenship of Russia, Austria, or Germany still guaranteed opportunity within limited restrictions.

Life in Kruszyn resembled the ordinary rural life of any early nineteenth-century Polish village. Amid the daily challenges of making the land productive, meeting crop quotas, surviving taxes, and providing for peasant families attached to the estate, the Truszkowski family, like their fellow countrymen, resolved to preserve outlawed Polish tradition, culture, and language. Catholicism was their source of unity, and trust in Divine Providence fired their determination to keep their country alive. Poland would be free; if not on the globe then at least for now in their hearts and prayers.

The Truszkowski household upheld its heritage and cultivated a deep faith and moral sense of justice within the family. Joseph, the Truszkowski's only son, was sent as many other Polish sons to complete his education at the Russian-administered University of Warsaw. This did not occur, however, before the young man was schooled at home to love his God, family, and country.

Sensitive and gentle by nature, Joseph clearly seemed more the scholar than the village lord. His genuine love for learning was enhanced early in childhood as he was introduced to the literary and spiritual masters of his

father's vast library. The Truszkowski's private collection merited historic distinction for its rare volumes, some of which dated as far back as 1500. At the University of Warsaw, Joseph pursued law courses. In addition to his academic schedule, he offered his services as a judge in Warsaw's juvenile court system. It was here in Warsaw that Joseph found not only a career but also a bride.

Sixteen-year-old Josephine Rudzinska, daughter of a country squire, was enrolled at the school of the Visitation Nuns in Warsaw. Her mother had remarried after the death of her first husband who was the father of Josephine's stepbrothers, Martin, Stanislaus, and John Ciechanowski. Martin, later employed as a customs officer at the Court of Appeals in Kalisz, was one of Joseph Truszkowski's closest friends. Upon their graduations in 1822, Joseph married his young fiancée and broke with expected traditions. When he left Warsaw, Joseph did not return to his family estate. Instead, the couple moved to Kalisz where he secured a position as a judge in the city's juvenile courts. In doing so, Joseph waived his right to his inheritance in Kruszyn and negotiated a settlement of the land among his relatives. One treasure, however, the Truszkowski library, was packed and moved to Kalisz.

Joseph looked down at the sleeping daughter in his arms. It had been only three days since her birth, but the fear of losing her waned as the infant seemed to grow stronger before their eyes. The time to make her arrival official had come. Above his wife's protests, the newborn was bundled up and carried off to the city court where Joseph registered her birth. Two of the Truszkowskis' acquaintances, Valentine Langowski, the local pharmacist, and Anthony Polaski, a city selectman, verified the child's birth and parentage. Joseph then entered her name in Poland's history as Sophia Camille. Eight months later, on January 1, 1826, during the 3 P.M. service in the church of the Assumption of Mary, Joseph and Sophia's godparents, Martin Ciechanowski and Frances Langowska, watched as Fr. Melchior Kierzkiewicz poured baptismal waters over the baby's forehead.

To everyone's relief, the doctors' grim predictions never materialized, yet their warnings were taken with the utmost caution. As Sophia grew, her parents' solicitousness increased. This precocious, endearing, bright, blue-eyed child remained frail and reserved. She was the constant focus of her family's concern and anxiety even though two years later, in 1827,

Josephine gave birth to another daughter, Valerie, whom Sophia loved ecstatically. Soon after that two brothers, Walter and Joseph, made their arrival in the young family. Days were happy and prosperous for the Truszkowskis, but historic events would eventually alter the course of their lives.

The political and economic life of Kalisz deteriorated significantly after the failed revolution of 1830 in Warsaw. In November of that year, an assassination squad of eighteen men attacked Belweder Palace and attempted to kill the czar's brother, Grand Duke Constantine. The students and cadets who formed the squad underestimated the force of the Russian Cossacks and assumed incorrectly that once they began the revolution the elite of Poland's own dismantled army would follow their lead.

Reprisals had been swift, far reaching, and devastating. For seven years Joseph and his colleagues in Kalisz and other provincial cities watched as hostilities intensified, and relations, which at best had always been strained between Russia and her acquired citizenry, grew worse. Czar Nicholas placed wide restrictions on education, religion, and politics, while he further increased taxes which threatened to obliterate the city's economy. Crime was rampant. Ironically, its perpetrators were also its most vulnerable victims—those whom Joseph Truszkowski met daily in his courtroom, widows and orphans who resorted to any measure to ensure their survival.

However, a paradox of sorts existed. Even though the revolution occurred in Warsaw itself, the czar, who feared another uprising, relentlessly suppressed the citizens of the outlying towns and cities, and for the most part softened measures against the rebel city. Consequently, as the situation in Kalisz degenerated, Warsaw still held a semblance of hope. By 1837, all government positions in Kalisz were confiscated. Denied his judicial post and faced with declining health, Joseph Truszkowski moved his family to Warsaw.

The house at 545 Długa Street in the Nowe Miasto sector of Warsaw was far from pretentious, but to twelve-year-old Sophia it seemed the hallmark of a new era. At first, the prospect of moving to Warsaw was heart wrenching. Young Sophia, unable to attend the local school system in Kalisz because of her health, had been tutored by a dear family friend, Anastasia Kotowicz, nee Langowska. The two had become fast and very

close friends. Anastasia marveled at the little girl's passion for learning. Without doubt, it was evident that Sophia, even at an early age, was gifted not only with a keen aptitude for assimilating knowledge but more astonishingly with a profound appreciation of spiritual and aesthetic refinement. Leaving her beloved tutor behind in Kalisz was softened by the news that her uncle, Martin Ciechanowski, had also decided to move his wife, Emma, and two daughters, Clothilde and Valerie, to Warsaw. Now Clothilde, Sophia's cousin and confidant, would be there to make the journey less threatening and more of an adventure.

Once in Warsaw, Sophia was eager to experience the city's opportunities. One of those first milestones came shortly after the Truszkowskis arrived. In the convent chapel of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters, Sophia knelt at the altar rail along with the other girls of her First Communion class. Palms pressed firmly together, fingertips pointed to heaven, she waited as the priest approached. Finally he stood before her. Heart and mind riveted to an overpowering awareness of divine presence, Sophia lifted her head to receive her God in the guise of a tiny, fragile white host. This threshold crossed, Sophia's next accomplishment was to convince her parents that she was well enough for another venture—boarding school. In the fall of 1837, she enrolled at the Academy of Madame Laura Brzezinska-Guerin under the direction of Miss Anna Lehmann. Unfortunately, her independence was short lived as illness which plagued her childhood devastatingly returned.

Joseph Truszkowski, waiting for his wife and the doctor to come out, paced back and forth outside his daughter's bedroom. It could not be happening he told himself for the hundredth time. Sophia had been well all winter even when the younger children had come down with the croup. Her health had improved significantly since they moved to Warsaw. She maintained the rigid schedule of classes at the academy and, though he had cautioned her not to endanger her health by studying too hard, she excelled. In fact, she had received high awards for scholastic achievement and deportment. School officials had no explanation and suggested that the family hire a specialist; Sophia was sent home exhausted and near collapse.

Visibly drained by the diagnosis he reached and now had to report to his friends, the doctor opened the door for Josephine and moved the parents away from Sophia's bedroom. Although he could not be certain, it looked

like the beginning stages of tuberculosis. Joseph's heart almost stopped. There was no known cure, but perhaps a prolonged stay, a year or so, in the thin, clean mountain air would benefit the patient. Neither parent hesitated. It was settled; Sophia would recuperate in Switzerland. Josephine studied her husband. As much as she wanted to, she could not accompany her daughter. Of course, Valerie, Walter, and young Joseph were old enough to care for themselves, but Louise and Bronislaus were toddlers. Still, there was no way she would agree to let Sophia go with no one near for solace and comfort. Joseph read her thoughts. A letter was sent, and several weeks later Sophia and Anastasia Kotowicz boarded the mail stagecoach that began their long, slow route to the Alps.

Sophia's parents did not expect the changes that accompanied their daughter's recovery. Her health fully regained, Sophia returned in 1842 marked by a new sense of determination. The seventeen-year-old woman resolutely announced that she would not go back to the academy. Family members protested the decision since Sophia was near to completing her course of study and unless she met the requirements she would not be granted a degree. Quite firmly, she assured them that she had no need for the degree, neither had she any intention of allowing her studies to remain incomplete. She simply would finish them on her own. Joseph could not help but smile at this new-found assertiveness. Sophia had even drawn up a schedule with an emphasis on foreign languages. She was proficient in Polish and Russian. Her French was already quite fluent, and now she turned her efforts to Latin and, of all things, Italian.

The issue was evidently settled, and the Truszkowskis prepared for a celebration. The library key which Joseph held out to his firstborn daughter hung from a slender gold chain. It was a birthday gift and rare privilege. The Truszkowski children had always been welcome in their father's vast library, but many of the volumes rested securely beyond small hands. Not only had Sophia kept her word in completing her studies privately, but she began tutoring her younger siblings. Her mother could find her on any given morning helping the boys with their schoolwork or reading to Louise and Bruno. The library had become her sanctuary on long summer afternoons. Joseph ordinarily supervised his children's reading and selected volumes for them from a collection which few could rival. Moreover, the library contained rare volumes and outlawed editions of Poland's literary

classics which were best kept behind locked glass cabinets. The key was a token of respect, an acknowledgement of Sophia's maturity and discretion. What the family could not foresee, however, was that Sophia's new-found independence would reach beyond an education.

It was not an unusual sight for the caretaker, who hurried through the silent rooms to the front door, to catch Sophia, at times with her sister Valerie in tow, attempting to push back the ornate wooden bolt. He had been given strict orders from the Truszkowskis not to allow their daughters to leave the house before 5 A.M. However, the man was beside himself as Sophia had managed in recent days to slip past him and make her way in the pre-dawn hours to Holy Cross Church for morning Mass. Oblivious of the time and cold winter dampness, Sophia would wait for the doors to open while shivering as she prayed before the outdoor statue of the crucified Lord. The man smiled to himself. Miss Sophia was not easily deterred once she made up her mind. Her parents' arguments and stem protests usually had little effect.

The man anchored himself in the foyer as he heard Sophia's footsteps on the staircase. She almost walked into him before realizing that he was in her path. Sophia contritely grinned at him, mumbled an apology about the time, and turned back to the stairs. On his part, the caretaker smiled broadly; at least this morning Miss Sophia would be forced to keep vigil in the heated comfort of her home.

Sophia's hands trembled, and she held the small prayer book tighter. Finally, she blew gently across the written lines to make sure they were dry, closed the cover, and returned the pen to its well. "The day of my conversion, that is, of my radical turn to God, of frequent confession and Communion, of sudden spiritual consciousness, occurred on Monday, June 14, 1848, the Octave of Corpus Christi." (2) The day of my conversion ... It had been so clear as she knelt there in the church. She felt as if heaven itself opened and the Lord came to sit beside her. Indeed, she sensed that if she had only put out her hand He would have clasped it in His. The breathlessness of the moment lingered; she knew what had to be done. Truthfully, she had known it for years, ever since Switzerland; and yet, she could not bring herself to accept the call she heard in her heart. Even more, she could not leave her family.

The attraction to contemplative life was strong. Her cousin Clothilde constantly talked of entering the Visitation Order. However, there were priorities, and Sophia had set her agenda when she returned from the Alps. First, she needed to complete her studies; furthermore, Bruno and Louise depended upon her, as she once had upon Anastasia Kotowicz, for their lessons and companionship.

To Sophia's dismay, other circumstances intervened. Josephine decided they would no longer put off her "coming out" and began the rounds of visits, concerts, theater parties, balls, and picnics among their friends' eligible sons. The only consolation was that Clothilde found herself in the same predicament. The two cousins had each other's company while they were paraded about as potential brides. It was amazing though that Clothilde had resisted; when she was present Sophia need not worry about her gentleman's attention. Beautiful, charming Clothilde made heads spin; but she had little interest in marriage. Sophia's parents eventually relented in their pursuit of a suitable husband, and the call for another commitment tugged at her heart. But without warning, a family crisis presented a tragic diversion.

The tranquility which seemed restored to the Truszkowski household with Sophia's return from Switzerland abruptly vanished. January 10, 1844 brought unexpected grief to the family. Josephine remained at Valerie's bedside throughout the night while Sophia knelt nearby; the rosary beads moved slowly through her fingers, " ... now and at the hour of her death." Valerie had not been seriously ill, but her mother worried about spreading the illness to the rest of the family. The doctor had prescribed medication for what seemed no more than a bad cold. When the girl collapsed after taking the prescription, Joseph went in frantic but vain search of the physician. The only trace of the doctor were confused accounts of a terrible mistake; poison had been administered, and negligence had killed his daughter. (3) There was little anyone could do but wait and pray through the night. The morning hours brought death to the young woman just six days short of her seventeenth birthday.

Almost two years of private mourning followed Valerie's death; sorrow hung like a pall over the family. Then, unexpectedly, new life burst into their lives. Josephine was pregnant. Sophia remembered the previous pregnancies, especially Louise's and Bruno's births. A midwife came, and

she was ushered out to wait with her father conscious of her mother's cries of pain. The joyful prospect of birth replaced the somber ache left by Valerie's death. It would be a difficult pregnancy and delivery for Sophia's forty-year-old mother, yet as the new life within Josephine grew so too did the faith and hope of her father and the family. One night in 1846, twenty-one-year-old Sophia presented her new sister, Hedwig, to Joseph. The child was as dear to her as if she were her own daughter; indeed, Hedwig would one day recall Sophia as her second mother.

But now, finally, the distractions, the diversions, no longer existed; the waiting was over. Sophia was certain; her family was settled, and everyone was joyfully captivated with young Hedwig who was already a toddler. At peace and ready to enter the Visitation Sisters, Sophia could give herself to her Lord Jesus in an act of total sacrifice. For an instant she hesitated. Would He want her? She had waited so long, six years. Yes, she was sure of it, but she would confirm it; she would ask Fr. Augustine, her spiritual director, after she received his absolution in confession.

Fr. Augustine Brzezkiwicz, an Augustinian priest, remained in the enclosed confessional. He knew his penitent well. However, her words haunted him as her footsteps echoed in the vast expanse of the church. She insisted that she had been blessed with the call to a contemplative life. Indeed a gift. Already twenty-three-years-old, she wanted to enter the Visitation Order ... immediately.

The request was so genuine, natural. He was surprised she had not made it long ago, but he knew how attached she was to her family especially to her father and he to her. At last she resolved her doubts and came to a decision. Still, a lingering doubt swept over him. Surely, not one of his penitents was more spiritually inclined to the contemplative life or more zealous in penitential exercises, but in Sophia there was a marked spirit of independence, stubbornness, perhaps even an inherent selfishness in controlling her own life. Unlike her siblings, she had been pampered, often given her own way as a child due to her frail health. Her charity was exemplary; there were stories among the parishioners of her kindness even as a child when she refused to pass a beggar in the streets until her father or uncle gave her a few pennies to put in the man's basket.

The cloister demanded obedience and self-denial, a renunciation of the will. Sophia would have much to learn, and the Visitation Sisters ...

Augustine smiled. At any rate, he encouraged her to tell her family of her decision that night.

Joseph Truskowski was a religious man; yet, as Sophia broke her news to him and Josephine he did not dare to trust his emotions. Sitting silently, he had all he could do not to burst out against her. A cloister ... to be locked away from all of them. How much good had she accomplished on her own in the streets among the city children near the church. And yet, incredibly, he couldn't believe his own reaction. Surely, he would not deny her; he couldn't deny her anything, and could he stand in God's way? But something in him rebelled.

Sophia watched her father through tear-filled eyes. When he finally spoke, he fought to control his anger. He would not give his blessing. If she were to pursue this course, it would be against his wishes. No discussion followed; Joseph simply stood and left the room.

The following months brought only more hostility. Sophia feared to broach the subject again as Joseph became agitated whenever it was mentioned. Eventually, the stress affected his health as hereditary deafness and subsequent depression became life-threatening. Sophia turned to her confessor, Fr. Augustine, for support only to find that the priest himself was ill and bedridden. Joseph's doctors urgently advised treatments at the medicinal baths in Germany to restore his health. There was no doubt that he would need to be accompanied.

Sophia was torn. She believed that her destiny lay with the Visitation Nuns. At this point in her life, to wait once more would be to deliberately dismiss her vocation, to reject God's call; and yet, how could she desert Joseph? Again she sought the advice of Fr. Augustine to no avail. Fortunately, a priest had been assigned to Fr. Augustine's duties. Fr. Paul Rzewuski listened to the urgent dilemma. The Truskowskis were well known in Warsaw as a deeply religious and generous family. Sophia was told to pack for Germany. Her protests were quickly silenced; if indeed she had a vocation, it would wait.

The Salzbrunn spas of Germany were among the best in the European circles, and slowly the days of calm and relaxation restored Joseph's inner peace. Sophia was a devoted nurse and companion; her love tender and compassionate. The rift between father and daughter quickly healed amid the beauty and majesty of the mountains and lakes of Salzbrunn. When

doctors discharged Joseph, he was eager to share the wealth of Germany's culture and religious history with his daughter and so charted a return home through its famous cities, including Cologne.

The amber glow of the gas lamps in the Domplatz silhouetted the twin spires of the Cologne Cathedral against the purpled twilight. Sophia took her father's arm and descended the wide stairway while Joseph studied his daughter's gaze. It seemed as if she were looking through him. He wondered if he had made a mistake in bringing her here. Sophia had not so much as hinted at entering the cloister for almost a year now, ever since they had left Warsaw. Did the visit to the cathedral reawaken her desire? Had he thwarted God's will for her? How much had she suffered, silently without complaint, because he refused his blessing? Joseph left the cathedral determined to correct his error. If Sophia still desired contemplative life, he would not stand in her way.

Coming to the last of the cathedral steps, Sophia felt the weight lift from her heart. She would have much to share with Fr. Augustine when they finally arrived in Warsaw. In the hushed stillness of the cathedral's candlelit beauty, she had heard her answer. For months now she prayed for a sign, some direction. Her resolution had been made in Salzbrunn; she was determined that when they returned to Warsaw she would pursue contemplative life; and even if, heaven forbid, Joseph did not give his blessing, she would still go.

Sophia did not know how long she had knelt praying in the cathedral's front pew. Joseph had gone off to walk along the aisles and admire the splendid stained glass windows and elegantly arched columns. Suddenly, as if Sophia had been shaken awake, the realization broke. She was not called to the Visitation Cloister. Perhaps events had irrevocably intervened; it did not matter. She had been mistaken. She could not withdraw from life ... rather like the skilled artists and craftsmen, who spent their lives dedicated to building this House of God, she was called to erect a structure which would touch the lives of those forgotten and destitute, and which would do it all for the glory of God himself. Fr. Augustine had tried to tell her, but she had dismissed his prediction that through her influence a new congregation would be instituted. (4) The voice that spoke to her was clear; she would not enter the contemplative life.

True to his word, shortly after their arrival in Warsaw, Joseph gave Sophia his blessing to enter the Visitation Nuns. Unable to see Fr. Augustine, Sophia sought out Fr. Paul who readily confirmed the enlightenment she hoped she had received in Cologne, despite Joseph's blessing. In fact, the priest was so adamant that he made her promise that she would not so much as consider entering the Visitation Cloister or any other until after her father's death. He went so far as to make her put her promise in writing.

Confusion reigned. If it were not enough that her father and spiritual directors could not make up their minds, Clothilde pressed the issue further. Sophia's cousin had heard about Joseph's blessing. Surely her own father, Martin, would allow her to go as well if Sophia entered. Amid the emotional chaos, a strange tranquility persisted. Sophia was content to resume her pre-dawn vigils, Mass and devotions. The caretaker no longer barred her way. In the process, she had come across two children; orphans, she presumed, who had been abandoned by their family. She had seen them once or twice on her way to the church. At first she offered them a few coins, but as she watched them scurry away she knew she had done very little.

Her brothers, Walter and Joseph, were at the University. Walter would be married soon and live in Moscow with his bride where he had already explored several business opportunities. The winter months saw a number of small guests in the Truszkowski household. Joseph admired Sophia's compassion, but their home could not accommodate an orphanage. Therefore, as an alternative, he offered to finance a modest enterprise. Perhaps, Sophia could rent a garret. Clothilde eagerly joined the venture, and the two women combed the city streets. By 1852, the private shelter was established in a single room where Sophia herself taught several children and cared for several homeless women. She even hired a caretaker to provide for their needs when she could not be present. The only reminder of contemplative life was Clothilde's constant longing. Sophia gently asked her to wait, be patient and continue working with the children and women.

During this time, Fr. Paul introduced Sophia and Clothilde to the new curate at Holy Cross Parish, Fr. Victor Ozarowski, who suggested that both women might be interested in an attempt to organize a chapter of the St.

Vincent de Paul Society. Fr. Victor had already made contact with several prominent families in Warsaw, and a small circle formed. Sophia listened with interest as the priest explained the project's focus. St. Vincent de Paul himself had specifically defined its spirit: "My daughters, you are not nuns, but you must be holier than nuns because your exposure to temptation is greater. If you are not holy, you will inevitably be lost. Modesty is your grille, the streets of the city your cloister, and the parish church your convent chapel." (5)

Sophia's enthusiasm knew no bounds. Here, at last, the Lord gave her direction. Sophia and Clothilde's enrollment increased the society's membership to ten. Madame Louise Gorska had cofounded the chapter, and Countess Gabriella Wrotnowska and Madame Alexandra Petrov were also among its members. The women were required to attend orientation sessions with Fr. Victor, for only when they had a clear understanding of the people's need-material, emotional, and spiritual-could they be effective.

Sophia climbed garrets and searched out cellars. The number of children, some runaways, some abandoned, was staggering. Single mothers were exploited in the city's sweatshops; their children were illiterate, prone to delinquency, and easy prey for organized crime and prostitution. The elderly died alone and neglected.

Gabriella Wrotnowska learned of Sophia's private shelter and became its first benefactress, and by November 1854 the garret was too small to accommodate its residents. After days of house hunting, Sophia and Gabriella rented a two-room apartment at 10 Koscielna Street in the Nowe Miasto sector of Warsaw near the Gothic church of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

A month later, on December 15, the new shelter was dedicated. Shortly before the ceremony, Gabriella handed Sophia a wrapped package. Unrolling its paper covering, Sophia found a magnificent reproduction of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa. For Gabriella, the tears in her friend's eyes were gratitude enough. Sophia cherished the devotion to Our Lady of Czestochowa; and although she rarely reminisced about her childhood, she had shared an incident with Gabriella.

One night Sophia fell asleep while praying before the icon in her bedroom. The candle melted and overflowed its well. The lighted wick fell onto the drape behind the picture, and the flames spread. By the time

someone smelled the smoke and came running, the drape was ablaze. Flames engulfed the picture frame and Sophia's nightgown; yet, she and the image were not so much as singed. Sophia brought the reproduction home with her and displayed Gabriella's gift before her family. It still needed a frame. There was a portrait of her grandmother in the hallway of the Truszkowskis' home whose frame was a perfect match. Joseph had the caretaker bring it to the shelter the next day. Firmly secured, the icon was hung above the threshold of the small apartment.

The Capuchin fathers conducted an annual mission at their monastery on Miodowa Street in Warsaw. The provincial superior, Fr. Benjamin Szymanski, assigned one of his newly-ordained friars, Fr. Honorat, already known for his eloquence and fervor, to preach the week's sermons and conferences. Sophia sat spellbound.

Fr. Honorat, Wenceslaus Kozminski, was ordained on December 27, 1852. Four years Sophia's junior, the priest seemed to be fired by the Spirit himself. It was not long before Sophia and Clothilde joined the increasing line of penitents outside his confessional. During her last visit with Fr. Augustine, Sophia praised Fr. Honorat's zeal, his profound love of the Eucharist, and his call for radical self-denial and penance. Franciscan spirituality enticed her. She candidly admitted that she felt as if she had met a kindred soul in the Capuchin priest. Sophia's dying friend and confessor paused and considered his penitent. Finally, Fr. Augustine took her hand and assured her, "Tell Fr. Honorat to lead you as he wishes, only let him not cast you away from himself." (6)

The pace of Sophia's days accelerated. Relying on the procedures adopted by the St. Vincent de Paul chapter, Sophia took time to learn each of the orphan's and woman's background. Gently, without prying, she gained their confidence and gradually discovered their life stories. The horror of their young lives haunted her. Many of them stole to eat and slept under bridges or in abandoned buildings. Often the children's parents were dead or in prison. Those who had any schooling were now dropouts who had been whipped for failing their studies. Sophia spent her mornings teaching them, and when they finally trusted her and regained enough confidence in themselves, she enrolled them in school. The women, after most had been nursed back to health, helped with the household chores and

learned handicrafts. Their afternoon conferences dealt with morality and basic catechism.

Although only four months had passed since the December dedication, the apartment on Koscielna Street was already too small for the growing number of orphans and women. Once again, Sophia and Gabriella searched for new quarters. The Dominican fathers owned a two story complex at 233 Mostowa Street and were willing to sell it. Gabriella, who was the president of the St. Vincent de Paul chapter, solicited funds. She and Sophia had little trouble finding patrons. The reputation of the shelter, The Institute of Miss Truszkowska, enjoyed prestige among the elite of Warsaw. In fact, Sophia had assured her father, Joseph, that "all of Warsaw had opened its arms and its pockets" to the institute. Moving day was set for April 17, 1855.

By now the children's daily pilgrimage to the Capuchin monastery became routine. Sophia led them through the city streets and visited the Franciscans before returning. A favorite spot was the alcove altar of St. Felix in the monastery chapel. The waxen statue of the "children's" saint was protected within a glass case. On May 18 each year, families brought their youngest children to the chapel to have them obtain an indulgence. Sophia made the pilgrimage to have the children blessed with sacred oil, a custom which commemorated the miracles that occurred after the sick had been anointed with the oil that oozed from the saint's casket. Residents who lived in the area were generous to the children and soon dubbed them the children of St. Felix. Sophia was charmed by the endearment bestowed upon her adopted family. It was not long-before Miss Truszkowska's Institute belonged to St. Felix.

Sophia's acquaintance with Fr. Honorat brought her into the circle of other Capuchin friars; one of them was Fr. Benjamin Szymanski, the Capuchin's provincial superior. For years Szymanski had hoped to establish an order of religious women in Warsaw and investigated one congregation in Munster, Germany, which seemed to embody his prerequisites. However, he was unable to arrange their emigration. Still intent on founding a group of women to perform charitable work as an offshoot of the Franciscan structure, he pursued establishment of the Franciscan Third Order, a rule of life written by St. Francis of Assisi for lay men and women. Tertiaries had once flourished in Warsaw, but fervor waned and

the Third Order dispersed. With proper direction, Szymanski's lay Franciscan community could pave the way to a formal religious congregation.

At Fr. Benjamin's invitation, Sophia and Clothilde became tertiary members on May 27, 1855. It was customary to adopt a new name when entering the Third Order to signify, as St. Paul proclaims in his letters, the putting on of the new person of Christ Jesus. The practice also declared a change in lifestyle, acceptance of the simplicity, poverty and humility of Assisi's poverello. Clothilde received the name Veronica after the Franciscan saint Veronica Giuliani. Sophia was known as Angela, and her patron was the Blessed Angela of Foligno.

Days seemed to flow one into the other. The number of residents at St. Felix Institute steadily increased; so too did the work. Sophia, after weeks of arguing with herself, made the decision to reside at the institute. She did not have the funds to hire another caretaker, and it was evident that she was needed to oversee the institute's management. Excuses aside, Sophia knew she wanted to give herself to the project full time. She and Clothilde moved into the institute on July 16, 1855. Sophia promised her family she would still return either to her parents or to her sister, Louise's, home each afternoon for dinner. Realistically, she was glad for the offer. Funds were tightly budgeted just now, and she knew she would not leave her family's table without something for the children.

St. Felix Institute was a happy blend of chaos and love. Lessons were taught, bodies scrubbed, plates filled, stockings darned, and souls nourished. Sophia marveled at the contentment which blessed her; ever since she had moved into the institute she knew a peace that she had never experienced before. Fr. Augustine died on September 15. She remembered her dear spiritual father and smiled. He had been right; she did find an order of sorts. The work of St. Vincent and the spirit of St. Francis ... While these two had never known each other, their influence transformed their respective worlds. They were the light and path by which Sophia now walked.

Quiet had finally settled over the house. Most of the children were in school; the women were resting. Sophia had considered it for a long while; and as was typical, Clothilde thought of the same thing. Both women had made a permanent commitment to their work of charity, but something was

missing. There had to be a profession, a declaration, that their hearts, minds and souls belonged to Jesus Christ alone, in this one moment of existence and for all eternity. They would never forsake or abandon Him. He would be the root and foundation of their lives. The Virgin Mary had voiced her fiat in the stillness of a humble Nazareth home. No one but the angel witnessed her act of complete faith and self surrender.

Sophia and Clothilde knelt before the picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa; she too had journeyed with them thus far and was their constant source of hope and strength. Mary dwelled at the heart of their new home, and she alone would witness their fiat. That afternoon on November 21, 1855, Sophia and Clothilde pronounced their consecration in a private act as solemn and profound, as authentic and binding, as any public vow. A congregation was born, and the Blessed Virgin herself was its foundress.

When Czar Alexander II succeeded his father Nicholas in 1855, the attempt to Russianize Poland was already sixty years old. In St. Petersburg, Secretary of State Milutin warned the as yet uncrowned czar to be wary of Poland's presumed allegiance:

Experience demonstrates that an excellent knowledge of the Russian language here goes hand in hand with an implacable hatred for Russia. For thirty years we have worked relentlessly to teach Russian; we have instilled into a whole generation a sense of the power and glory of our mother country along with the characteristic defects of the Poles, the causes of the downfall of their national sovereignty. But our teaching has transformed no one! (7)

Although the Congress of Vienna had established the Kingdom of Warsaw as an autonomous political entity, Nicholas had effectively ignored the agreement, and by 1839, Warsaw ceased to be an entirely independent administrative unit. Moreover, in 1841, Polish zloty were

replaced by Russian rubles, all levels of education were regulated by the Curator of the Warsaw Educational Region, which was controlled by St. Petersburg, and the Church's activities were scrutinized. Paranoia ran so high and contact with Rome was so suspect that Nicholas issued a ban forbidding the establishment of any new religious congregations.

However, despite the advice to hold tight control over Poland, Alexander was not cut in the same mold as his father. The war against Turkey in the Crimea already appeared a costly defeat in lives and dollars, and Russia needed time to replenish her resources and mend alliances. Alexander could not afford his father's mistakes; the new czar needed Warsaw as his ally, not a rebellious subject.

St. Felix Institute was dedicated on December 16, 1855, merely a month after Sophia and Clothilde's private consecration. With Nicholas' death came hope that the new czar would officially sanction the institute as a separate organization. Both Sophia and Fr. Szymanski sent applications to the Ministry of Internal and Religious Affairs. Unfortunately, their best efforts failed; Prince Czerkaski, head of the ministry, refused to grant even a temporary charter. The institute's growing numbers, as well as the publicity its charitable work received, made it an open target. Sophia imagined Russian soldiers at her door. Clearly, there was no security, no future, if the government would not grant approbation.

Finally, as a last resort, Fr. Szymanski requested that the institute be placed under the jurisdiction of the Petrov Foundation. Alexandra Petrov, a member of both the Third Order and the St. Vincent de Paul Society, willingly included it as a branch of her own work. The strategy worked; and as such, St. Felix Institute was granted a three year permit in July 1856. Fr. Szymanski then registered the women working at the institute, all of whom were Franciscan tertiaries, as members of the Capuchin Congregation.

So much had happened so very quickly. It was as if the work somehow had suddenly taken on a life all its own and slipped beyond Sophia's control. It had been a difficult year. Frustrations mounted, and there seemed to be nowhere to turn. Sophia paced the floors of the shelter night after night; even the pervasive silence after everyone had gone to bed no longer held peace for her. She had been struggling with the issue for days; each decision, each incident infuriated her all the more. Then

suddenly, as in the past, she realized what she was struggling with. Those around her were not the enemy....

Tears stung her eyes, but she picked up the pen, touched the ink with its tip and focused on the paper. At first, the words came slowly; and yet, as she wrote her confidence grew.

Dear Fr. Honorat,

After invoking the Holy Spirit, I am presenting my case. You know, Father, that it was with your permission I had gathered together several women and a few children. I gave them shelter and material security, hoping to influence them morally by educating the children in the principles of religion, by assuring them of a means of earning a livelihood in the future, and by instructing them in what their state of life would require of them. This was my very sincere and special intention, and above all, my desire to bring it to fruition. Not having any stable funds except some small donations-and only one larger one-I undertook the care of a dozen or so persons. I do not know whether God was pleased with my intention, or whether He wanted to reward my faith, but He blessed my work in a special way. As more and more persons joined us, material resources increased likewise. There were frequent and voluntary gifts even though I made little or no effort to seek them.

No one had any part in the entire organization, direction and instruction, not even Clothilde, who supposedly excused herself from it. The whole burden fell on me, but perhaps due to my excessive presumption, I did not consider this too strenuous for me. I did not introduce any regulations or any definite schedule in the overall management or in teaching the children or in influencing the women. I simply followed my inspirations, adjusting to the needs and circumstances as they came along. I acted quite confidently, not depending on anyone for help, guided simply by my own common sense, and convinced that this was right. I fulfilled my self-imposed responsibilities with ease and satisfaction. Finding in this a personal pleasure, I was happy hoping that this whole project would remain

unnoticed by the public. I was sure that these, my desires, flowed from genuine humility, but now I recognize that they must have been due to my pride and for that reason God did not permit things to remain in this condition.

My Institute (as it pleased people to call it) attracted attention. Many individuals began to take an interest in it, coming to our aid with various supplies, but without interfering in any way in the external or internal management of it. Everything seemed to be proceeding normally. Soon, however, and I do not even know how, I found myself under the care of Fr. Benjamin, who, having imparted me his blessing, began to manage affairs and to look to the project as his own. The Institute became known to the public, contrary to my original intent. I did not evade his spiritual help because I thought that this would end up with his blessing and spiritual aid, but that my position would remain unchanged so that I could continue and have the freedom to operate. I never suspected that my humble beginnings would take on such a broad scope, and lead to the establishment of some other institute under structures, management, rules, regulations and schedules. Furthermore, in order to facilitate matters for himself, Father Provincial turned over the whole shelter to the general management of Mrs. Petrov who promised not to interfere in any way. I was also told that her patronage of the Institute would avert the attention of the government.

Sophia hesitated with the next words, quite aware that she could never retract them once they were written. Yet, these very decisions had created her dilemma. It was Fr. Benjamin Szymanski who had introduced Michaeline Rhebinder to Sophia and Clothilde. She was a lovely woman, well bred, devout and a princess in her own right. Born in Bucharest, she was the daughter of a Russian general and later was given in marriage to Prince Meszczerski. While Sophia was not certain of the details, she knew that Michaeline had fled her husband and was a convert to Catholicism. Everyone connected with the institute and the Third Order agreed to perfect secrecy regarding Michaeline's new faith, since Russian authorities

escalated their harassment against those who broke from the Russian Orthodox religion.

Fr. Benjamin arranged for Michaeline to live with the Rogalski family, and it was here that she met Sophia and Clothilde and learned of their work. The Capuchin superior was anxious to have Michaeline join the institute permanently, which she did on April 8, 1856. Five days later, April 13, Sophia sat stunned as Fr. Benjamin announced that the three women should name a superior from among themselves. Before she fully grasped what occurred, Michaeline was their superior. Three days after that, April 16, Fr. Honorat was appointed director of the "congregation." Determination fixed, Sophia put the pen back down unto the paper.

Just as the initiation of my project seemed unusual, so, too was its progress. My first aim, which may have been childish, developed into a higher, more perfect goal. Perhaps, God Himself took this undertaking out of my hands and gave it to those who will direct it more prudently, not as incompetently as I did.

Convinced of this, I ought to have rejoiced, and yet I felt hurt. Why? I considered the project my own, taken away from me by force. I even felt somewhat bitter towards the people involved. I was told that my pride and self-will were challenged. My whole attitude suddenly changed.

Previously, all my activities were enlivened by faith. There was more peace, certainly in action, and love for my duties, greater ease and fervor, and a sense of competence in teaching the adults and children. Now it appears to me, my faith has waned, or at least indifference has set in. Donations, although more bountiful than at the outset, do not make me happy. I find greater difficulties in teaching and in fulfilling my responsibilities. I feel an unusual burden, grief, and anguish. To what should I attribute this if not to my self-love which seeks preference over the common good? Should I not expect that there will be both more glory rendered to God and more good done to others than under my direction? Why did I try to attribute to myself what was ordained by Divine Providence?

If God permitted that I, the least capable, would initiate this work of mercy, it was only because he could thus manifest his omnipotence, and on my part I could better recognize my inadequacy, a weakness difficult for me to admit. It was quite arrogant on my part, that not having assessed my own strengths, I plunged into things not meant for me. I thought I could manage everything and do justice to it all. I was so presumptuous that I believed I could accomplish everything well. Meanwhile, a more sensible and devout person saw otherwise and attributed to my conceit and arrogance the taking upon my conscience of the responsibility for so many persons and assuming their direction. And yet, I considered myself capable to carry on alone and wept that I should be restricted and that I should have to submit to the will of a superior, even in helping others. Is not such an attitude an audacity on my part?

Surely there remains nothing for me now but to remove myself completely. I have no fear that my charges will be left without help, the kind I had been giving them until this time; rather, they will receive more tender care since Clothilde and Michaeline want to dedicate themselves entirely to this work. No doubt others will be found who want to join them. The fact that someone like myself is removed will harm no one; on the contrary, it may prevent offending God because I might have been a scandal to others. I see that I overestimated my self-worth and circumstances proved what I am like. How can I, so full of pride and self-love trust myself to fulfill my obligations well when these demand so much humility and self-denial? I am so irritable, so impatient, and so insensitive. How could I attain gentleness, graciousness and empathy? I am so touchy and unsociable. How can I live with others? How can I observe that unity, harmony and sisterly charity needed to tolerate the faults of others? I am unable to enumerate the array of faults I possess. God alone knows them and I ask Him to make them known to you, Father. I realize my wickedness and my failings but I cannot rise above them. I am a burden to myself and a nuisance to others. Having recognized my worthless disposition, I acknowledge that I have no right to stay

longer in this developing Institute; however, I hesitate to act alone in this matter and that is why I have recourse to you, Father, not for counsel but for a definite order to practice the virtues which I lack, or should I, in view of my unworthiness, withdraw entirely?

Whatever you decide for me, Father, whatever I hear from you, I will accept as coming from God himself. The anguish, the uncertainty and the constant struggle I must wage with myself-may these serve to justify the fact that I trouble you with my writing. Tomorrow, then, I hope to get your permission to go to confession in order to receive your command as well as your blessing.

Sophia (8)

The pen remained in mid-air. Gradually Sophia felt a gentle calm restore itself. Leaving the institute would be devastating; remaining would be hypocrisy. Her heart had been torn for weeks. She had no doubt that the focus of the work, of their entire lives, was rapidly changing. Over a year ago, when she and Clothilde had consecrated themselves to the Blessed Mother, both realized that more was needed than just the work with the orphans and women. The institute provided for only half their lives. The Lord Himself was calling them to something ... All of it, the predawn hours, the worry, the missed meals, the countless things that had to get done, she had offered almost as a daily prayer. But was it really an offering, a surrender of all she was?

The answer was painfully sobering. Sophia had been just as quick in deciding to return to her family as she had been to remain permanently at the institute. She smiled as she remembered Fr. Augustine's warnings. Being a disciple demands following God's will ... are you ready not to do what you want? Whichever decision she came to regarding the institute, it would be her own. There was only one way to guarantee that she followed the Lord's will for her; through obedience she would freely place it in God's own hands.

Sophia trusted Fr. Honorat implicitly, just as she had once trusted Fr. Augustine. Yet days passed without a definite answer. She had expected Honorat's immediate response, a response that would have provided a solution and dismissed her fears. The only indication that father had even

read the letter was his continued insistence that she was essential to the institute, that she was in fact its "mother." It seemed unusual that although Father had not directly addressed her letter and she was no closer to a solution, there was a marked feeling of relief and an unmistakably restored contentment. Perhaps the solution was already evident in that she was willing to forsake what she loved most—the work, the children. It defied reason, but even the pain of turning the institute over to someone else faded.

Beginnings were always unpredictable, and did not great moments call for heroic virtue? Perhaps, God himself tested her faith, and like Abraham she had been brought to an altar ready for complete sacrifice. Sophia had been there once before ... those days of uncertainty in Cologne. She had trusted Him then, could she do otherwise now? If she left all in His hands then she had nothing to fear but to walk on the road she could not see. Sophia's own advice to Clothilde rang in her ears, "Let us be patient, and wait, and work with the children."

Contentment for Sophia, despite the uncertainty of her role and the future of the shelter, reached a summit on June 3, 1856. Fr. Szymanski's small band of tertiaries had swelled in numbers, and several women who had joined the Franciscan group when it was first initiated were now ready for their profession of vows. Though remaining outside cloister walls, these women as Third Order lay members of the Capuchin community would promise to live poverty, chastity, and obedience as befit their lifestyle.

The Capuchin chapel was dimly lit for the evening service; its front pews filled with a dozen or so women including Sophia and Clothilde. Newer members filed in behind them, and in the pews farthest back were many of the maids and servants of the prestigious patrons who would soon profess a new way of life. In the sacristy, one of the Capuchins, Fr. Leander Lendzian, who had been assigned to receive the women's vows slipped the white surplus over his habit and fixed the stole around his neck. Sophia and Clothilde, as many of their peers, wore long, dark dresses. The austere wardrobe, much to the dismay and protests of Sophia's family and close friends, was her usual dress. Yet, here in the chapel, the adopted attire added to an elegant simplicity. Even Clothilde did not object as Sophia smiled at her across the aisle.

Fr. Honorat and Fr. Benjamin were both present for the historic moment. The Capuchin provincial barely contained his pleasure at the filled chapel. His dream had certainly exceeded his original expectations, and he credited that to Sophia. She recruited members as naturally as inviting them to tea. In fact, that's where she probably had found many of them-over tea-as they persuaded her to allow them to enter the work of the shelter and the spiritual ranks of the tertiaries.

Reports from St. Petersburg filtered into Warsaw daily. The new czar appeared serious about reform, and his attempts to reconcile his citizens seemed legitimate. As soon as he was crowned in 1856, Alexander appointed Prince Mikhail Gorchakov viceroy and commander-in-chief of Warsaw's 1st Army. The new viceroy was a welcomed relief after the thirty year terror reign of Ivan Paskievich who had been sent to restore order in the Russian sector of Poland after the Revolution of 1830. Also, in November of 1856, Czar Alexander recognized Anthony Fijalkowski's installation as Archbishop of Warsaw. Though Sophia would have laughed off the prediction that these two powerful men, Gorchakov and Fijalkowski, would one day influence the course of her life, it was true. With these events, life at the institute soon changed.

On September 18, 1856, after the morning Mass, Sophia and Clothilde received word that Fr. Benjamin Szymanski had been appointed the bishop of Podlasie, a region of the Warsaw archdiocese, by Archbishop Anthony Fijalkowski and would be installed on February 1. Before assuming his new post Fr. Benjamin met with Sophia. Both were clearly nervous. Sophia had no idea what the Capuchin provincial needed to discuss with her; she was even more alarmed when she found Fr. Honorat at the door with him. Now the three sat facing each other in the small conference room. For what seemed the tenth time, Fr. Benjamin cleared his voice then sheepishly smiled at her while Fr. Honorat sat silently. Sophia finally asked what was wrong.

The tertiary group was still in its infancy, and as its founder Fr. Szymanski wanted to set guidelines to insure its survival. Sophia listened as the former provincial, now bishop, outlined her new responsibilities. Fr. Honorat would remain the director; Sophia would be entrusted with the instruction of new members in addition to the overall management of the shelter's staff. Sophia visibly relaxed; of course she would do everything

possible to insure that the Third Order continued. Fr. Benjamin put up a hand; before Sophia went any further he wanted her to hear out his proposal.

Even as the meeting concluded, Sophia realized that her life was about to change once again. Bishop Szymanski tried to be gentle, but nonetheless remained emphatic. It was time for Sophia and at least some of the women to seriously consider religious life. With almost a sigh of relief, Sophia reminded him that the idea was a long cherished dream but that it belonged to another lifetime long ago abandoned. Besides what would happen to the work and the children if they were to enter the cloister?

Until now Fr. Honorat had been silent, allowing his superior to present Sophia with the challenge. The soon to be bishop turned to him for support. Knowing Sophia as well as he did, Honorat was certain of nothing other than her resolve not to become a religious. But a new flowering of ministry had blossomed throughout Europe. Poland itself saw the dawn of a radically original lifestyle that was at one and the same time contemplative in the monastic sense and dynamically apostolic in addressing social needs. Step by step, Honorat told Sophia of diocesan sponsored religious communities that functioned under the auspices of the archbishop. Sophia was the heart of the tertiaries' work; the new community would be Franciscan in its spirituality. The women would follow the Rule of Francis and continue the ministry of the institute. They would adopt a Franciscan habit, live and pray in common.

Echoes pounded so violently Sophia barely heard the young priest's voice. "The streets will be your cloister. ... You will found an order ..."

Honorat continued about traveling uncharted ground. She heard the priest insist that no one was better qualified to guide the others through the uncertainty of creating the norms and structures that would accommodate their living, as St. Vincent had done ... as Francis ... She would address the needs of the time and give witness to the spiritual dimensions of life that seemed to disintegrate daily in the moral decline and apathy of Warsaw's citizens. Her sisters would touch the needs of the little ones, as the poverello himself had done when, called by the gospel, he summoned his followers to go out two by two to the poor, and abandoned, and the destitute. Honorat promised she would not walk alone, both of them would be there to support the congregation.

Bishop and confessor waited for Sophia's response as she sat bolt upright staring through them. Their words tumbled through her mind. What assurance did she have that she was capable of the task they put before her? Together ... together they would pave the way.... Experience had already taught her that good intentions lacked time and dependability. How often had she pleaded for Fr. Honorat to look over the children's curriculum or the spiritual exercises for the women? Faced with conflicting issues and decisions for which she had no expertise, Sophia often found herself unable to rely upon anyone but Divine Providence Himself. And yet, had that ever made her hesitate, had that ever kept her from a decision? Finally, Sophia smiled back at the two Capuchins.

The morning of Good Friday, April 10, 1857, the tolling bells of St. Felix Institute brought the small community together in the chapel. The chanted psalms continued while ten of the women processed down the center aisle and took their places along the altar rail. Kneeling at the head of the column, Sophia could see the faces about her. Fr. Honorat prayed that the Holy Spirit come forth to overshadow His brides. Sophia reached for the pin holding her hair in place and tugged it loose. Involuntarily, she shivered at the snap of the cold steel scissors at the back of her head. She watched as Fr. Honorat proceeded from one to the other. Clothilde knelt transfixed and did not flinch as silky tresses gathered at her hem. The tonsure ceremony complete, Fr. Honorat blessed their habits and folded them over their outstretched arms. Ten of them lifted the coarse, grey homespun over their heads, and then the long woolen scapular over that. Bleached muslin, to which the long, black cotton veil was attached, framed their faces and covered what was left of their hair. White cords, bearing the symbolic Franciscan knots of the vows poverty, chastity, and obedience, were fastened about their waists; their bare feet were strapped into sandals. When the crucifix was held out before her, Sophia bent to kiss her Spouse.

Discussion concerning names for the new sisters and the new congregation itself had been settled only hours ago. Sophia suggested that the women retain the Third Order names they had already chosen when they first joined the tertiaries, but the final decision she left to the Capuchins.

She insisted, however, that the congregation be called the Sisters of St. Felix of Cantalice. After all, that was the name the people of Warsaw had

bestowed upon them and the children long ago. They would be known as Felicians; happy followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Her own name.... Sophia listened as Fr. Honorat called each newly invested sister. Joan Lebenstein was now Sr. Felix; her sister Frances became Sr. Isabella. Two other sisters Julia and Xaviera Tessaro received the names Sr. Rose and Sr. Antonine. Pauline Zdrojewska and Teresa Sawicka had both kept their baptismal names, and Ludwika Slusarczynska became Sr. Frances. Three were left. Sophia caught Clothilde's eye as Fr. Honorat announced that the title of "mother" would be added to Michaeline's name now Cunegunda and Clothilde's name now Veronica. Sophia Truszkowska would be known as Mother Angela.

Later that afternoon, Archbishop Fijalkowski himself visited the community to mark the establishment of the new diocesan congregation. Four of the newly invested sisters, Antonine, Felix, Veronica and Angela, had already made tertiary vows and, thereby, were granted permission to take religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in July. Her investiture complete and the date for her first profession set, Mother Angela found little time before her next challenge. Archbishop Fijalkowski agreed with her that two issues warranted immediate attention—a new petition for approbation had to be written for the czar's visit to Warsaw and it was time to go house hunting again.

When Czar Alexander made his first imperial visit to Warsaw in 1857, Polish-Russian relations seemed ready for a thaw. Although Alexander reminded his subjects that Poland's continued prosperity depended upon her complete integration within his empire, some leeway was obviously necessary. (9) During his visit, the czar announced amnesty for political offenders, some imprisoned since the 1830 revolution. He also admitted Poles to various posts in the imperial administration and established a Medical School in Warsaw to train physicians. If all went well, he promised a charter would be granted for an Agricultural Society which could become a forum for public assembly.

Standing in the crowds, Angela watched for Alexander's carriage. As the cortege wound slowly through Warsaw's streets, she wondered once more what would become of the children if her mission failed. To date all efforts to legalize the institute had either failed or received only temporary authorization. Angela knew they were living a political limbo and could

find themselves on the street by any official's whim, which seemed to change daily depending upon the signals from St. Petersburg. Furthermore, while ecclesiastical approval had been granted by the church under Bishop Szymanski and later Archbishop Fijalkowski, Rome itself would one day soon have to be involved. She closed her eyes and silently groaned at the bureaucratic delays and injunctions that inevitably lay ahead. It had all started out so simply; now she had little time for anything but petitions and letters which it seemed were never read.

Angela, still waiting for the czar's arrival, tried to concentrate on the recent bids Gabriella Wrotnowska had brought her. It was not like the old days when the two friends had gone house hunting through the alleys about the city's churches and had found garrets and spare rooms for their charges. Now she had to rely on lawyers and bankers. Their needs required substantial capital; as usual, they operated on a shoestring budget.

Suddenly a cheer went up, and Angela was jostled as the mob surged forward to see Alexander's open carriage nearing the square. It was no small miracle that Madame Petrov had managed to get an interview for her with the czar. Evidently, General Petrov's wife had significant influence in Alexander's court. There was, however, no way to predict the outcome; indeed, she promised herself she would not set her heart on this petition succeeding. Directives against the establishment of any new religious order were still securely in place.

The garb had not helped their chances with Prince Czerkaski, a professed atheist, at the Ministry of Internal and Religious Affairs, which thus far had denied all their petitions. But little could be done about that now; all of Warsaw was already used to seeing them in habit and veil. Bishop Szymanski's argument that the women were not wearing a habit but the common uniform of the Third Order was a polite pretext which Angela prayed would work with the czar. At any rate, she knew the sisters would not abandon it. If the authorities focused upon the social work of the shelter and could be convinced that the sisters were a branch of the already authorized Capuchin congregation, there was hope.

Three months after Alexander's visit to Warsaw, Madame Petrov met with Angela, and though she knew the verdict, sat bewildered as the edict was read. Official recognition had once again been denied as "it would be entirely contrary to the text and spirit of the government directives of May

12 and 17, 1841, whereby Czar Nicholas Pavlovitch had absolutely forbidden the founding of new religious orders" (10). The document came from the Ministry of Internal and Religious Affairs and was stamped with Czerkaski's seal.

The report further specified that while Czar Alexander II commended the humanitarian effort of the institute, a permanent charter would be granted when and if Miss Sophia Truszkowska and her associates complied with government regulations by removing their habits, veils, and all accouterments of monastic life. Madame Petrov whispered her disappointment and regret. Angela consoled her; they would appeal, again.

For the time being at least, Angela could easily distract herself from the frustration of Russian bureaucracy. Moving day was fast approaching! One of the bids Gabriella had brought her came through Countess Alexandra Potocka's attorney who urged Angela to purchase the Zaluski Library. Angela marveled at Providence's hand in their affairs. The four-story building would house dormitories, classrooms, dining rooms, bedrooms for the women and handicapped, conference halls, an infirmary, a convent for the sisters, a chapel, and room to spare under one roof.

Built in the early 1700's, the edifice was an architectural monument to Polish history. Busts of Poland's kings encircled the white marble facade of its four stories. Abandoned when the Russian Empress Catherine confiscated the entire collection of some 300,000 volumes and 10,000 manuscripts, the library lingered since the final partition as a ghostly shell of Poland's aborted history.

Yet for the Felicians, its nominal price, 60,000 rubles, was still prohibitive; even the suggested down payment of 3,000 was impossible. Without disclosing her intention, Countess Potocka anonymously purchased the building through Attorney Puslowski. Ownership was transferred from Jacob Lewinski to Clothilde, Mother Veronica, who was the sisters' superior. In return for the generous gift, Angela promised Alexandra Potocka that the Felicians would assist the Magdalens, an institute for delinquent women founded by the countess' sister. On July 1, 1857, Fr. Honorat led the procession of women, children and sisters to 617 Danielewiczowa Street.

The year 1857 was indeed remarkable for Angela and her Felician family, but political changes would put them directly in the midst of

historic events. One of the czar's promises, the creation of an Agricultural Society, *Towarzystwo Rolnicze*, became a reality at the end of 1857. Czar Alexander himself nominated Count Andrzej Zamojski for the presidency; yet, the count was already a front runner in his own right among the upper class and landed nobility. Within two years, the Agricultural Society's membership increased from twelve hundred to four thousand and had chapters organized in over seventy-seven districts. Peasant emancipation was the focus of all discussion and furious debate.

Much of Europe had already seen the collapse of serfdom, and the terror and bloodshed that often accompanied its death. Although Poland's political agenda was restricted by the czar, emancipation was a key issue. The Romantic writers after the failed revolution of 1830 warned that Poland would not be reborn as a sovereign state while the wealthy used ignorance and superstition to exploit the poor. Mickiewicz, one of the most outspoken and beloved exiled writers, claimed that Poland had to repent of its sins against the peasant before it could become the "messiah" of nations.

If, one day, Poland were to declare independence, she could not succeed without the peasants who, as they proved in 1830 and 1846, usually did not uphold the national cause. Angela wondered if they ever would since the national cause was the landlord who consistently betrayed the peasants and kept them too poor to realize that they could improve their own lot.

Political gestures indicated that the czar intended to promulgate emancipation within the year, two at most. Emancipation in Russia would occur simultaneously in Poland and other Russian annexed countries as well. Members of the Agricultural Society insisted that they, in the name of Poland's nobility, and not St. Petersburg, abolish serfdom's labor services. It was crucial that the peasant and the landlord become neighbors. Solidarity before revolution, and it had to come before the peasant recognized the czar as his benefactor.

However, a freed, illiterate, immoral peasantry was a dangerous prospect, as history already attested to in France. The society proposed a sweeping program of education and health care situated on the estates and funded by each respective landlord. The *ochrony*, or social centers, required staffing and trained personnel. President Andrzej Zamojski proposed that the assembly table further discussion of the project until he

and several others could explore financial considerations and an offer made by a group of women at St. Felix Institute.

Countess Elfrida Zamojska, a long time friend of the Felicians, sent Angela word that the Agricultural Society, in effect her husband, had agreed to approach the community for positions in the ochrony. It was not like these men to pursue their wives' suggestions; however, here they were. Mother Angela and Mother Veronica now at the table before them, they were less certain than ever of what they were dealing with. Andrzej Zamojski found himself defending his position that goals of the society were not political in nature. Many of the gentry wanted to redress the centuries of injustice perpetrated against the peasant; the proof was at his own estate in Klemensow. The prime necessity in Poland, even though some of their younger, noble counterparts did not accept it, was material and moral reconstruction.

According to the petition dated January 28, 1859, the society requested the Felicians to train young women as social workers. Louis Gorski confirmed the request and included the offer to use his estate at Ceranow as a training center. Angela shook her head. The Felicians would not accept responsibility for training lay workers for several reasons. She opened her notes and explained: Management and supervision of the centers will require limitless devotion to duty; will young lay women be that dependable? In addition, a constant personnel turnover will occur because of staff marriages, illness, death and the like. She looked up and scanned the room.

Instead of training lay women to do the work, she convinced Fr. Honorat that the sisters themselves staff the ochrony. Now she offered these men her proposal. Three sisters: a nurse, a cook, and a teacher would be provided for each center. In addition to academic classes, the sisters would teach basic catechism and morality; they would also conduct religious devotions. Zamojski began to explain that the society felt it best to adhere to a secular curriculum when Angela cut him short. The religious dimension of the work was not negotiable. Projected annual costs per center were estimated at 75 rubles. Should any manor not be able to meet that sum, the sisters would be instructed to make due with begging to their needs. Silence pervaded. No one present quite believed what he had just

heard. Finally, one of the men indicated that he would inform the society of the Felician's proposal and asked to adjourn the meeting.

Angela stayed on her knees in the darkened chapel. Each memory of the past week brought joyful tears. Just two days ago she and Fr. Honorat had managed to secure verbal authorization for the congregation with Czerkaski's office. The written documents were not processed, but ministry officials confirmed the approbation. This afternoon, thanks to her friends and God's Providence, the sisters were on the verge of a mission. Although it would take a year before an official contract was signed with the society, Louis Gorski had returned days later to finalize an agreement of his own. Six months later, Mother Veronica and four novices arrived at his estate in Ceranow to open a center and in time a novitiate for new sisters.

The morning air was crisp while frost still glittered like crystal upon the open field. While she had reservations, Angela was delighted that she decided to make the trip by horseback; it provided the leisure of setting her own pace. She marveled at the sheer joy of being outdoors, not to mention the exercise. It had been a long time ... the trip offered an adventure!

Angela and her companion paused at the mouth of the valley. Sunlit shafts cut through the mist between the trees. It was mild for November, and the ride to Ceranow had taken them through two days of clear weather. Although Mother Veronica had arrived only four months ago on Louis Gorski's estate, the training center was already well established and actually flourishing. Six candidates had been accepted to the community and awaited Angela's official "blessing." The horses whined, and Angela nodded to Sister Magdalen. She was glad for the woman's company.

Sister Magdalen, formerly Aniela Borowska, had been with the Felicians for almost a year now. She and Angela, though quite different in temperament, had become fast friends. Daughter of a Protestant mother and a Catholic father who was captain of the Uhlans and who participated in the Revolution of 1830, Magdalen was a staunch patriot. She was almost at constant odds with Angela over political issues, but their shared dedication and commitment to the Lord made them one. Angela again questioned her decision to keep Magdalen in Warsaw instead of sending her to the center. It was difficult for the woman to remain politically neutral, especially in view of the escalating demonstrations.

No sooner had the doors of the university been opened by the czar in 1857 than upheaval resulted. Student protests mushroomed and talk of insurrection sent panic throughout Warsaw. Attempting to ambush left wing student organizations and eliminate them, the Medical Academy's Russian curator instituted comprehensive exams in 1859. Administrators posted the announcement a week before the first scheduled test. Refusal to take the exams resulted in immediate dismissal.

Angela and Magdalen found themselves embattled over the issue. However, try as she may, even if she would not give Magdalen the satisfaction of agreeing with her, it was impossible for Angela to remain neutral. Her own brothers attended the university, and her parents were as frantic as many of the sisters whose families found themselves in similar circumstances. News filtered into St. Felix Institute daily; so too did the victims of the violence that began to mark "peaceful" demonstrations.

Tension mounting, Angela watched with alarm as Magdalen's sympathetic patriotism, and that of her sisters, grew. And yet, because of her outstanding educational background and keen intellect, Angela wanted Magdalen near Fr. Honorat. It was evident that the woman was destined to lead others; she needed his guidance and inspiration. Besides, Angela was grateful for her presence and more so for the challenge.

The morning after they arrived in Ceranow, six young women knelt before Angela in the village church. In addition to Mother Veronica and the four other novices, peasant families attached to his estate crammed the pews and spilled across the aisles. After the service Angela traced a cross on each forehead and planted a kiss upon both cheeks of each new postulant. She found tears in her own eyes as she gazed at the determined, innocent zeal of these young sisters who loved her as a mother. Their open affection humbled her.

Angela's stay in Ceranow included a visit to the outlying peasant homes where everyone held great hope for the endeavor. Mother Veronica confirmed that the sisters would be ready to assume their responsibilities as soon as contracts between the congregation and the Agricultural Society were signed. Angela seemed to be in constant discussion with Andrzej Zamojski; both the society and the Felicians were determined to open the centers before spring.

The historic moment occurred on February 1, 1860. Ranking members of the Agricultural Society met at St. Felix Institute. Two of the most prominent political leaders of the Russian sector of Poland, next to the czar himself, Count Andrzej Zamojski and Count Alexander Wielopolski, sat at opposite ends of the table. Angela's association with the wives of these two men had taught her that there was no loss of competition between them. There was almost a sigh of relief when the inked signatures were dry upon the parchments, and all were on their way home.

New centers opened as quickly as Angela felt the sisters were ready to assume their responsibilities. Late that spring, she once again found herself on the road to Ceranow. This time, however, the trip was made in a covered mail wagon, and Angela brought along several novices who would meet various landlords and travel on from Ceranow to their missions. It was on the way that Angela's exuberance for the work ahead of them suffered a catastrophe. Conversation among the young sisters revealed their aversion and utter dread of life on the rural estates and work with the peasants. Accustomed to the city, their own independence and, for the most part, affluence, they felt as if God had exiled them from Himself. They came seeking the Lord in the fragrance of the incensed sanctuary and silent hours of mystical contemplation. The realization staggered Angela.

How could she have anticipated such a response when she herself yearned to be among the laborers in the field? The demands of her spiritual "motherhood" gave her only opportunities for mere glances of the work at hand. These young sisters asked her to confirm their sacrifice-leaving the sheltered holiness of their cloister walls to go out into the fields. She suffered the pain of remaining behind. Yet her heart broke for these innocent souls. She would help them find their God; only, He would wear a peasant's cap and live in a hut made of straw and mud!

As soon as Angela returned to Warsaw she embarked upon her project. Training sisters required more than spiritual direction and even that seemed to suffer. By the end of the summer, she completed a short document, directives for the sisters leaving for local missions. The text, though brief and far from a primer on all the sisters would encounter in their ministry, would provide guidelines and offer encouragement. It would be used as an actual resource for the younger sisters' classes and common

reading for all on the local missions. Angela thumbed through its pages and focused upon several passages:

Our sisters, who are called not only to save themselves but to save others, should lead a life of perfection adhering to the words of the Savior: "Your light must shine before men so that they may see the goodness in your acts and give praise to your Heavenly Father." This perfection should not depend on extraordinary things but on a common life lived in an uncommon way, that is, whatever they will do, let them do perfectly so that it may be said of them what was said of Christ: He has done everything well.

All the sisters should be everything to one another: meek, pleasant, patient and not excusing themselves from any sacrifice. They should not be indifferent to any wretchedness whether moral or material. They should help everyone with advice, consolation, work, favors and prayers. They should have understanding for children, watching over them with care, instilling in them the tenets of religion, training them in work and order, and seeing to it that they are washed, combed and dressed neatly. They should also exhort the parents to do the same. Towards the sick they should show patience and care; they should console them, teach them, bear with them patiently, take care of their needs, trying not to show any disgust. They should also prepare them to make a good confession and not allow anyone to die without the sacraments.

All the sisters will try to learn all the jobs of the peasants so that at all times and in all works they could be a good example. This, above all else, will help to bring them close to the sisters. In this way the sisters will gain their confidence. (11)

The directives were plain enough, but Angela, still haunted by the fears and regrets she had heard on way to Ceranow, was far from satisfied. The missions were not an option, and the Felicians would not be contemplatives. She had sensed a change for some time now, especially since Fr. Honorat announced that a chapter was set for the fall. A strong move toward the monastic life recently surfaced and was gaining increased

support. In addition to that, contemplative tradition and penitential practices began to draw a wider following. But the congregation had been founded to reach out into the world, not retreat from it. Angela begrudgingly admitted to herself that, as their numbers grew, the spirit of new members and even of those who had been with her from the beginning shifted. Perhaps discontent had always been there; certainly her cousin, Mother Veronica, still advocated a contemplative life and begged to be released from her position in Ceranow. Be that as it may, Angela knew she could no longer ignore the signs. Leafing through the finished mail, she once again picked up her response to Sr. Hedwig's letter:

You write that life at the center and constant contact with people weary you. Tell me my dearest, if a true servant of God, the Spouse of the Crucified, can be without pain on this earth. . . .

My dear daughter, look upon Jesus interrelating with people; look at the Blessed Virgin accompanying Him in His public life. Tell me, were their Sacred Hearts free of suffering? Was that constant contact with people, so full of evil, deceit and hatred, pleasant? Was it not instead arduous beyond our comprehension? Yet, our Lord bore it with such love! And for it He gave up the peaceful and joyous company of the Blessed Virgin in the holy home at Nazareth. Why? Because Jesus knew that His mission was the Will of the Father, because His only joy on earth was to fulfill that Holy Will, to love the souls of sinners, and to suffer for their redemption.

Let this fill you with joy in your present state; let it suffice that you do the Will of your Spouse, that for His love you lead others to Him, . . . tell me, my dear daughter, on what does true union with God depend? On the feeling of His presence or on the faithful doing of His Will? I believe that being in the continuous turmoil of duties, almost collapsing from weariness, you cannot even feel the presence of Jesus in your heart, or think of Him constantly. I believe that you may be occasionally somewhat deprived of that tangible union, but your present mode of life cannot affect your actual union with God, indeed you are ever more closely united with Him by fidelity to His holy will and by suffering for the love of Him. (12)

With more certainty than before Angela resolved to face the problem. She hoped only that she was not too late to influence their attitudes and change them.

The last days of summer ended in a flurry of preparation for the first General Chapter which Angela and Fr. Honorat scheduled to begin on September 17, 1860. As Angela expected, contemplative life dominated the agenda. Finally, after debate and tears, compromise and prayer, a vote was taken. The congregation was split into two branches or choirs; the first was strictly contemplative, the second would remain active-contemplative. The sisters themselves, according to Capuchin directives, would elect twelve of their members by secret ballot to leave the active apostolate and join the contemplative group.

Angela watched Fr. Honorat move around the room to collect the sisters' ballots. She did not dare raise her eyes, her heart pounded wildly, and the anxiety was so severe she thought she would stop breathing. When Father began to call the roll, all Angela could manage was to whisper a prayer, over and over, that Clothilde's name would be the next one announced. It never occurred to her that she herself would be called.

Late that night, by the candle light in her room, Angela struggled to put the day's events into some rational perspective. Long ago she had promised, vowed, never to enter the cloister at least not until her father, Joseph's, death. Then she yearned for the solitude of contemplative life; now the prospect horrified her. How could she face Clothilde, Mother Veronica? If anyone, she should have been selected; Clothilde had always dreamed of the contemplative life and had set it aside only for Angela. These two cousins had been so close, ever since childhood; now it seemed as if God Himself had put an irrevocable rift between them. How often had she begged Clothilde just to wait a little longer? "Let's wait and work with the children ..." the words throbbed in her head. Well, the waiting was finally over; the opportunity was within Clothilde's grasp ... but it was God's will that she go, and her cousin once again wait.

There was barely enough time to rearrange the sisters' rooms in order to section off a wing for the cloister. Within a week, the few renovations which were needed had to be complete. Angela did not supervise the carpenter's construction of the grille; she would be obliged to use it soon

enough. On October 4, 1860, the feast of St. Francis, Fr. Honorat sealed the cloister separating one part of the congregation from the world and itself. Angela was consequently appointed superior general of both choirs; and while she protested, her arguments seem to fall on deaf ears.

Was she expected to live in two worlds? Angela was responsible for the young sisters' formation, the tertiary groups, and the sisters' spiritual direction, not to mention the daily business of St. Felix Institute. Fr. Honorat calmly explained that she could receive the active sisters at the grille, and on Fridays she would leave the cloister to settle any necessary business with them that could not be handled by one of the other mothers. She would not have to deal with the laity anymore, and her responsibilities could be divided. Upon Angela's suggestion, Sr. Magdalen became the director for the novices and postulants, and Sr. Elizabeth the director for the tertiaries. There seemed nothing left to do but follow the line of eleven sisters into their new world.

The transition did not come without pain, for many sisters resented what they considered Angela's desertion. Even though selection for the cloister had been by election, the active sisters felt that as foundress Angela should have declined and remained with them. The hurt overflowed and touched both groups.

At the grille Angela listened to confidences and attempted to reassure sisters of her concern as they shared their disappointment. They deserved to know where she stood, to learn that she and they lived by the same vows, the same obedience, and that it was difficult, so very difficult at times, for a foundress as well as for them. Fatigue had become a constant companion. Angela closed her eyes; the tears and the accusations of the last sister she had seen that day unnerved her. She had never rejected the congregation.

True, the day Fr. Honorat sealed the cloister Angela attempted to reconcile herself and leave the past without regret, but the vision of the future was more than apprehensive. Contemplative life held no rapture as some experienced; in fact, she managed to cope with it only by convincing herself that it was a release from commitments and pressures. Did she dare admit to herself, never mind the sisters, that entering the cloister was so devastating that she found herself hoping she would become ill? (13)

When the institute began she put all circumstances into Honorat's hands. The years slipped by, but the road had always been challenging. Angela looked up at the open slats of the grille; who would have envisioned all this? And yet, hardly a month since the enclosure, despite her first inclinations, she now knew a happiness she had never experienced during the early days when she first offered her heart and will to God.

Somehow, during the first few weeks her new life become bearable; then ... actually joyful. Although, even if she wanted to, she couldn't explain the change in her attitude toward the cloister because her inner feelings had changed very little. Angela shook her head slowly as she realized that the sisters who knew her best probably attributed her change of heart to her spirituality, that she was, indeed, very close to Him. If they only knew how far they were from the truth.

A certain pervading stillness enveloped her; though she still did not see herself as a contemplative, the lifestyle now beckoned her. Almost imperceptibly she warmed to it like the flowers that crept through the icy frost in the garden. She had the leisure of longer hours of prayer in the chapel and alone in the garden. Strange how comfortable she was there with God and his creation; here more than anywhere it seemed she found solace and tranquility.

Then, as usual, without warning, Fr. Honorat summoned her. Angela assumed he needed to settle the sisters' Mass schedule for the month ahead. As he explained his reasons why she should leave the cloister and reenter the active community, she grew indignant. The more he explained the angrier she became, but as she had been taught in her father's house she held her tongue. She would wait until evening, when the heat of this surprise announcement passed and she could collect her thoughts clearly on paper.

The candle had spent itself before she finished her letter. Angela lit another and reread her lines:

Seeing me one day very sad or distressed, you concluded that this life must be too difficult for me, that it exhausts me, that I cannot persevere in it, and that I just do not have the courage to tell you about it. Whether God calls me to this kind of life or to some other one, today as before, I will not decide. Whether I have the proper disposition for it or not, I do not know

how to judge myself. I leave it to you, Father. I have entrusted the direction of my soul to you and you can treat me as you see fit. Whatever you decide, I will be entirely at peace with it because I desire nothing else but the fulfillment of God's Will which I see in your will for me... (14)

Fr. Honorat had gently reminded her that she herself from the beginning indicated that she was torn between the two choirs of sisters, that she was caught between two worlds and could serve neither effectively. She would not have argued with his recommendation a month ago; in fact, she would have left the cloister without looking back at that point. But wasn't that always the problem; what she would do...? Thy will on earth as it is in heaven-the words of Our Father jarred her this evening. God called her to obedience; thus far, he led her to paths she would not have dared to travel. How often did she forget He was there alongside her? As insurmountable as the future seemed at any given time, she had consciously fought to renounce her will and accept what the Lord offered her through the directors of her confessors and especially Fr. Honorat. Angela studied the letter again; she would not influence his decision:

Father, do not think that, when I open my heart to you, I want to influence your plans for me. These are not my designs. Actually, my main purpose is to free you from any scruples so that you will be able to tell me without any reservation what you consider suitable for me. If you want me to leave the cloister, I will do it. . . . You know that I did not want to continue in it through my own choice. You have every right to direct me. (15)

It had been years since she thought of Fr. Augustine, dear Fr. Augustine, who had promised her a constant struggle if she pursued religious life. Yet, here she was. Suddenly Angela could not quiet the laughter inside her. The image of Fr. Augustine, shaking a feeble warning finger at her, demanding that she be ready not to do whatever she wanted to, helped chase away the heartache. Of one thing she was absolutely certain; this time she had not set out to do her own will. Upon Fr. Honorat's decision, she would remain behind cloister walls.

The more Angela tried to limit the time spent settling the congregation's affairs from behind the grille, the more pressing the

demands became. Members of the Agricultural Society questioned the efficiency of the centers and the sisters whom they considered too young and ill-trained to deal with the peasants. Several argued that the women whom the Felicians sent to the field were privileged debutants toying with social reform and having little success in the Villages. Indignant over the accusations and defending the sisters, Angela confronted the community's critics. She demanded that the society conduct nothing short of a stringent evaluation of the centers. The findings would either discredit the sisters or put the matter to rest. Then she held her breath. Angela had no way of knowing which center or sisters would be observed; the committee chose Ges and Kolano.

Document in hand, Angela assembled the entire house of sisters. The report had been presented to the full membership of the Agricultural Society and accepted on January 12, 1861. Angela opened to the first page and read:

The spell of a first impression notwithstanding, we could not bring ourselves to believe in the efficacy of their mission. On the one hand, we distrusted their extreme youth and inexperience; on the other hand, we doubted their ability to persevere in this life of devotion to a suffering humanity...

We were embarrassed at having entertained such prejudicial views. Indeed, we were obliged to note that from the very beginning the sisters placed themselves at the service of those who suffer and they do this with truly maternal gentleness. They arrived in autumn, during the season of contagious diseases such as measles, scarlet fever, and diphtheria. Everywhere were sick children but thanks to the Felicians, the mortality rate was reduced by half. They remained day and night by the bedside of the more seriously ill. They saw to it that medicine was administered as prescribed, performed the most unpleasant services for the sick. One of the sisters, after sitting up with a sick woman for six nights in succession, finally fainted from exhaustion and another came close to dying. When peasants from the neighboring village come to ask for help, the sisters do not refuse to leave at once, even during the night, taking along their

nurse's kit. The result is that people cannot find words enough to sing their praises...

School attendance of the children varies with the seasons, depending on how much they are needed for work on the farms. In a village of 560 inhabitants, from 35 to 60 children attend regularly. The fluctuation in attendance disturbed two of the teaching sisters who one fine day announced briskly that it was not in conformity with their vocation to waste time on children who were habitually absent and that consequently they were moving to another village where people were more concerned about the education of their children. Panic broke out. On the very next day, the classroom was filled to capacity not only with children of school age, but even with mothers carrying babes in their arms...

Their method of teaching is very much ahead of the times. Obligated to improvise for lack of a textbook, the sisters instinctively made use of techniques which experience has proven successful: the attraction of games, singing and dancing, a kind of rhythmic gymnastics which appeal even to the most unreceptive minds... The girls are initiated into the art of cooking, sewing and housekeeping, and are taught the elementary principles of hygiene so sorely lacking in rural areas. The boys weave straw hats which can be sold at the market. The one and only classroom is very clean and well-ventilated...

In frail health, their fine hands unaccustomed to this type of manual work, dressed in their homespun, barefooted, these women seemed to be helped and sustained by God's grace, for from any point of view, the thing is impossible to comprehend... Their needs are certainly modest. They are content with straw mattresses and wooden stools, eat the same food as the peasants, use wooden bowls and spoons; poverty is as precious to them as their eyesight. . . .

Their highest achievement is to have given back to the peasants, so distrustful and uncommunicative by nature, a sense of their human dignity; they are given to understand at last that they are persons like us.

(16)

Count Andrzej Zamojski delivered the report to Angela himself as soon as the committee chairman, Nadrovich, submitted it. He also offered her an apology which she promptly waved aside; they had been friends for too long to stand on ceremony. The report vindicated the Felicians, and Angela knew no one was more pleased than Zamojski. She rejoiced for her sisters and also for the count. His support for their work had never wavered, even though Angela was certain that his judgment was challenged. The victory belonged to him as well. Angela studied the count as he rose from his chair; weariness marked his features. She knew from Elfrida, Andrzej's wife and her friend, that political tensions mounted daily. Even in the cloister they were not immune from the world outside. Two distinctly opposed political views infiltrated Warsaw—one called for rebellion, the other for tolerance. The Reds, students and activists who believed the time had come for Poland's independence, argued that the way to national resurrection was immediate revolt. Consequently, they beseeched the Agricultural Society to use its power as the only legal Polish institution to promote their cause among the nobility and military personnel. Convinced that a show of numbers and determination would force the society to take a stand, hundreds prepared to march to the palace during the society's annual meeting and demand emancipation of the peasants, a clear sign to St. Petersburg that Poland had taken the first step to self rule.

However, members of the society, in addition to many influential citizens, reasoned that concessions with Russia and continued restoration of class privileges such as education, voting, and trade would bring eventual political freedom. Assimilation was the key, not bloodshed. After several discussions with leading members of the Agricultural Society, Angela was fully aware that the goal of the independence movement was to create unrest. Even her brothers, visiting at the grille, warned Angela to be cautious as both political sides had access to the institute through the clinic and the Agricultural Society's offices.

Sisters, returning from errands, brought back news of demonstrations in the square and near the cathedral. In Warsaw, protests were nothing new. Naturally, the Russian authorities outlawed them, but so far they had little success in stopping funerals and memorial anniversaries from deteriorating into spectacles. And yet, although violence erupted on the streets daily, so

far the Agricultural Society and Russian authorities managed to keep it contained. Both sides resolved to cooperate rather than face civil war; hence, every military unit in Warsaw was on alert.

As days passed, however, the society agreed to debate emancipation but refused to put political autonomy on its opening agenda. Retaliating, the Reds turned to other tactics. They argued that if the Russian soldiers could be provoked to commit an atrocity, a massacre of innocent people, public and international outrage would compel political action. Poland's nobility would have no choice but to declare independence.

Pamphlets charging the Russians with harassment and brutality littered the streets. From all she heard, even behind cloister walls, Angela sensed restraint would not withstand the intense emotional patriotism rampant in the city. Therefore, when Sr. Elizabeth arrived at the grille Angela instructed her to curtail the sisters' travel as much as possible and to forbid all political debate among the tertiaries and, above all, among the active sisters. Both choirs, contemplative and active, were to begin a week of prayer and penance so that God's will govern not only the political proceedings but men's hearts lest Poland be torn apart further at the hand of her own countrymen.

The highest Russian authority in Warsaw at the time was Viceroy Gorchakov who had joined forces with Zamojski during the annual meeting to avert any violence before it erupted into the streets. Their plans seemed effective. However, what Zamojski and Gorchakov could not have foreseen was that the Reds encouraged further drastic measures.

Their opportunity came less than a week later. Two memorial services for revolutionaries executed in the 1830's took place on February 27. To accentuate their position, Reds augmented the procession with their followers. Aiming to avoid Cossacks who guarded the palace square, demonstrators merged with a funeral cortege. Gorchakov had given strict orders that under no circumstances were his men to use force. Faced with the confusion of the mingled throng, the soldiers spread out in an attempt to clear the bottleneck. All proceeded peacefully until someone seized the processional cross and swung it like a cudgel; pandemonium let loose.

Although two Cossacks disarmed the man, tragedy was not averted. A general returning to the citadel caught sight of the disturbance and turned his unit into the square from the opposite end. Assaulted with mud and

stones, the general held his troops but threatened to open fire. Agitators charged that open fire was forbidden, and nothing but blank cartridges backed Russian intimidation. Above the confusion, from somewhere, a shot was fired. Instantaneously, the general barked his orders, and several volleys burst into the crowd.

Miraculously, only five were killed, including two members of the Agricultural Society who had come out to investigate the uproar. However, it was enough to provide all the ammunition the Reds needed. International indignation headlined every newspaper in Europe and North America; all of Warsaw: Christian, Protestant, Jew, nobleman, and peasant adopted mourning.

After the funeral services for the five victims, Archbishop Fijalkowski visited St. Felix Institute. He usually came to the sisters whenever he needed a cause entrusted to their prayer and charity. Later as he prepared to leave the institute, he startled Angela as he took her arm and led her off into a small reception area. He assured her that he respected the sisters' patriotic fervor but asked her to exercise prudence. Angela felt the heat rise in her cheeks as Fijalkowski described the black bunting which draped the cathedral's threshold for the victims' funeral. (17) As soon as she had closed the door after him, Angela called for Magdalen. The headbent culprit readily admitted that she was responsible for draping the cathedral. Assured that the incident would never be repeated, Angela whispered a grateful prayer that none of the sisters had been arrested for their patriotism. She felt as they did, but knew she could not risk political suicide. As it was, Russian officials held the Felicians suspect, and the verbal approbation they had received to date had never been verified in writing. They would do nothing in Warsaw to indicate their sympathies for the national cause; however, that was not to say they could not go elsewhere.

That morning Fr. Honorat sent word of a memorial service in Czestochowa for the five victims. Angela wondered why she had not thought of it sooner. The Felicians were certainly free to send a delegation; this way the sisters would be steered clear of involvement in Warsaw and still be able to express their prayerful solidarity with the fallen victims. In fact, the entire household would unite themselves with the mourners through penance and adoration; not only for those who had already died

but for the hostility and senseless bloodshed that inevitably lay ahead. Her hand went to the rope bell, and when the sister appeared, Angela asked that Sr. Elizabeth come to her office. By the time Elizabeth arrived, Angela had traveling money ready for three sisters, Modesta, Columba and Elizabeth, who would leave for Czestochowa on the 4:00 P.M. stage. She also had a note for Fr. Honorat:

Certainly in these times, we are not obliged to observe the regular hours of sleep. Perhaps, you may permit the sisters to pray all night, in groups of two for nine days-one group starting in the evening until 1:00 A.M. and the other from midnight until morning prayers. Thanks be to God that the funeral services went by uneventfully; however, supposedly we cannot be entirely at peace. It is necessary, therefore, that the sisters storm heaven with prayer for God's mercy and compassion. (18)

The Reds' hopes to gain political sympathy surpassed their own expectations. Debate over the massacre erupted between the Agricultural Society and the chamber of commerce. Citizens were outraged; innocent blood was spilt through Russian brutality. Zamojski had no alternative. Members of the Agricultural Society converged on his home to draw up the petition demanding political reform and eventual autonomy. To forestall further violence, Archbishop Fijalkowski agreed to proclaim an indefinite period of mourning and accompanied Zamojski to present the petition to Gorchakov who in turn presented it to the czar.

Czar Alexander II dismissed the Agricultural Society's petition as a whim, but his minister of war regarded it as a violation of the empire's security. A telegram delivered to Gorchakov indicated the czar's sentiments over the affair; the viceroy was not to leave the city for any reason, and, if need be, he was to bombard it from the fortress. Anxious to enlist the gentry's support in keeping the Reds under control, Gorchakov permitted the creation of a Municipal Delegation which furnished its own police force. Although the czar had rejected the petition for autonomy, he authorized several concessions. Town councils were instituted, a reorganization of the educational system was approved, and Count Wielopolski became the director of the newly established Commission of Religion and Public Enlightenment. Again, the concessions sent a

contradictory signal to the Reds: if the czar could be forced to negotiate, why not use every means available, including the organizations he had just sanctioned, to press for independence.

Within the first few months of his jurisdiction, Wielopolski managed to almost triple the number of schools and businesses throughout Warsaw and the outlying regions. However, his personality accompanied his success, he inaugurated his position by assembling all of Warsaw's clergy and assuring them he would tolerate no government within a government. Predictably, an even greater split resulted among Warsaw's own people, and political tensions ran high. Recent events supposedly indicated that the Reds had aligned themselves with the Agricultural Society. Fearing further riots and bloodshed, and in consultation with St. Petersburg, Wielopolski terminated the Municipal Delegation and its police force. The next day, April 6, 1861, he dissolved the Agricultural Society.

The small clinic at St. Felix Institute was converted to a makeshift hospital, and Angela had not been in the cloister for over a week. The line of wounded, both Russian soldier and Polish patriot, had not ended. The violence Wielopolski hoped to avoid burst into the streets. When authorities announced that the Agricultural Society was dissolved, the mob, chanting "Long live Zamojski, King of Poland," descended on Zamojski's estate. Thousands filled the avenue as far as the front gate and presented a mourning wreath to mark the society's death. At that moment the Lublin post coach passed through with the driver atop the coach playing "Jeszcze Polska nie Zginela" (Poland will not cease to exist as long as we live) on a concertina, and the crowd followed it all the way up to the windows of Viceroy Gorchakov's palace.

There the Russian general on duty chose to put into effect the Law on Disturbances which he and Wielopolski had issued for controlling the mobs. First, authorities ordered crowds to disperse. Successive drum rolls signaled additional warnings. After the third roll, the guard was instructed to open fire. The rabble laughed in the general's face, but the drums rolled on. No one believed it, even the Cossacks didn't expect the general to go through with it. In fact, he was forced to give the order twice before they fired the first volley. Russian guns were raised against unarmed men, women, even children in the crowd. One volley after another was fired until Wielopolski himself finally stopped it by stepping in front of one of

the guns and ordering the general to cease or shoot him as well. Viceroy Gorchakov was so overtaken at the slaughter outside his door that his heart gave out. Before midnight the Cossacks were burying the dead; no rites, just one large hole behind the citadel where they threw everyone.

Elfrida Zamojska, sitting beside Angela, struggled to put the events into words. Andrzej had been offered a position on Wielopolski's board; when he declined, he was summoned to St. Petersburg and deported to France. Angela thanked God for her friend's sake that at least he was still alive and not in Siberia. Despite her own tragedy, Elfrida had come to voice her husband's concern. The society was dead; what of the sisters' work in the villages and on the estates? Angela had already given the matter serious consideration. Realistically, it mattered little to her or the sisters who was in or out of command.

The work was not in vain; hardly a year had passed since the project began and already there was ample evidence of remarkable progress among the peasants. Angela's main concern had always been the peasant, and his circumstances were not any better for all the political turmoil. The Felicians could not even think of abandoning their work, and the landlords were still eager for them to stay. Perhaps it was a vote of confidence for them that Wielopolski himself now requested that a center be opened on his estate in Chroberz. Angela immediately sent three sisters there; among them was Sr. Hedwig, a skilled nurse who would rather have received word that she had been accepted to the cloister. There was even positive evidence that the ochrony would survive. On July 24, 1861, Angela received an application to open a center in Cracow, the Austrian sector of Poland, on the estate of Countess Pelagia Russanowska.

Count Lambert was assigned to Warsaw upon Gorchakov's death in May; the viceroy had never recovered after the massacre beneath his palace windows in April. Lambert's first major challenge came on October 15, the anniversary of war hero Tadeusz Kosciuszko. The situation was made worse by the absence of a gentle, moderate, patient voice; Archbishop Fijalkowski had been buried on October 5.

The congregation at the memorial service for Kosciuszko sponsored by the Bernardine Fathers at the Cathedral of St. John was orderly; even the slogan-chanting agitators were unusually silent. Perhaps, the archbishops' recent death created a somber atmosphere; at any rate, the

services proceeded without incident. Once outside, however, departing worshippers thronged the square and took up outlawed patriotic hymns. Lambert declared martial law and ordered the square cleared. Hundreds retreated into the cathedral's protection, and remained in sanctuary the entire day and night. Negotiations were deadlocked; the cathedral doors were sealed from the inside.

Russian authorities were at wits' end to find a church official high enough to intervene. A Monsignor Bialobrzewski temporarily replaced the archbishop, but he had barricaded himself in with the demonstrators. Lambert ordered Cossacks to storm the cathedral and the Bernardine Fathers' church at dawn. In all, some 3,000 were arrested, and atrocities prevailed. Monsignor Bialobrzewski charged that the military invasion constituted a sacrilege and closed the violated churches. Warsaw convulsed under military and spiritual siege.

Serious attempts to restore peace in Warsaw failed as the move for insurrection grew stronger. Deprived of spiritual solace, many sought out the refuge of chapels in religious communities which still offered Mass and the sacraments. Often their patriotic fervor infected the religious communities they had come to for spiritual observances. Angela was beside herself. From the cloister she wrote to Fr. Honorat daily pleading for discretion: *"I became very upset and therefore I fear to receive Holy Communion because I resented the singing of that hymn which is banned in parish churches. I said nothing to anyone; even so the people spoke ill of us, that is, about our patriotic spirit. My conscience bothers me . . ."* (19) Eventually Angela became even more adamant, *"Perhaps you will reproach me for this, Father, but I am afraid that by allowing lay people to enter our chapel, we ourselves may be deprived of Holy Mass. It has reached me that the Dominicans at the Church of St. Hyacinth on Freta St. are forbidden to have more than one Mass offered because they allowed the laity to enter by a side door. The authorities could take the privilege away from us completely . . ."* (20) In any event, she kept her chapel doors open to the public and prayed for prudence. Angela met with the other mothers and then with the sisters; in reparation for the churches' desecration and in supplication for God's mercy they would maintain adoration by two for twenty-four hour periods and keep a strict fast until the day the doors of the churches would reopen.

Circumstances in Warsaw worsened daily; a curfew was in effect, and soldiers patrolled the streets. Carried off to St. Petersburg, Monsignor Bialobrzewski was sentenced to death for closing the Warsaw churches in defiance of Russian authorities; however, the czar commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. Lambert was dismissed as viceroy for his own part in the catastrophe. Talk of insurrection was contagious. Indications were subtle; nonetheless, a revolution brewed. Upper and middle class youth flooded the newly opened academies which grew more radical each day. Currents were so violent that even the most conservative of the nobility were swept up.

Then suddenly the cold winter months wrapped a semblance of calm around the city. Since the October massacre both sides retreated to safe distances, although the barricades across the cathedral entrance stood like a specter draping fear over the streets. Both choirs of sisters and even many from outlying regions crowded into the chapel for Mass the morning of February 13, 1862. Because of the number, Fr. Honorat agreed to a private liturgy solely for the sisters. Angela smiled and told him he could consider it her feastday gift.

In her pew at the back of the chapel, Angela marveled at the flowers cascading down the vases. How had they managed in February to find any? She would not have the organ play; they were still in penance. But for her feastday, at Elizabeth's insistence, she had permitted chanting. She studied Honorat carefully as he entered the chapel; the bell rung and all rose to chant a simple psalm. Father grinned at her, and she caught several of the younger sisters staring back at her. Instead of approaching the altar, Honorat went to the lectern and faced the sisters. In steady voice he addressed them. As a sign of favor, he was sure, God heard and granted their faithful plea for mercy. For on this, their own beloved foundress' nameday, the churches of Warsaw were reopened and their sanctuaries reconsecrated. Angela held to the pew in front of her and could not fight back tears while the organist fumbled to pump enough air into the pipes. Silence was displaced with bellowing chords and cracking voices raised in praise.

As life settled back into somewhat of a routine in Warsaw, so too did the pace at St. Felix Institute. The number of tertiaries had grown and so too did the vocations entering the congregation. Moreover, before his death Archbishop Filjalkowski had asked the Felicians to establish a catechetical

center for Jewish girls. Even the initial uproar of angered Jewish parents had quieted over the past months, and the center continued with a small but steady number of converts. Angela thanked God that work in the centers on the estates proceeded uneventfully, but the cost of total dedication became frightfully real. Sr. Maurice died of tuberculosis on March 6; a month later Sr. Margaret followed her. Another sister, Juniper, also returned to Warsaw in poor health. With characteristic devotion, Angela herself had addressed their needs, and when she could not meet them, she sought consultation:

First, I want to tell you, Father, that on the day following your departure, Juniper and Margaret arrived, both of them ailing but with this difference. Juniper is not in any grave danger while Margaret is far gone. She may last only until the fall. We called in a doctor for consultation and he confirmed what the physician in Rozanka diagnosed -- that Juniper, with proper rest and medication, will probably regain her health, while Margaret has tuberculosis in the advanced stage; nine members of her family have already succumbed to the disease. He told both of them to start drinking mineral waters from Szczawnica immediately. I did not limit myself to his opinion but called in three other physicians. Today they are to hold their consultation, and I will let you know about its outcome.

Juniper is presently in a sad state. In addition to her physical ailments, she is undergoing a spiritual crisis. She suffers from aridity and discouragement; everything worries her and makes her impatient. Previously I had a deep influence over her; now, I seem unable to soothe her in any way. I persuaded her to write to you, Father. Maybe, you could send her a few words of consolation.

Margaret is peaceful. She knows she is going to die and she talks about it freely. She begs to be relieved of doctors and curatives since they cannot help her. We too are aware of this but we cannot leave her without any help. For this reason she heeds our advice and takes the prescribed medications. (21)

The untimely death of the two sisters was not the least of Angela's unforeseen burdens. For some time now, with the chaos of the political demonstrations over and the village centers well established, Angela spent fewer hours at the grille. The once maddening pace dissolved into a placid standstill. Yet, the imposed serenity was far from peaceful, and Angela found herself in turmoil. The active sisters thrust the congregation into vibrant ministry, and she longed to partake in the trials and joys of their ventures. Left behind suddenly, Angela struggled with the solitude and depression. Furthermore, her health even on her best days had always been precarious, and the rigorous lifestyle of contemplative penance and fasting wrecked physical havoc. Drained of emotional, spiritual, and physical strength she had only one recourse -- in obedience to present her plight to Fr. Honorat and hope for God's inspiration.

That morning when Mother Elizabeth came to the grille, Angela sent the letter through her to Father. She did not need to wait long for his answer. As she expected, Fr. Honorat still insisted she was the heart of the congregation and the only issue was whether she would discharge her duties from the cloister or rejoin the active sisters. With his blessing, Angela left the cloister that afternoon. However, she hardly had time to consider what the transition would bring. News came that Sr. Juniper, who had returned to the village center, suffered a relapse, and Angela asked that a companion be ready to leave with her for Rozanka in the morning. Spring was late north of Warsaw. It was almost June, yet snow still clung to patches of the open fields. The air was mild and fragrant with traces of lilac. Wild violets, marigolds, daisies, narcissus and pansies rainbowed the mounds along the streams. Farms enroute were already furrowed to accept new seed. Rozanka welcomed Angela with open arms. Countess Lubinska, transferring Sr. Juniper to the manor as soon as the young nun became sick, had treated her as a daughter. The situation was well under control; however, the doctor warned Angela that the patient was highly emotional and advised that she wait to see her. Persuaded that Juniper was sedated and not in any immediate danger, Angela hesitatingly left for Ceranow where she could surprise the novices and Mother Magdalen who had been there to formalize the sisters' spiritual training. In Ceranow she also met with Louis Gorski and his wife. They were delighted with her visit and were obviously proud of the accomplishments made by the sisters. In

the morning, the sisters took Angela on a tour of the complex; they began at the schoolhouse where most of the village awaited them. Angela was an instant celebrity, and the children outdid themselves hoping to impress her but more importantly please their teachers. Each child recited a prayer or poem; the older ones read for her, and the sisters' unabashed joy could not be contained. Before she left the children to inspect the huts and clinic, Angela bent to kiss each well scrubbed face and pressed a piece of candy into each happy palm. Later that evening, after listening to the sisters' concerns and implementing some programs of her own, Angela penned a quick letter to Fr. Honorat:

Without consulting you, Father, we began reciting the Office in common. Since the sisters are doing this elsewhere, I felt you would not forbid it here in Ceranow. Likewise, during the past week, the sisters frequently received Holy Communion; I did not have the heart to deprive them of that joy. Some received it daily, but it was only for that week. If I overstepped my authority, I admit my fault. This is not the end yet. . . . I do not think such demands should be imposed upon the sisters. Indeed, it appears to me, it is to their credit that, despite the active life to which they were assigned, they do not wish to neglect their prayers. As far as I can see, their duties will not suffer if a regular horarium of religious life be maintained.

Order and regularity not only do not hinder us, but help us fulfill our obligations. I wrote out a schedule for the sisters and they are already adhering to it. I think it is feasible. Undoubtedly, there will be days and occasions when we will have to omit something or make changes, but those will be extraordinary circumstances while routinely the sisters will know the order of the day and what they are obliged to follow. (22)

She was not certain what Honorat's reaction would be, but she was confident that he would listen. Angela chuckled softly; in effect it was he who sent her back out into the world. She was, after all, in his own words, mother of the congregation. Still, she would bring the matter up again once she arrived in Warsaw. When the time came to return to St. Felix Institute,

Angela found herself already lonesome for the children. Yet, she knew she could not afford to remain behind any longer; word already reached Ceranow that an assassination attempt was made on the life of Warsaw's new viceroy, Grand Duke Constantine, the czar's brother.

Although the attempt was unsuccessful and the grand duke dismissed charges against the seventeen-year-old assassin, Wielopolski had the young man publicly hanged. Anger replaced reason and any hope of tolerance in the streets. In St. Petersburg, advisors warned the czar of certain rebellion. Wielopolski's recent appointment as head of the civil government not only sent shock waves through the city but angered military personnel. There was outright dissension in the First Army. After a raid on the Modlin Fortress put 70,000 rifles into the insurgents' hands, Wielopolski was determined to restore control. His first target was the students. The count's solution was a massive draft which would clear the universities and crush clandestine organizations.

Sr. Aniela's brother, John Jezioranek, was a captain in the First Army, and his rare visit to St. Felix Institute brought evidence that insurrection was more of a reality than anyone could have anticipated. Following the suppression of the Agricultural Society, moderates reorganized as the White Directory as opposed to the Red's Town Committee. Poles had a flare for outlawed organizations be they right wing or left. Angela discovered that the sisters had inadvertently helped both groups.

The Agricultural Society had a close working relationship with the Felicians and rented space on the ground floor of St. Felix Institute for their offices. After Andrzej Zamojski had been deported to France, his son assumed leadership over the moderates and that they were still welcome at the institute. From somewhere, the Reds obtained a printing press, not to mention a cache of weapons. In an unprecedented gesture both the Whites and the Reds agreed to joint possession. The Reds had secured the press; the Whites would find a safe hiding place. A word in the passing conversation alerted Angela to the plan, and she immediately contacted young Zamojski who arranged for the press to be removed during the night to the house of a relative of a prominent Red. However, the word had already leaked out that the Reds had the press at the institute.

The insurrection broke in Warsaw on January 23, 1863. Communication was cut off and travel non-existent. Frantic letters arrived

from the sisters who within days had converted twenty-five centers to field hospitals and then reassigned themselves. Angela marveled at their faith and courage, and begged the Lord that her letters at least get through to Hedwig who, though reluctant and one of the youngest among the sisters, was the best qualified to hold them together. Indeed, she had already been responsible for most of the reorganization but feared a reprimand. The young sister had instinctively used her talents and then realized she had acted without her superior's permission. Hedwig also worried that the sisters provided care to both the insurgents and the Russians; where did their loyalties lie? Arms lifted in supplication, Angela stayed on her knees throughout the night though her mind could focus on nothing but her own words:

My dearest Daughter in the Heart of Jesus.

I received your letter toward evening and am answering it right away tonight. Not only did you not err in presuming permission to help those poor victims, not only do I not rebuke you, but rather, I am most happy about it. Nurse them as long as it is necessary, even if you have to remain there more than a few weeks. I do not prescribe any time, nor do I limit your dedication. I know your prudence and trust that our Lord Himself will inspire you as to what you should do and in what manner. Do not discriminate among the sick. Give aid to all without exception; your vocation obliges you not to exclude anyone, for everybody is our neighbor . . .

I leave the assigning of the sisters to your discretion for the time being because contact with superiors is difficult and your conditions are such that delay is inadvisable and decisions can only be made on the spot.

I am fully aware that your present circumstances are more difficult than ever, that they are fraught with dangers, but I trust that our Lord will see you through it all successfully. You fear death, but you know that not a single moment is ours, that Jesus said: "You know not the day nor the hour." By this He wanted to urge us to constant watchfulness, so that we may always be ready . . . all that you now experience will be regarded

with the abundance of God's grace and the satisfaction of your own conscience since you were not idle in the Lord's vineyard, and that you responded to your vocation. May Jesus bless you and help you at every moment, may He give you strength and perseverance, may He enlighten you so that you will carry on with zeal and prudence.

Do not abstain from Holy Communion; consider yourself unworthy of such a great grace but remember that it is important to you, for God is your strength, that without Him you can do nothing, but with Him all things are possible for you. Receive Him not for consolation but for support, for courage.

My dear sister, I absolutely forbid you to practice mortifications. I am very grateful to the pastor for forbidding you to keep nightly vigils. Obey this without questioning. Preferably write briefly and often but you may not deprive yourself of sleep. Let your mortification be the denial of your own will and desires . . .

I realize that you are very involved especially at this time, but write at least a few words, even daily if you can, because now more than ever I look for news from you. Write about yourself your problems, your needs, because I am concerned . . . (23)

Failing to capture their intended headquarters in Plock, the insurgent government was forced to roam the countryside for almost a year. Finally, its officials retreated to Warsaw itself and operated right under the Russians' scrutiny. Violence had not yet invaded the city though fear escalated. Casualties rescued from the field just outside the city limits found themselves at St. Felix Institute where the forty-bed clinic was hastily transformed into hospital units. A house adjacent to the main building had been rented at the end of the past year for what Angela hoped would eventually be a girls' academy. Now she raced up and down its corridors with several sisters, scrubbing floors and carrying mattresses to convert the empty rooms to another hospital. Russians on the first floor; insurgents smuggled through a back door to the supposedly vacant second floor.

With the wounded came news of the battles and the sisters. (24) The fighting continued in sporadic raids for over two weeks at Wielopolski's estate in Chroberz. Each time the gunfire sounded, the sisters lifted their patients to the floor and pulled them under their beds. When it ended, half would remain at the center, and the other half would go to the field to collect the wounded and bury the dead.

The story from Ges was even more frightening. The center, filled with wounded, did not have an empty bed; in fact, those who were not seriously injured were put on blankets on the floor along the wall. Reconnaissance on both sides learned that over fifty men were there. The Russians set a trap; they issued word that they had seized the hospital, but retreated leaving only a makeshift guard. In no time, rumors spread that insurgent bands assembled and were on the way to rescue the wounded. It was exactly what the Russians wanted. An entire unit surrounded the center and waited in ambush. The patients were hysterical, and the sisters could not calm them. The soldiers threatened to execute them one by one, including the sisters, if the bedlam did not subside. They waited all day; however, the insurgents' commander had sense enough to check the rumor and discovered the trap.

The worst part of the waiting was the helplessness; all Angela could do was pray for them. She listened, despite her horror, to the soldiers' stories, and begged God that none of their own would be caught innocently in the bloodshed. She would have gladly traded places with anyone of the sisters, in any center, if only it would prevent even a single death. Her one consolation was that she had been able to get a large group to Cracow before the insurrection broke. At least they were far from enemy lines; although, she had no contact with them. This hope was soon shattered when a dispatch arrived from the Austrian bishop.

Learning that a battle had been fought just across the border in Miechowie, four of the Cracow sisters went to the bishop's chancery to get passports to cross enemy lines. The bishop's protests were in vain; the sisters heard that the wounded were kept in an unstaffed field hospital. After several attempts to dissuade them failed, he called the ministry of internal affairs which did not believe the request either. Finally, the four Felicians were given documents which would get them through.

The village was leveled, and only charred, knee-high remains of huts jutted from the blackened earth. What the Russians had the audacity to call a hospital was a series of connected tents, opened at both ends and running vertically through a line of trees. The stench of blood, urine, and vomit was overwhelming. When the colonel who accompanied them realized that the sisters had every intention of staying, he issued orders that the guard should assist the nuns as far as possible. The sisters divided into two pairs, each beginning at one end of the tunnel of tents. All they could do that first late afternoon was gently close the eyes of those who had died and carry them out. To the living they gave water and their hands.

Horrified by the conditions, Sr. Justine found the Russian commander and accused the unit of insulting the czar. The Russian empire was disgraced by its inhumane treatment of wounded prisoners. The seventeen year-old novice stood a foot below the commander's shoulder and insisted she would not move until some immediate provisions were made for the prisoners. Most of the unit had stopped to watch the confrontation and waited for the result. By nightfall, the soldiers distributed blankets for the prisoners to sleep on and a portion of their own rations for the sisters. The next morning, a military physician from the nearby medical unit for the Russian soldiers visited the camp and ordered the men moved. Three weeks later, he listed the insurgents as incurable, required that they sign an oath of allegiance to the empire, and deported them to Cracow. The Felicians were invited to staff the Russian facility. Unable to convince them to remain, Russian officers reluctantly escorted them back across the border.

By January, 1864, insurgent forces knew that they would not survive without the peasants' backing; a point which Russian officials were well aware of. The czar, consequently, lost no time insuring the peasants' loyalty. Alexander intended to destroy the Polish nobility once and for all; therefore, he gave the peasant what the nobleman could not, the land. Anything the peasant was on, he now owned. All that was left was to capture the leaders of the insurrection.

Violence in the city increased with raids on private businesses and homes, and anyone found harboring an insurgent could be convicted of treason. The institute was swallowed in the furor early one September morning as a squad of soldiers pounded at the doors and, with rifles drawn,

assembled the sisters, women, and children. Without a word, the soldiers ransacked the storerooms and offices. Repeatedly Angela demanded they tell her what they were looking for. She held her breath because from time to time passports and letters came through the institute. Angela struggled to recall if she had anything left in her room. On her desk were several letters from the sisters, but, thankfully, none from Hedwig. Of that she was certain; she had burned everything last night.

One of the soldiers returned to report they had found nothing. Angela again confronted the colonel; they had nothing to hide. He was not persuaded and told the soldier to go back and look again; if nothing was found they were to dig up the yard. Fighting to control herself Angela pleaded with him. What were they looking for? The squad had come to confiscate the printing press and the documents the Felicians allegedly held for the rebels. There was also the matter of stolen rifles. Suddenly, Angela turned and headed away from him. When he ordered her to stop, she looked back and invited him to follow her. St. Felix Institute was a house of God not an insurgent camp. She would gladly lead him through every corner of the building, even the cloister if necessary, and put the matter to rest once and for all.

The insurrection ended as abruptly as it had begun, once the czar had effectively cut off the peasants' allegiance. The insurgents mounted several raids but rapidly lost men and supplies. Conditions in the centers worsened as soon as the peasants were emancipated and the landlords cut off support. The peasant owned his land but had no resources to plant or harvest. The seed, tools, and food they now were deprived of belonged to the manor. There was little to gain without the ability to farm the plot they stood on. Compassion prevailed in most situations, but even the nobleman found himself a disenfranchised outlaw of the Russian empire and his poverty equal to that of his former peasants. Many of the centers had already closed, and the sisters returned to Warsaw. Angela was determined to keep as many sisters as possible, as long as possible, on the estates. Times were critical, and the consolation and care the sisters offered was crucial to both the peasant and the lord. Their presence could, if nothing else, keep emotions in check and anger from becoming volatile. She wrote to Hedwig that night:

Do you believe, my dear daughter, that I am not at all worried about the fact that the landowners do not want to support you? As long as the peasants are willing to give you enough to live on, that is sufficient. I am sure they will not let you experience hunger even if you are in danger of experiencing want, surely you will not fear, rather you will rejoice in imitating the poverty of Jesus and our Holy Father Francis, living like the birds who rely on the Providence of God. Then truly you can call yourselves daughters of the poor Francis. For that reason I advise you not to dictate any conditions to the peasants in Chroberz concerning your maintenance, but accept whatever they offer you.

If Wielopolski's son cannot support the sisters, all the more you cannot depend on others, and you can expect more landowners refusing to maintain the sisters. Therefore, I very strongly encourage the sisters at all missions to abandon themselves completely to Divine Providence, maintaining themselves from the alms of the peasants, and not imposing any conditions but accepting whatever they offer. (25)

In the predawn hours of April 10, 1864, Russian soldiers raided a small farm house and captured several insurrection leaders, among them was John Jezioranski, Sr. Aniela's brother. A court martial followed on July 18 at the citadel for twenty of the men. Fifteen were convicted and sentenced to death; of that number ten had their sentences commuted. On August 5, 1864, some of the sisters stood with Aniela before the scaffold erected on the square near the cathedral. Silence hung over the assembled crowd patrolled by Russian troops. John Jezioranski was among the five insurgents who was sentenced to hang.

Within weeks, consequences of the political unrest would affect Angela and the sisters even more directly. Angela listened to the chimes mark the next hour and watched the flames flicker erratically on the melting candlesticks. The chalice and ciborium rested in their places upon the linen draped altar; bread and wine, readied to be broken and transformed, remained whole. No one stirred but stayed on her knees, waiting. Finally, Angela extinguished the candles. The front door of the Capuchin monastery had been left ajar; the rack where the priests kept their

capas was empty. A black scarf, a single boot was all that was left behind after the soldiers had come and marched them to Zakrocyym.

Determined to establish a workable, politically stable relationship with the now landed peasantry, the czar desired to break their bond with the Church. He, therefore, reinstated his father's policies. On November 8, 1864, all religious orders in Warsaw were forbidden to accept new members. At 9:00 P.M. on November 29, each Capuchin house was raided and its friars carried off into exile. The czar's advisors believed it was imperative to cleanse Warsaw entirely of mendicant orders. Consequently, in December ninety-three monasteries were closed and the remaining fifty-two were put under surveillance.

Religious women to a large extent did not suffer the same fate. Forty-two communities were on record; only four were earmarked for disbandment. The Felicians, classified as an unlicensed association and not a religious congregation, were targeted. The czar was puzzled when he saw them listed; however, Czerkaski assured him that the small group of noble women he met in Warsaw in 1856 had far overreached their humble origins. The so-called association now boasted a membership of over 200 and held such influence that on several manors peasants refused to accept the czar's deeds to the land until the sisters approved. There was no question; the empire had no choice but to suppress the association.

At that time, the Felicians were responsible for the eighty-five orphans, forty-six handicapped persons, and thirty catechumens under their roof. Several estates were seized and others totally destroyed during the insurrection. Sisters from those estates and others which closed after the peasants received their land returned to Warsaw and overcrowded quarters. Everything was in short supply, and monetary support for the institute dwindled in proportion to the hopelessness of Poland's political aspirations. Just as the centers experienced financial upheaval when support was cut off from the manor, so too did St. Felix Institute.

The bell for dinner sounded. When the sisters entered the dining room they were surprised that the meal had not yet been served. Bread and watered soup had been the steady diet for weeks it seemed, but this noon there was nothing on the tables except the water pitchers. Mother Anna, who was superior of the provincial house, left the table with Angela and went to the kitchen. The sister explained between sobs. She was sure a

delivery would have been made today, and everything she had baked was given to the children. By the time they had filled the children's bowls with soup, there was nothing left. She could not water it anymore.

Angela gave the cook a hug and told her not to worry; before supper God would provide, somehow. Anna remained behind to follow Angela's suggestion and contact Elfrida Zamojska and explain the present crisis. Now back in the dining room, Angela scanned the questioning faces around her, sisters still waiting to recite grace before their meal. She knew she did not have a singing voice, but she took a breath and began the "Magnificat," Mary's hymn of gratitude for God's providence. Then she asked the sisters to be seated and served them the water.

The financial crisis at the institute was the least of Angela's concerns at the present. Although she opposed relying upon the generosity of the congregation's benefactors, Angela knew she would depend upon them rather than let the sisters starve. What had to be resolved was the threat of suppression. All around them, monastery and convent doors were being sealed. Their efforts thus far had been futile; the Ministry of Religious and Internal Affairs would not recognize St. Felix Institute nor the congregation. Angela's friends, among them Elfrida and Alexandra Potocka insisted that if Prince Czerkaski, the minister of Religious and Internal Affairs who had repeatedly denied approbation of the Felician Congregation, saw the work first-hand, the children and the handicapped, he would stop harassing the institute. At this point, Angela and the sisters could think of nothing better, and yet, they had an overpowering sense that the visit could be a disaster.

The delegation from the Ministry of Religious and Internal Affairs arrived just before classes began; Czerkaski and the new viceroy, General Berg, were among the inspectors. For a moment Angela had been distracted and did not see Czerkaski wander away. By the time she caught up with him, he crossed into the wing of the cloister.

As she approached the minister, Czerkaski's gaze was riveted to the austere furnishings of one of the sister's bedrooms. He heard Angela come up behind him and faced her. She saw his questions and answered them before he asked. Yes, this wing was very different from the rest of the institute; the cloistered sisters lived a life of total poverty and strict penance. She knew he would not understand, but realized she had to at least

attempt an explanation. The world had no part of the cloister. To it the sisters were fanatics; to the sisters those outside were sinners. The two worlds had not yet found the bridge that would span them. The minister and Berg expressed their admiration for the sisters' work with the orphans and the handicapped. But when the delegation left, neither the sisters nor their patrons held much hope.

Angela and her council waited in the chapel. A letter arrived from an anonymous donor with a donation of 2,000 zloty for the children and a note which marked a date and time, December 17, 5:00 a.m. When the bell sounded, five of them went to the door, and Mother Anna made her way up to call the community together. The sisters moved as if they were in a trance; this had been expected for so long that everything seemed to have happened before. Angela was surprised to see ranking officials at the end of the guard.

The reading of the edict took only several minutes. Colonel Anenkov's voice was steady and well-practiced:

Taking into consideration

that the so-called Association of the Felician Sisters has never been
officially approved,

that it has failed to present its statutes for governmental confirmation by
the deadline of July 21, 1859,

that it has not given evidence of a regular income thus far, in
contradiction of the czar's decree dated February 18, 1842, article 56,
and the czar's instructions dated August 28, 1851, as well as against the
czar's

directives dated May 27, 1841, February 15, 1858 and November 20 of the
this year 1864

that it has prolonged its illegal existence and participated in collusive
endeavors against the Empire

In virtue of the czar's authorization, I determine the following:

that the illegal Association of the Felician Sisters or the Sisters of St.
Felix

be immediately suppressed

that the specifications of the disbandment be designated by the Ministry
of Religious and Internal Affairs
that the said directives of suppression be chronicled within
civil law (26)

The document carried Viceroy Berg's seal. The sisters lined side by side around the dining room stood in silence. As if trapped in a nightmare, Angela heard a voice ordering them to discard their religious attire and leave the building within three days. They would be under surveillance during this time. Angela could not get her mind to focus, surveillance . . .

Elfrida Zamojska had written an appeal which was to be placed on Berg's desk as soon as possible after the ministry issued the edict of suppression. Now as the soldiers moved about the corridors, Angela wondered what little it would accomplish. Czerkaski had taken her aside after the edict was read and informed her that the czar, in his benevolence, allowed the monastic women, the cloistered sisters, to be transferred to another congregation rather than be dispersed. The minister had in fact mentioned something to the czar about the world not being ready for them. The sisters would be taken, escorted, to either the Dominicans in Warsaw or the Bernardines in Lowicz.

It was a mixed blessing. Angela nurtured vain fantasies that the cloistered sisters would be permitted to remain on their own in Warsaw; however, this was certainly preferable to disbandment. As Franciscans they were closer in spirit to the Bernardine sisters; therefore, Angela indicated that they would go to Lowicz. When she asked who would notify the Bernardines, she was told that authorities would tell them to expect the Felicians, fourteen of them, in two days.

The next few days were so chaotic that later Angela had difficulty reconstructing all that happened. Viceroy Berg left a guard on each floor of the institute, and they even patrolled the sisters in chapel. Elfrida attempted to persuade Berg that the sisters should be held on their own recognizance. He, on the other hand, was adamant and believed that if he blinked half of them would slip away and regroup somewhere else. Angela could not help smiling when Elfrida told her; he was probably correct. Finally, they compromised. The guard would be placed outside each entrance; no one

except Elfrida, a physician, and a priest, and by no means a Capuchin, would have access.

After Mass on the morning of December 21, the first fourteen Felician refugees stood in the foyer. Angela's words were barely a whisper. She embraced each one and then knelt before them to beg forgiveness and blessing. When all had said their goodbyes, Angela rapped on the front door, and it opened from the outside. As the sisters and their scant belongings were hustled into waiting wagons, Angela ran to the second floor. She thrust open the terrace door and from there was able to touch the hands of each sister as the wagons drove toward Lowicz.

Elfrida sent word that she secured permission for seven of them to live at the Zamojski mansion on Wiejska Street, which meant the entire administration could be housed there and maintain contact with the dispersed sisters. The waiver stipulated that the women wear regular dresses. The countess confided that she was certain, in this case, the soldiers would periodically check the house, but that could be tolerated especially if the sisters remained together. Angela listened to Elfrida's news, but then offered the sisters Fr. Honorat's letter. Mother Anna took it and as she read lowered herself into the chair beside Angela.

I do not know what the Lord intends to do with you but I do know that He will not let you perish, that your trials will be an opportunity for your growth, that He will now show you some new ways to attain the goals which He destined for you, and that by means of these adversities He will make it easier for you to carry out His will . . .

It is my hope that what was being accomplished at a slow pace through the centers will be expanded much faster and more easily through your disbandment and that you will find something to do for the Lord wherever you are. And even if you were to spend the time of your suppression exclusively in prayer, uniting yourselves in spirit and reflection with the heart of your heavenly Mother, that time will not be wasted . . .

I did not want Mother Angela to leave the cloister so that the entire Congregation would not separate itself from her and so that the cloister would always remain your center because it is your cradle. It seemed to me that it would be easier for you to communicate with her if she were in the cloister rather than somewhere in a private home, more so since everyone will not stay in Warsaw. Some of the other mothers, however, will remain there in Warsaw. In this way, in case of necessity, having taken care of the needs of the cloistered sisters, Mother could return to you or at least visit you often. It would be difficult for Mother to see the cloistered sisters if she remained with you . . .

Mother Anna and Mother Magdalen, having been chosen for a term of three years, retain their responsibilities. In the absence of Mother Angela, Mother Magdalen may serve as the spiritual mother -- to whom all the sisters may have recourse in spiritual matters . . . Mother Elizabeth will continue the supervision of the local tertiaries and societies to the extent she deems possible and prudently advisable . . . Above all, remain together and may none of you leave or separate herself, even to lead a stricter life, for there is nothing more vigorous and more perfect than the ways through which the Lord is leading you. Just do not abandon Him now . . . (27)

Anna handed the letter to Elizabeth and Magdalen. Several of the sisters feared that when news reached Zaroczym concerning the cloistered sisters' move to Lowicz, Angela would be obligated to join them. To avert such a decision, they decided to write to the Capuchins and petition that Angela remain with them somewhere in Warsaw. Mother Anna, who was one of Fr. Procopius Leszczynski's spiritual daughters and highly esteemed by the Capuchin provincial, wrote to him herself. The sisters did not reveal their intentions because, naturally, Angela would have forbidden it. Now Anna assured Elizabeth and Magdalen that she had written to Zakroczym and pleaded with Fr. Procopius not to allow Fr. Honorat to place Angela back in the cloister. The Capuchin provincial agreed with her and promised that father would abide by the decision.

Taking the letter from Magdalen's shaking hand, Angela reminded them that Honorat's message indicated that if the sisters departed for Low-

icz by the time she received his letter, she was to remain in Warsaw. Anna and Elizabeth stared down at the floor, both fighting back tears. Finally, Magdalen broke the silence and asked Angela what she intended to do; but clearly, she already knew the answer. Angela would do what she had always done.

The foundress wiped her tears and stood up. Elizabeth was to pack her suitcases and arrange with Elfrida for transportation. She asked Magdalen to bring her writing paper and pen from her office; she would go to the chapel and try to compose a letter to the sisters. She smiled; tomorrow was Christmas Eve, and she wanted to lift their spirits. Magdalen began to protest that Angela should not make the trip alone; she would go to Lowicz as well. Angela put her arm around Magdalen's shoulders and turned the woman toward her. Elizabeth and Anna could accompany her and then return to Warsaw. Magdalen would remain and, in Angela's name, serve as superior and spiritual mother to the dispersed sisters throughout Warsaw. She would be their touchstone, the bond that kept the Felician spirit alive and thriving.

Angela looked into the woman's eyes and with a fingertip caught a tear on Magdalen's cheek; she would also be the link between the foundress and the congregation. Angela admitted she could face Lowicz only if she knew the sisters were safe and if she remained in touch with their pain and struggle. Magdalen promised and bent to kiss her superior's hand; now both smiled at each other through tears. In the meantime, as soon as transportation was found, Angela would go to Lowicz and wait there.

It seemed incredible to Angela that she had been away from the active sisters for almost two years; to those who knew her well it was even more incredible that she had managed to leave the cloistered sisters in Lowicz. The gentle rhythm of the train's rocking had lulled Angela to a half-sleep; reluctantly waking, she yawned and stretched on the cushioned seat. Across from her, Mother Joseph slept soundly; her head bobbing on the back of the headrest. They were at most an hour from Cracow, but there was no sense in waking the woman yet. Angela knew her companion was exhausted, even though Joseph would have denied it adamantly. Four of them, Angela, Joseph, Augustine, and Monica, had left Lowicz weeks ago. Their destination was Cracow and the miracle Angela had prayed for; there she and the congregation would begin anew.

The straight-line distance from Lowicz to Cracow was little more than 150 miles; however the train route took them across more than 230 miles. Too ill to travel the entire distance, Angela was grateful that they had stopped for nearly a week in Czestochowa and visited the shrine of Po-

land's Black Madonna whom she regarded as the foundress of the Felician Congregation. It was Mother Joseph who insisted they change their plans and, as usual, it was also Joseph who stayed with Angela through the long sleepless hours.

Closing her eyes, Angela allowed the memories of recent years to wash over her: Colonel Anenkov's voice as he read the edict of suppression; the soldiers in the corridors; the cloistered sisters' departure for Lowicz; the heart wrenching goodbyes when she herself left Warsaw with Mothers Elizabeth and Anna, who refused to let her make the trip unaccompanied. Even now, their concern during those bitter days was still a comfort. Angela's eyes filled as she recalled their first exiled Christmas. The Felicians, including Angela, Elizabeth, and Anna, gathered before Midnight Mass with the Bernardine sisters and in procession led the way to the manger in the suddenly too small chapel. According to Franciscan tradition, the Bernardine superior, Mother Seraphina, placed the statue of the infant Christ Child on the bed of straw; far back in the chapel and kneeling behind the sisters, Angela begged that her own spiritual daughters would somewhere, somehow, find their own Bethlehem inn, ready and welcome. Now looking back, Angela realized that her prayers had already been answered. That blessed night, when she feared all was lost, the Lord had simply wanted her to wait and trust him.

Cracow. Angela had fallen in love with the Austrian-Polish city when she visited it as a teenager with her father, yet, never did she imagine it becoming a refuge. When the edict of suppression was issued, she and her council sent each sister who held an Austrian passport across the Russian border to the center on Copernicus Street. These sisters, as well as their counterparts who already staffed the day care center, became the remnant of the Felician community since suppression by the Russian czar did not affect the Austrian center in Cracow. While the sisters were not as yet sanctioned as a religious congregation by the Austrian government, Angela hoped that they would soon gain official approbation.

No one at the time could have known that Countess Pelagia Russanowska's invitation in 1861 to staff the center would one day insure their survival. Angela shuddered to think that she had almost turned down the countess' request for sisters that July, because the community had been stretched for personnel and barely kept pace filling positions in the Warsaw

centers. However, the generosity and goodness of the countess had touched Angela's heart and, in any event, she was eager to establish the sisters in the cultural and aesthetic milieu which Cracow offered. The tiny center housed four sisters; to accommodate approximately twelve more, after the suppression forced them out of Warsaw, was no small feat for the young superior, Sr. Boleslava. Despite the odds, she took to the task with determination; she also had the foresight to catch the ear and protection of the Archbishop, the somewhat gruff and sometimes unapproachable Galecki, who warmed to the young Felician.

Meanwhile in Lowicz, Angela prepared for a second farewell. Shortly after Christmas, Anna and Elizabeth returned to Elfrida Zamojska's estate in Warsaw where they with Mother Magdalen remained in contact with the sisters who now lived in twos and threes within the city. Another small group also found refuge within Warsaw and remained under Mother Pauline's direction. Those sisters who could linger on the estates where they once worked, but that number decreased rapidly, and the sisters sought shelter with family and friends.

For Angela this second farewell was no less bitter than leaving Warsaw. Her desire and need to be with the dispersed sisters was acute; both Mother Anna and Elizabeth realized how deeply Angela loved her spiritual daughters and that residing in Lowicz was an ultimate sacrifice. Angela, all too well aware of Anna and Elizabeth's anxiety and concern for her, summoned the courage to make the farewell a celebration. She insisted that within the next season all of them would be reunited, yet, her heart broke as the two sisters boarded the stagecoach for Warsaw. Indeed, it would have been so much more convenient, and undeniably so much less painful for all of them, if she had traveled alone. But then, Anna and Elizabeth would not have seen the conditions at the Bernardine cloister in Lowicz; then, Mother Joseph would not have been sent to her as a solicitous companion and cause for joy.

The Bernardine congregation had been given merely a few days' notice of the cloistered Felicians' arrival. Still, by the time Angela herself appeared on their doorstep just prior to Christmas Eve, arrangements had already been made with Mother Seraphina, the Bernardine superior, that the Felicians could avail themselves of separate quarters for a conference room and a dining hall. Living space was minimal, but the sisters' goodness

prevailed. The rigors of the Bernardines' cloistered life were taxing; the frigid winter dampness, the unheated rooms, poor diet, and strict penances, including prolonged fasts and little sleep, threatened a vigorous person's health. The suppression had left Angela emotionally and psychologically drained; her health was dangerously frail. Returning to Warsaw, Anna and Elizabeth shared their fears with Mother Magdalen who, to insure the foundress' survival, asked Mother Joseph, Antonina Mikulinska, the daughter of a Lublin physician, to reside in Lowicz. From there she could act as an intermediary between Angela and the sisters at the Zamojski estate and, as a trained nurse, she could also care for Angela's well being.

Angela chuckled to herself as she now watched Mother Joseph sleeping on the train seat beside her and could still feel the disbelief and sheer relief when she learned that the woman had come to Lowicz. She had been certain that the Bernardine sister who told her she had a visitor was mistaken. Arriving at the grille, Angela was stunned to find Mother Joseph with baggage in tow but quickly recovered. Joseph, totally confused by Angela's silence, did not know whether her superior was angry or delighted that she had come. However, before she could utter her greeting, Angela forced her hands through the slats of the grille and enfolded Mother Joseph's hands in her own. Grateful once again for her sisters' compassion, Angela rejoiced that she would not brave her exile in total isolation. Joseph connected her to the scattered congregation; and together they hoped, prayed, dreamed and planned for a homecoming.

Reports which reached Lowicz from Warsaw emphasized the continued need for caution. The sisters were under police surveillance, and their homes were frequently searched. Several sisters recounted being stopped on the street and having to lift their skirts to prove to local police that they did not have their religious habits on underneath their clothing. It was evident that the harassment would not stop while Czerkaski was still minister. On the other hand, while news from Warsaw was pessimistic, letters from Cracow offered hope.

Soon after the sisters settled in Cracow, they were asked to open a girls' school on Wesola Street that would accommodate fifteen boarders as well as day students. An application also arrived from Duchess Helen Poninska to staff an orphanage in Lwow. Sr. Boleslava approached Archbishop Galecki, who blessed the expansion of their work, and then

headed for the government bureau to submit the preliminary paperwork. The young superior presented her request only to find a decree of suppression waiting for her. Information from St. Petersburg, claiming that the Felicians were religious fanatics and a threat to the nation's security, reached the Austrian emperor in Vienna. Seeking advice from Archbishop Galecki, Sr. Boleslava was told to wait out the decree; in the meantime, she sent word to Mother Angela in Lowicz of the impending suppression. All in Lowicz and Warsaw held their breath. Cracow was their last chance of survival; if they were banned there then hope of reestablishing the order was all but gone.

Letters flew between Lowicz and Cracow; Angela and every Felician, whether in a small community or alone in her bedroom, pleaded on bended knee for God's mercy. The waiting became unbearable; then finally, like a repeated, dreaded nightmare the soldiers surrounded the Copernicus Street Center and ordered the sisters to disperse within three days. This time, however, all was not lost. Archbishop Galecki filed for an immediate injunction which Austrian officials granted; then he headed for Vienna and an audience with the emperor.

It seemed the Lord also intervened in this latest crisis. Elfrida Zamojska, attending a reception in Warsaw, happened to meet the Austrian Minister Belczedi. She assured him that the reports from the Russian Minister Czerkaski concerning the Felicians were grossly exaggerated and argued that the sisters' work promoted the welfare of the people and, therefore, the nation they served. Sophia Truszkowska, Mother Angela, was her dearest friend and no more a fanatic than she. Belczedi studied the elegant woman before him and did not miss the significance of her title or position. After all, he was speaking to the wife of Andrzej Zamojski, in recent years the closest attempt Poland had come to in having her own uncrowned king. Yet, it was Andrzej who was now exiled in Paris; Elfrida was still in Warsaw and very visible in social and, thereby, government circles. Russia had made serious political mistakes; certainly, a group of religious women was no threat to the Austrian empire. The staunch efforts of these two advocates, Galecki and Zamojska, succeeded, and the political controversy regarding the Felicians dissolved. In fact, Minister Belczedi personally met with the emperor and had all charges against the Felicians dropped.

Angela knew immediately that something drastic had occurred. The light rapping on her door interrupted her night prayers and the mandated grand silence over the Bernardine cloister. Off her knees and racing to the grille, she stared at Mother Joseph, but no words would come. Joseph folded the letter she held and pushed it through the grille. Angela shook her head; she could not have steadied the paper enough to read it. "Tell me," her eyes pleaded. Joseph drew the envelope back and tore it open. The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Felix of Cantalice, popularly known as the Felician Sisters, was officially sanctioned by the crown of Austria. The document was sealed by the emperor himself.

Several minutes lapsed before either Angela or Joseph realized they had broken all the rules governed by grand silence. Oblivious of the time, marvelously off pitch, the two Felicians alternately chanted and cried through the verses of Mary's song of thanksgiving, Magnificat. The document, dated September 7, 1865, had taken a day to reach Lowicz; it arrived on the 8th, the birth of Mary. When Mother Joseph left Angela late that night, she knew that neither she nor Angela would sleep. Angela would probably return to her knees and spend the hours until sunrise in thanksgiving; she, on the other hand, went in search of pen and ink to send the foundress' message to her dispersed daughters in Warsaw.

No time was lost in planning for the future. Correspondence flowed to and from Lowicz, Cracow, and Warsaw, as well as to and from Zakroczym so that Fr. Honorat was kept informed of the congregation's circumstances and could render spiritual solace and guidance. Receiving Angela's instructions, Mother Elizabeth left Warsaw for Cracow the next month. The center on Copernicus Street had served as a temporary refuge; but undoubtedly, new lodging for the sisters became a priority. As so often in the past, Divine Providence brightened the path before them. Shortly after Elizabeth joined the sisters in Cracow, an attorney by the name of Brzezinski requested an interview. Not knowing what to expect, Mother Elizabeth was dumbfounded at his news. Countess Pelagia Russanowska who founded the Felicians' first center in Cracow had died in August of 1863. Her affairs had been held up in litigation but were now resolved. The countess had bestowed her home on Mikolajska Street to the Felicians as well as 10,000 florins for its upkeep.

After consulting Angela, Elizabeth used the resources to provide at least a temporary motherhouse for the returning sisters, and by November renovations were complete enough for partial residence. To solemnize the occasion, on November 21, 1865 a group of reunited Felicians met in the newly painted chapel of the Mikolajska Street convent and renewed their temporary vows for the first time since the suppression.

By December Angela arranged for Mother Anna's transfer to Cracow with Fr. Honorat's directive and blessing to reinstitute the Felician lifestyle, seek out future ministry, and locate a larger residence for the congregation. Elections were also held: Mother Anna became the superior in Angela's absence; Elizabeth assumed Angela's duties of spiritual mother and became the directress of novices as well; and Sr. Boleslava continued as envoy between the congregation and the archbishop.

From behind Lowicz's grille, Angela found herself constantly occupied as she met with sisters who had been scattered all over the Warsaw region and who now boarded trains that would take them to Cracow, back to their vows, prayer life and community. Departures brought renewed longing, and Mother Joseph watched her friend and superior secretly grieve as each new group eagerly embarked for a reunion in Cracow. Angela's heart went with them; her enthusiasm and encouragement had no bounds, yet Joseph also knew Angela too well to be fooled. Several times she urged Angela to write to Fr. Honorat and insist that the Cracow community needed her spiritual leadership.

What Joseph did not realize was that Angela was already well aware of her spiritual director's response -- she was more valuable remaining with the cloistered sisters and should wait awhile to rejoin the active members. However, Fr. Honorat's approval was not the primary obstacle that kept Angela from reaching Cracow. The edict of suppression confined her to Lowicz. She could not travel outside the city without explicit permission from local authorities; and certainly, she could not cross the Russian border without a valid passport, which officials refused to grant.

As the days turned to months and years, the harsh conditions of the cloistered life took their toll. Initially, Mother Joseph was to live in Lowicz but outside the cloister. The arrangement was short-lived; realizing how quickly Angela's health declined, this companion and nurse soon found it necessary to move into the Bernardine cloister. With the Cracow founda-

tion well under way, the need for consultation waned, and the cloistered sisters in Lowicz seemed once again cut off from the life of the congregation. As the sisters' visits to Lowicz decreased, Joseph noticed a rapid deterioration. It was as if Angela had suddenly given up hope for herself; she succumbed to illness and was plagued with depression.

Angela had been ill for most of the week, but despite Mother Joseph's objections she told her nurse not to bring a tray; she was getting up and going down to the dining room. Now she regretted her stubbornness; her head throbbed, and the room spun around her. Somehow Angela had misjudged the time; there was no one in the dining room or in the hallways. If she could get some fresh air or, maybe, visit the chapel; yes, she could sit and rest for a while there. Angela grasped the doorway and clung to the frame. No wonder she was so dizzy she told herself; though their meals were far from substantial, she had not been able to keep anything down in days. Making her way along the corridor to the chapel, Angela found herself in the back pew. Not sure whose seat she was in, but grateful that nonetheless she could sit, Angela slumped forward.

Consciousness faintly crept back. Uncertain how long the Bernardine sister had been kneeling beside her, Angela heard the woman softly call for help. Hands were about her, lifting her; someone behind her was holding her head up, and a hand brought a glass to her lips. Then a pungent smell; Angela had struggled to break free, turn away, but the hands held her. Was she dreaming? Voices -- she could barely hear them. She must have fainted in the chapel; yes, that was why they were whispering. So much confusion about her. Mother Joseph was there ordering people about; the Bernardine superior was also there.

Several doctors, including a physician from Warsaw who was sent by Angela's parents, arrived at the sickbed. Her fever had broken, but there seemed to be no change in her disposition. It was as if she had already crossed over to another world and would not rouse herself to face the circumstances about her. At first, Angela's patience wore thin with the doctors' prescription for total bed rest; she was not to be confined. Tearfully, she argued with Mothers Joseph and Seraphina; at least she should be allowed to go to the chapel. Joseph, who could not bear to deny Angela anything, was rescued in time by the Bernardine before she gave in. Moth-

er Seraphina knelt beside Angela and gently asked the Felician foundress to allow her the privilege to demand obedience.

Angela lay back down on the pillows Joseph had piled behind her. There was a possible compromise the superior told her, but she would have to submit. Catching the smile the woman tried to hide, Angela halted mid-sentence. One of the Bernardine sisters occupied a room that shared the interior chapel wall, and the room's window opened into the chapel, high above the altar. The sister had lived in the room for years and would not relinquish it. Her age had secured her right to it, and the superior had bowed to the sister's self-proclaimed prerogative. Lifting herself up on her elbows, Angela rose from the pillows and gaped in disbelief. Mother Seraphina read her mind before Angela asked the question. No, she had not intervened; the sister herself requested that Angela be given the room. The Felician foundress had a quiet way about her. At first glance, Angela appeared withdrawn, never was she seen communicating with the sisters, and she seemed to distance herself especially from the Bernardines. Even during recreation, Angela kept to herself. She enjoyed listening to the sisters, but rarely engaged in conversation with any of them.

Yet, her silence spoke. Without exception, her compassion and interest in the sisters was felt by each Felician and Bernardine alike. When Angela became ill, the sisters worried over her as they would have over their own mothers, the Bernardines no less than the Felicians. A shared smile as she passed a sister in the garden, a nod of recognition, a tender touch upon a tear-stained face; a holy card placed anonymously in a book, a whispered prayer, a look in the opposite direction when a young sister found herself with a broken rule, and countless other moments of love had endeared Angela to everyone. The Bernardine superior found herself, more than once, glad for Mother Joseph's presence. That way she did not need to negotiate the arguments over who would be Angela's nurse. At any rate, the discussion settled the matter; the new room was Angela's. And Angela would not move from the bed unless she was told to.

But her health did not improve; the fatigue, weakness, and loss of hearing continued. All too soon, Angela's worst fears were confirmed; she knew the diagnosis before the doctors admitted it to her. Her deafness was hereditary, and stress accelerated the loss of hearing, just as it had done to

her father. Only, the peace of the Salzsbrunn spas had relieved his ailment and steadied the decline; Angela realized it would not be the same for her.

Communication continued to arrive from Warsaw, Cracow, and Zakroczym, and Angela realized that Mother Joseph tried to hide the difficulties from her. As gently as possible, she told her confidant she would not have it; she would not be cut off. Nevertheless, no matter how desperately she tried, Angela could not sustain her physical energy. Unable to eat and severely dehydrated, she was plagued with fainting spells as soon as she attempted to leave her bed. The doctor who had been anxiously summoned again to Angela's bedside conferred with Mother Joseph. Both realized there was no cure for Angela's physical condition; however, there was a remedy for the depression and hopelessness that devastated her. Angela needed to be in Cracow.

The damaging effects of the cloistered life were harsh, but Angela could recover. What would kill her would be sustained exile. Finally, the doctor, who held a military rank, overruled local magistrates and with luck managed to secure passports for Angela and Joseph. They were to rejoin the sisters in Cracow. It was a temporary measure; the passport was issued for medical reasons and granted a three-month duration. Still it was enough to arouse a sense of purpose and new vitality. What Angela was not prepared for was the reaction of her own sisters.

The cloistered sisters refused to accept the doctor's recommendations or Fr. Honorat's directives. Emotions ran so that hysteria almost swept the entire household. Mother Joseph argued that Angela would not regain her health under the present conditions; the cloistered sisters countered that death was perhaps the climactic sacrifice demanded by the Lord who saw their foundress worthy of martyrdom. They were not about to surrender Angela, to lose her once again to the active sisters whose very existence still hung in jeopardy. Angela was totally bewildered by their hostility; evidently, the Felicians in Lowicz no longer believed that they would be reunited with the sisters in Cracow. If Angela were to leave, they too would be lost. Bitterness raged, and Angela was torn. Eventually, Fr. Honorat, invoking the sisters' obedience, demanded that the cloistered Felicians accept Angela's departure and temporary sojourn to Cracow.

The train whistle broke Angela's reverie. Gazing out the train's narrow glass panels, she studied the rising sun ribbon the sky with pale gold

strands and swatches of pink and lavender. Remembering her farewell in Lowicz had left tears upon her cheeks. Wiping her eyes, Angela attempted to straighten the folds of her skirt, but finally surrendered to the creases. The dresses she and the other wore were borrowed from the tertiaries since they could not travel in the Russian sector of Poland clad in their habits, which were wrapped within bolts of material and stored with the rest of their luggage. In Cracow, the sisters were granted permission to wear the postulant dress until they took the oath of allegiance to Austria and became citizens. Well, with the usual bureaucratic delays, it would be some time before she put her habit on again.

As the train conductor announced that they would be in Cracow in ten minutes, Mother Joseph woke with a start. Mothers Augustine and Monica hurried down the aisle to help collect the luggage which had already been lowered from the racks. All their possessions had been stuffed into the four battered trunks lined against the train seats. Monica still worried that news of their delayed arrival had not reached Mother Anna; what if they were stranded at the station? Angela, taking a full-length view of her three companions, assured Monica that even if Anna did not arrive, which was quite unlikely, Cracow would have at least one kind soul who was bound to take pity on four, obviously lost, quite homely, and rumpled women.

For a brief moment Angela thought Monica's fears held true; as they climbed down from the train, she recognized no one. Then a gentleman approached and asked them to come to the back of the station where a carriage was waiting. Angela was the last to turn the corner. Concerned that Mothers Joseph and Augustine carried one of the heavier trunks between them, she argued that they allow her to take a handle of the trunk. Without warning, the trunk and the two women stopped suddenly, and Angela almost fell over them. As she steadied herself on Joseph's arm, her head came up, and her eyes traveled past them. Angela did not move; no one spoke; even the gentleman who led them stopped and turned. A flush rose to Angela's cheeks, and she bit her lip to keep back the tears. The distance to the waiting carriage was no more than a few yards, but, letting out a strangled cry, Angela could not get there fast enough. Her arms outstretched, she half ran, half stumbled toward Mothers Anna, Elizabeth, and the entire house of waiting Felicians. Dressed in their full habits and veils, the sisters formed a welcoming party Angela found more splendid

than a contingent for the czar, more beloved than her own precious family. Indeed, she had come home.

The reunion carried the Felicians far into the early morning hours. Anna had arranged for a morning Mass the next day, and Elizabeth presented Angela with the young women who awaited her arrival to become the newest members of the Felician community. That morning, May 18, 1866, the patronal feast of their namesake St. Felix, Angela invested the postulants as novices and accepted the first profession of vows of the older group of novices for the first time since the suppression. Her congregation had not only survived but already flourished.

The first weeks in Cracow kept Angela at a vigorous pace; conferences were held with the sisters, applications for new missions were reviewed and accepted, and correspondence with the dispersed sisters and the cloistered Felicians continued. To Angela's dismay, the excitement of returning to the active sisters and the adrenaline that fueled her schedule rapidly vanished. Her health did not improve significantly, and the loss of hearing increased. Some two months after her arrival, Dr. Joseph Dietl advised Angela that she required total rest and prescribed treatments at the health resort in Krzeszowice. Though she was reluctant to leave Cracow, the sisters prevailed, and Angela agreed upon a month's reprieve. Secretly, she intended to use the time to review the Constitutions which Fr. Honorat had begun writing for the congregation. The first drafts had reached her while she was still in Lowicz, but many areas required further development and consideration.

The rest and relaxation which Krzeszowice offered eluded Angela; along with her suitcases came the concerns of the community she left behind. Human nature and its innocent peculiarities affected everyone. Religious women were no exception; perhaps, they had inherent foibles all their own. Angela was perplexed by the apparent division between Mothers Anna and Elizabeth. It had not taken more than a few hours before she realized the two superiors were locked in a tug-of-war over religious conduct and the direction the congregation should take. Uncertain how to settle the matter, and trying her best to keep both viewpoints from clashing, she wrote to Fr. Honorat:

Each of them is a magnanimous soul -- full of virtue and zeal. Each one has exalted notions about perfection; but, each one has her own viewpoint about different matters, each one comprehends things differently even to the point of interpreting the Constitutions in her own way . . . Furthermore, their opinions and their commands are so conflicting that the sisters are noticing and talking about it . . . Mother Anna, the superior, wants to stand by her rights; Elizabeth also insists on her own, and herein lies the problem. For that reason, it would be of great benefit if you would already send the entire Constitutions, wherein each authority and duty is precisely delineated . . . (28)

In the end, Angela knew she would have to be the referee between them, but how was she to settle differences when both viewpoints seemed to be supported by various, incomplete drafts of the Constitutions?

Other issues were even more critical. The sisters' preference for the cloistered life still dominated and was enhanced by Mother Elizabeth's own inclinations. On a visit to one of the centers just outside Cracow, Angela asked a young sister what was wrong with the patient whom she was tending. The sister supposed it was a fever. Angela probed further and learned that when the doctor made his rounds the sister was not at the bedside; Angela feared that she had probably been in the chapel. She complained in her letter to Honorat:

How can the sister serve the sick person if she does not know what ails him or what he needs? I believe that in rendering care for the body of the sick, a sister could more easily influence his soul. Perhaps I misconstrue the whole thing, yet, I feel that such behavior of a sister, as I cited above, is impractical. Enlightenment in this respect to our apostolates also is the responsibility of the Director of the Novices . . .

It appears to me also that M. Elizabeth, through her love of modesty and strict religious observance is very opposed to one's dedication outside the convent premises, for instance: at the center, at the hospital, and in visiting the sick in town. Naturally, the sisters who are not drawn to such activities and who know about the attitude of the Director of Novices,

will increasingly feel aversion to these apostolates. They will discharge their duties under compulsion; they will feel depressed, thinking they are jeopardizing their souls. Yet it seems that at present, there is a grave need for the good influence of the sisters in such activities and that the sisters who are not dedicating themselves in this manner would not be responding to their vocation which obligates them to every type of sacrifice. (29)

On paper, her words seemed the strongest she had ever written, perhaps even harsh. But her conscience demanded no less. More than anything, Angela had longed to be with the sisters in Cracow, to roll up her sleeves once again and join in their acts of mercy. It was second nature for her to open her heart in genuine compassion to the suffering, to the children, and to those who were abandoned. It was as if Angela were starting at the beginning once again, as if the community had never fought the battle between good works and good prayers. She traveled against long-standing social and ecclesial traditions. Contemplative life weighed in a balance against the new lifestyle she and her sisters were to adopt -- work and prayer. The scales were tipped again. For the sake of their very existence, the sisters had to see that there was no difference between the two, and Angela prayed that she be granted the strength to do it all over once again.

This time the challenge was greater; the sisters were entrenched. They had been left on their own since the suppression and readily felt the security of the cloister walls. Behind them, they had nothing to fear; they could not be hunted down if they kept to their own prayers and private acts of kindness. The alleys and byways no longer called to their hearts, and they were deaf to the song of their patrons, Francis and Vincent, "come rebuild my church," "the world will be your cloister . . ." With all good intentions, they were on the verge of walling themselves back inside. If nothing else was certain, Angela resolved it would not happen. The Constitutions would safeguard their lifestyle, and she threw herself into insuring they be completed as soon as possible.

Dr. Dietl and his assistant Dr. Joseph Szewczyk both agreed that Angela's health had significantly improved during her stay at the health resort. She suffered from acute anemia and gastric disorders, but the

relative calm, rest, and proper diet had begun the healing process. Both physicians marveled that the woman was still alive, and Angela was warned that she could not afford to disregard her health. At the end of the prescribed treatments, Dr. Dietl met with Angela and decided that, although she was better, she could not be discharged. Further therapy was necessary. He recommended that she spend several weeks in Krynica; there doctors would maintain the treatments and initiate mineral baths.

Angela did not object to the doctor's advice but insisted that she first return to Cracow where she could attend to several matters. Dr. Dietl was nothing short of exasperated with his patient; yet he knew well enough that she would go only when she was ready. His protests ended after she assured him she would go to Krynica within a month.

Of all the issues facing the newly restored congregation, Angela was determined to resolve at least two: the transfer of the cloistered sisters and the completion of the Constitutions. Letters from Sr. Isabelle, who had been appointed superior in Lowicz, concerned her. Of late, it appeared the cloistered sisters assumed a certain air and demanded that the Bernardines grant them, as Isabelle insisted, indisputable rights. Undoubtedly, the small group of Felicians felt deserted; yet at all costs, they had to preserve harmony between the two communities until, God willing, circumstances were such that they too would be liberated. Angela knew their frustration and predicted disaster if Fr. Honorat did not intervene:

The sisters fail to remember that they are not in their own convent but are housed through the charity of other religious women with whom everything can be arranged with gentleness and humility and not coercion . . . I did anything I wanted to but slowly, by compromising, by asking for everything but not demanding anything impulsively. And I could in no way complain about the Bernardines. Never did the superior infringe on my authority . . . (30)

However, even as she wrote the words, Angela empathized with her cloistered daughters. Not only were they cut off from the dynamic growth of the community in Cracow, they were doomed to extinction in Lowicz. The edict of suppression emphatically forbade them to accept any new members. They were a dying community, and to all appearances she had

forsaken them. How could they know she worked feverishly to bring them home? Angela prayed that time would resolve the hurt, the misunderstanding; for now, all she could do was continue her efforts on their behalf.

The situation turned even more disastrous when Fr. Honorat sent them a version of a constitution whereby they would follow the Third Order Rule. The cloistered sisters expected to live according to the Second Rule of the Poor Clares. Angela shook her head sadly, how frail human nature was. As usual, it was she who was obliged to tell Fr. Honorat of the latest dispute:

. . . I am attaching Sr. Isabelle's letter from which you can learn what an unfavorable impression the proposal of adopting the Third Rule made on the cloistered sisters. I could foresee all this since I know their dispositions and their desires. It is too bad that you prematurely revealed your intentions for the future of the group. They should have been left in uncertainty until there was devised some method of stabilizing their existence . . . Assessing their strengths, both physical and moral, I am sure they would not have been able to observe all that the Second Rule requires . . . It seemed to me that the time had not yet come to open their eyes to this fact; however, to help them keep up their spirit, it was necessary for a time to tolerate their weakness. (31)

Although problems plagued the cloistered branch, Angela had no intention of abandoning them. Consequently, she was puzzled when Fr. Honorat indicated that a cloister be established in Cracow. Though the idea did not surprise her, the notion that it would be a group other than those in Lowicz confused her. Admittedly, she herself agreed with him that it was not feasible to bring the cloistered sisters to Cracow at the present time. Conditions did not warrant it:

. . . the town demands of us an active apostolate, dedicated to works of mercy. They would probably be opposed to contemplative life, and would not accept a greater number of sisters, all the more that we cannot vouch for sufficient funds for our upkeep. They would consider us

an added burden to the town and this could cause an uproar and even greater prejudice as well as discouragement. (32)

Perhaps, Fr. Honorat had misunderstood her; nonetheless, Angela continued to hope and pray that eventually the congregation would bring the cloistered sisters back to itself. And yet, as she studied the issue and consulted various political circles, Angela realized her greatest fear could hold true, that Russian authorities might never allow the sisters to leave Lowicz.

While circumstances remained deadlocked, Angela treasured one hope, an alternative. Mother Veronica, her cousin Clothilde, was the perfect candidate to guide the cloistered Felicians. As long as they had to remain in Lowicz, certainly Veronica would be their consolation and joy. Up to the present, Veronica had rejected all attempts Angela and Fr. Honorat made in having her take the responsibility for the cloistered branch, even though the sisters themselves wanted her and had elected her their superior. Hope remained in that Veronica initially agreed to Fr. Honorat's proposal that she make a novitiate with the Capuchin sisters in Rome. After this training, she would assume leadership in the cloistered group. In the meantime, Angela would continue attempts to transfer the sisters.

Frustration was the only result of their efforts. Veronica did go to Rome but declined the offer to make the Capuchin novitiate. True to her promise to Angela, however, she did make several efforts to establish a residence for the cloistered sisters. One possibility was to move them to Lwow in the Austrian sector. Disappointment over Veronica's refusal to join the cloistered Felicians abruptly turned to grief when she decided to remain in Rome and not return at all.

Alone in her room, Angela freely surrendered to anguished tears. Mother Veronica was dearer to her than her own blood sisters; the two of them had grown up together, shared dreams and plans. Painfully aware that it was more than distance which now separated them, Angela told herself that she had lost Veronica's trust. Both cousins realized it was neither one's fault that they had grown apart, that Angela not Veronica had been selected for the cloister long ago in Warsaw. But the bond between them had irrevocably dissolved; where they had been one in heart and hope, now

they walked alone. Life held regrets; Angela wondered what she would or could have done differently if time reversed itself. It was little comfort to realize that most probably she would still have followed where the Lord called her.

Messengers continued to carry letters back and forth across the Russian and Austrian borders. Throughout August, Angela studied drafts of the Constitutions which Fr. Honorat sent, and they seemed no further in the process than when they first began. However, back in Cracow new concerns demanded her attention. Assigned to locate a site for a new motherhouse, Mother Anna managed to secure property in Cracow's suburbs at a fair price. The real estate was situated at the intersection of Smolensk Street near the Rudawa River, and the present manor was once the bishop's residence. Major construction was definitely required, but the prospect was more than Angela and the sisters could have hoped for. In addition to the manor, there were stables, an orchard, and a guest house on the property.

The Felicians received a proposal of 22,000 florins for the estate. Angela and her council sat around the table and went over the figures a final time. With nostalgia Angela recalled her very first house-hunting days. It seemed the congregation moved in cycles, and they were back to finding larger quarters to house her companions and their work. But the simple days were gone forever. Angela sighed as she recalled how often she, Gabriella Wrotnowska, and Veronica climbed up to second floor garrets and rented two room flats. Now she dealt with contracts, and deeds, and lawyers.

Ironically, the Felicians were able to consider purchasing the real estate on Smolensk Street through the czar's financial resources. In 1864, at the time of the suppression, each sister received an indemnity of 300 rubles from the Russian government; throughout the year, upon the advice of various legal and financial experts and friends, the sisters had forwarded that "inheritance" to Cracow for investment. The sisters' indemnity, along with several donations and small loans, brought the Felicians close to a settlement. Learning of the opportunity, several sisters from affluent families, including Mother Anna, convinced Angela and Fr. Honorat to use their dowries to make up the difference and purchase the property. On November 21, 1866, seven months after Angela's arrival in Cracow and

less than three years after the Russian minister Czerkaski believed he had obliterated the religious women's existence, the temporary convent on Smolensk Street was dedicated.

The following months were blessed as the sisters' reputation and work gained recognition. Centers were established in various cities, and gradually the sisters realized that their ministry required fundamental change. In Warsaw, the sisters were called to work vigorously with the peasants. Learning to read and write took place wherever space was available, even outdoors in the fields. Attention was paid to catechism, domestic arts and handwork which could raise monies. Circumstances were far different in Cracow. Centers thrived in structured settings, and the sisters dealt with academic-based curricula. Angela's quick foresight outlined an immediate, basic academic training for the sisters and pursuit of higher education for sisters who had the aptitude for university study.

On a more personal note, one concern increased Angela's anxiety as the months passed. Her original passport was temporary and, in fact, inadvertently destroyed by Sr. Cherubim who, helping to clear correspondence, accidentally tore it. All that remained was the serial number which Elfrida Zamojska used to procure another three month extension for Angela. Several times Angela had managed to slip into Lowicz to visit the cloistered sisters; however, this enterprise was an adventure all its own. Technically, Angela and Joseph were considered fugitives by the Russian authorities and could no longer safely enter the town as she informed Fr. Honorat:

I would probably encounter difficulty in returning to the cloister because the civil authorities at Lowicz are very much on my heels. In fact, Isabelle wrote that the official there just recently found out about my absence from Lowicz. He questioned how I got my passport because he claims that it is not given directly to the person and besides, there is no record of it in Lowicz. He asked what spa I visited, where I was staying and what I was doing. He was at the cloister twice and said that the matter was not closed. The sisters were to have an inspection. The government does not any longer pay a pension for me or for Joseph; they also plan to review the entire period of our absence. What their intentions are in my regard I

do not know. It can only be surmised that I would be subjected to no small trouble on my return . . . (33)

Angela did not have an Austrian passport which became increasingly more difficult to obtain. Now the political atmosphere in Lowicz convinced her that she could no longer procrastinate; therefore, without delay she filed for Austrian citizenship. She was not certain how Fr. Honorat would react; while he had granted permission for her to live in Cracow, he intended a temporary arrangement. Procrastination was a fault; Angela knew she had to settle the issue once for all. Her heart was with the second choir, the active sisters, and the developing community of Cracow fulfilled the initial goals and purpose which she strived to create early in Warsaw. Going back to Lowicz would not be her choice, but neither would it be her decision. As always, she demanded that God's will be done; for her Fr. Honorat was the instrument of that divine will. Within days her letter was written and sent to Zakroczym; now she awaited an answer.

Each afternoon, as Mother Joseph delivered the day's mail, Angela could barely breathe. Then one afternoon she recognized Honorat's writing. Joseph realized the significance of the unopened letter which Angela placed on the table beside the bed. She embraced Angela, told her she would be waiting and then left. As soon as the door shut behind Joseph, Angela tore the envelope open. Moments of anxiety, years of struggle and disappointment faded like crystal frost before the rising sun. Cracow was Angela's home.

Fr. Honorat's only question was when and where Angela would renew her vows. Sure that Mother Joseph was probably just beyond the door, too concerned and curious to go too far without learning Honorat's response, Angela called for her. She was to renew her vows in Cracow. Mother Joseph, tears brimming, followed Angela to her desk:

You know well, Father, that from the beginning when God assigned you to me as my director, from the moment I entrusted my soul to you, I believed that whatever you decided concerning me was God's Will. Although at times I did not comprehend God's designs and I struggled; although I had to give up my preferences almost constantly and live

contrary to my nature, I fulfilled all that you demanded of me, never choosing for myself either the mode of life or the means of perfection. Indeed, I would like to remain docile to you to the end of my life and to accept everything, even though it should cost me very much. Therefore I repeat again: Let it be unto me, my Father, according to your will. I am ready to pronounce annual vows and to live with the [active sisters] on the day you designate; however, if I may be given a choice, I would select the feast of the Presentation of our Blessed Lady. That day is very important to me . . . (34)

Angela hoped she would not push her luck too far, but in Lowicz she had left behind an inheritance she refused to part with. This seemed the most appropriate time to bring the matter to Honorat's attention:

Father, I beg your permission to restore to me from the cloister the picture of our Beloved Blessed Mother Foundress. Since I cannot have the pleasure of making my vows into your hands, let me at least have the joy of making them before that image. Please give it to me as a nuptial gift. That image ought to be where I am. That is why it was in the cloister since I was there for some time. If it can be recognized that I have some rights, then I have an indisputable right to that picture. At the very foundation of the Congregation, Gabriella Wrotnowska gave me that picture and since it was not framed, I obtained the frame from an old portrait of my grandmother . . . That picture was witness to our dedicated life of service to others so it rightfully belongs to us. To me it is so very precious! My greatest desire is to pray before it again and to make my vows before it. (35)

Several weeks later, after a visit to the sisters in Lowicz, Mother Anna presented Angela with a large, carefully wrapped parcel. The sisters celebrated that evening; the picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa, whom Angela called foundress and superior, finally rested in their midst. Angela beamed; she told them that their heavenly Mother would make one more trip, in procession to their new motherhouse on Smolensk Street.

No sooner was the Smolensk Street property blessed than the blueprints for a new motherhouse were also drafted. Construction required major renovations and in some areas starting from scratch. Mother Anna continued arranging the finances, but Angela was to oversee the entire project in addition to her roles as superior general and spiritual mother. Despite the schedule, no task seemed impossible.

However, this happy stride was broken without warning almost two and a half months later by news from Warsaw. Joseph Truszkowski, Angela's father, died on February 11, 1867. Joy was often found in unexpected places. To experience the comfort of God's warmth and love despite apparent hardships, discouragement, dismay, and crosses took heroic effort. Angela had not seen her father since she left Warsaw. Her family did visit, and she kept in close contact through correspondence. There had been no cause for concern. Her father's health was poor; but certainly, he was not in any danger.

The letter from Warsaw lay crumpled on the floor. How often had Angela interceded with Fr. Honorat on behalf of a sister whose parents were ill or dying; how often had she herself permitted a sister to attend funeral services for her family members? Was it a cross or a blessing that she had been denied a precious leave-taking: the vigil at her father's bedside, the need to comfort her mother, and the time to say farewell? Still, he had died peacefully; the message was clearly underscored in the letter. Her mother's words rang true -- be at peace and rejoice for he lives eternally in the Hearts of Jesus and His Blessed Mother. Before evening prayers Angela decided to write Fr. Honorat; it would be best that he receive the news from her. Although her mourning would be solitary and silent, there was something she could ask for; yes, she would offer thanks for this bittersweet gift:

At this time I do need a prayer. While I am thanking for myself, I beg a similar offering for the soul of my father who died on the eleventh of this month, strengthened with the Sacraments, thank God. The funeral took place on my feastday. Is it not true, Father that only Jesus could give me such a gift? I should not be too surprised because all the greater feasts are always marked for me with heavier

crosses. Throughout the novena before the feast of St. Angela, I asked the Blessed Mother for some special gift, but I did not expect this one. It must be the best one that pleased the Lord to give me. I trust that you and Father Procopius will remember his soul and will commend him to the other Fathers as well. On the vigil of his death, not knowing that he was dying, I enrolled him in the Society of the Heart of Mary. (36)

On May 4, 1867, Fr. Lawrence Oprzedka blessed the cornerstone of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Motherhouse on Smolensk Street. It had not taken long for Angela and her sisters to decide upon a name for their new residence. Under the title of the Immaculate Heart, Mary had been their protection and source of unity. She had brought them through the isolation and heartache of the suppression, and at this treasured moment, as the Felicians embarked upon a new era, they would do so in her honor. There had been days of severe trial, but Angela and the congregation endured. Faith was their salvation, yet little did Angela realize that her greatest trials of faith were still to come.

It seemed to Angela that the summer passed too quickly this year and that the autumn frost arrived unexpectedly. When the news reached Cracow, Angela was likewise unprepared for Fr. Honorat's decision. Not when she was in the Warsaw cloister, nor when Fr. Szymanski named Sr. Cunegunda their first superior, not even when she was confined to Lowicz in what seemed permanent exile, did Angela feel so cut off from the work she began and the women who had joined her ranks.

The sisters had been summoned to the conference hall to hear the announcement: Angela was to resign her positions. As the sisters silently left the room Angela remained in her chair at the table. Mother Anna asked if she was well; would she come to chapel for evening prayer. Angela simply stared at the woman and told her to go on; she would follow later. Finally alone, Angela stood and went to the window. The few maple and oak trees in the garden had erupted into pale orange and deep scarlet. Perhaps, it was appropriate that change had come now, in the season preceding winter.

Angela could recall every word of her last conversation with Fr. Honorat. She had gone to Zakroczym in September to work on the

Constitutions and to discuss plans regarding the cloistered Felicians. Earlier that summer she had painstakingly prayed and concluded that she could no longer serve as the sisters' spiritual mother. It was a difficult decision. There was no question that her health was severely impaired; and consequently, she could not adequately fulfill her responsibilities. Undeniably, the sisters were patient with her, yet she could no longer hold a conversation unless a sister shouted directly into the ear horn Angela held close. Privacy was all but lost when she spoke to them. She could not even hear herself when she spoke and failed to judge how loud her own conversation was.

Moreover, the headaches did not subside even though she had returned to Krynica twice. Fainting spells were commonplace, and often she could not tolerate food of any sort. Forty-four-years-old, physically drained, and without hope of a permanent cure, Angela believed she was a burden to the congregation; she consequently insisted that Fr. Honorat accept her resignation. Although he gave no indication, Angela assumed he would consider her request and honor it. The time had come. Angela planned to remain in Zakroczym until she heard father's answer; when he hesitated to send the congregation the news and schedule elections to fill her positions, she pressed the issue:

I am reminding you about the letter which you promised regarding the election of a superior general and spiritual mother. If I had it before noon, I could have copied it and (it) could have gone to Warsaw by boat even today. Father, please be so kind and write firmly, as if binding under obedience, that the sisters not raise any objections and not waste any time. (37)

Mother Anna had read Father's letter which detailed the reasons for Angela's resignation to the entire community. Silence had pervaded; unable to hear it, Angela sensed it. Several sisters attempted a smile in her direction, a gesture of comfort; others just stared straight ahead. It was what Angela had asked for; and yet, she did not expect the utter emptiness which followed the announcement. Somehow she envisioned maintaining some sort of active role; this was like the aftershock of a staged tragedy.

Even though the audience is fully aware of the outcome, hope still lingers that events and circumstances will change and that the heroine will not perish. Chilled as a sudden gust scattered the fallen leaves and bowed the branches, Angela closed the lattice but remained at the window. Change, indeed, was coming, and it was good. She begged God only to send her another spring.

On October 18, 1869, Mother Anna assumed Angela's position as superior general, and Sr. Hedwig became the superior of the motherhouse. At the same election Mother Magdalen, who was still in Warsaw, was chosen as the sisters' spiritual mother. The transition required that Angela remain involved with the congregation's affairs, yet gradually her tasks decreased. Travel was no longer a political liability for her since she became an Austrian citizen in March of 1868 and received a passport. A visit to Fr. Honorat, the sisters in Lowicz, and Czestochowa was scheduled a month later. Angela hoped to include Warsaw in her itinerary, but the trip became unnecessary. After an exile of more than five years in Warsaw, Mother Magdalen achieved the impossible. Under her direction and discretion, the dispersed sisters secured passports and had been reunited in Cracow; her task completed, she herself could now go home.

Angela fully intended to sit aboard the wagon bound for the train station. The sisters, fearing she would have a relapse from severe bouts of anemia and colitis, urged her to wait for Magdalen at the convent. Angela was determined to be at the train station; however, in the end she relented. Happy memories of her own arrival motivated her insistence, and if anyone deserved her presence it was Magdalen. Relief was this Christmas' gift. Angela's concerns over the sisters' spiritual well-being lifted when she learned that Magdalen secured a passport and was actually on her way. It was one thing to resign; another not to worry. Her health declined rapidly; bedridden throughout the Christmas season, Angela did not transfer from Mikolajska Street to Smolensk when the convent was blessed on December 23. The Felicians' new dwelling, the Bethlehem inn which she had long ago prayed for, was a reality. Ironically, she was not able to celebrate Christmas there. Though she rarely shared her fears, she related them to her new spiritual mother:

Dear Mother, please support me with prayer, that I may know how to bear with merit the cross of illness which presses down on me ever more heavily, which makes itself felt ever more painfully so that I do not have a day or even an hour free from pain. In addition, my deafness progresses so rapidly that you will have trouble with me, Mother, because you may have to have a conference with your spiritual daughter on paper. If only my spirits were not so low, but unfortunately, they grow heavier. (38)

Indeed, when Mother Magdalen arrived just after the new year, on January 5, 1870, she sat next to Angela with pen and paper before her. Eventually, the two women would manage with lip-reading and gestures, but that came only with time and trust as their relationship grew dearer. Fifteen days after Magdalen's arrival, Angela was well enough to transfer to the convent on Smolensk and requested Fr. Honorat's blessing: "*so that in this new place I may lead a new life, that is, that I begin serving the Lord.*" (39)

1869 had marked the opening of the First Vatican Council, a meeting of the world's cardinals that would regulate the vision and direction of the Church. A year into the cardinals' deliberations, rumors circulated that congregations which were not approved by the Holy See would be disbanded and their members asked to enter religious orders already sanctioned. The Felicians regarded the warning with utmost seriousness, and Angela confronted Fr. Honorat:

. . . I once again turn to you with this plea, even though I have no longer the right to make it, that you do not permit any further delay in seeking approval for our Constitutions. The priests who are sympathetic to us are urging us by insisting that this is the best time (during the Council); yet, we are continually correcting and discussing and doing nothing about receiving the approbation of the Church. What will we do if the Church dissolves us? . . . Forgive me, father, for my insistence in pleading for your effort to have the Constitutions approved. I do this not because I have a right to it, but I let my attachment to the congregation be my excuse. If you only knew how much I desire it and how it constantly occupies my mind . . . (40)

She did not wait long for a reply. Upon the request of Mother Anna, Mother Magdalen, and Fr. Honorat, Angela devoted her time to personally revising the drafts of the Constitutions.

Quietly, Angela slipped into a solitary world; without notice, the years also ran their course. Mother Anna completed Angela's term as superior general, and the congregation readied itself for new leadership. Mother Magdalen clearly won the hearts of her spiritual daughters, including Angela's; and her election in July 1871 as superior general was no surprise. In addition to excitement generated by the elections, news of an unexpected blessing reached Cracow. Angela had always hoped that the cloistered sisters would be reunited with the congregation. When it became obvious that they would not be allowed to leave the Russian sector, she sought alternatives to their continued residence with the Bernardine sisters in Lowicz. Angela enlisted the influence of several Warsaw families who supported the Felicians' cause and asked Sr. Bronislava, who secured the Austrian approval of the congregation, to resume her role as diplomat. From St. Petersburg the sister brought word that the czar, Alexander II, rescinded the edict against the cloistered Felicians insofar that he permitted them to establish their own residence in Przasnysz on the outskirts of Warsaw.

The dim flicker of a single candle shone before the face of the Crucified Christ. Night upon endless night Angela lay prostrate before the image; the midnight silence broken only by her stifled weeping. Her life had settled into a familiar routine; the initial transition was awkward, but graciously she stepped far back into the shadows and allowed Mother Magdalen full authority. Prayer had always been her salvation. Granted, she had been unable to spend long hours in the chapel as some, especially during those early hectic years when she barely managed to be with the community for the morning and evening breviary let alone her meditation and devotions. Illness had also confined her to the private sanctuary of her own room. Yet without grave reason, she never neglected daily Mass and created as many occasions as possible for the sisters and herself to receive communion. (41) Nevertheless, despite all the activity of those first busy years, all the hours of work, meetings, and planning, a consciousness of Divine Presence permeated Angela's world. A moment of awareness was

all that was necessary to bring her before her Lord; to lift her heart to Him was to instantly discover a sense of the Sacred within her.

Then came a restlessness. Angela continued to pray, but a vast emptiness swallowed her. It was as if she had suddenly lost a beloved child and wandered again and again to sit beside an empty cradle. Where there was once an overpowering sense of peace, even in light of chaos and ruin, now in prosperity and calm there lingered nothing but a pervasive, hollow ache. Illness remained and threatened her life; undeniably, the very human terror of death stalked her. But it was no longer death that she feared most; it was damnation. Could she have, as scripture foretold, gained everything and lost her soul?

Confessors assured Angela that her inability to sense God's presence, the loss she experienced in prayer, and her doubts of personal salvation were all but a stage of her soul's growth. Painfully, this development spanned two years of sleepless nights during which she begged God to fill her heart once more with His love. Every waking moment was tinged with hopelessness. Abandonment pervaded the day's hours; time in the garden or with the sisters was but a heightened reminder of the God who no longer walked with her and whose grace and favor she had lost. This "night of the soul" devastated her beyond the power of any natural illness. And when her trial ended, close to 1874, she like the patriarch Jacob, who had wrestled with Yahweh, found hope in the hushed, determined voice of the Creator Father, in the unexpected comfort after chaos. The experience affected her profoundly, and she would inevitably relive its moments throughout the remainder of her life. Yet her faith, as precious as fire-tried gold, had in its genuineness found her worthy and would lead to the praise, glory and honor of God Himself. (42)

No one realized the extent of Angela's anguish. In her waking hours she had longed for escape, yet she knew she could not despair. Moreover, she not only feared for her own soul but was terrified that in some way her heart's apathy and doubts would endanger the congregation. This plight, these cruel days, she braved alone. True, she had written often to Fr. Honorat and several sisters, but she maintained a visible, spirited presence. Though insisting she remain in the background, Angela's concern did not waver. Mother Magdalen spent long hours with her, often at the bedside, discussing the sisters' assignments and the congregation's affairs. The

superior urged Angela to make use of the convent gardens, even to take her rest periods outdoors when she was able. It was a suggestion that proved miraculous.

Angela had never worked the earth, planted seed in the depths of the darkened soil, nurtured it, and waited for its growth. The task was appealing. She often sat during early afternoons and watched the sisters with the children in the courtyard. Spring bloomed fully and fragranced the air. The breeze through the open shutters was warm and drew Angela to the window. Looking down, she longed to share in the soundless merriment that scrambled below. She watched birds perched on nearby tree limbs; the silence hurt. But the sight of new buds in the furrowed garden rows and in procession along the greenhouse tables was exhilarating. It made her muted world useful; the work of her hands again brought forth life. Like the thawing earth, her heart reached forth for warmth and new light. New blessings were just on the horizon.

Although she feared the day would never come, Angela spent most of the morning confirming details. The Constitutions were completed and on their way to Rome with her hand-picked messengers. Hands trembling, Angela traced a cross upon the foreheads of Mothers Magdalen and Anna. She could not hold back her joy. In chapel, before all the sisters, Angela had lifted the parcel, kissed it tenderly and placed it in Magdalen's hands. The happiness was tangible. Years of frustration, revisions, drafts, discussion, compromise, and love were bound among the finished pages of the Constitutions. The document would be presented to the Sacred Congregation for Religious and, God willing, the Felicians would receive the Church's approval and blessing. In Magdalen's absence, Mother Joseph would assume her duties; she told the two Felicians to hurry home. Everyone knew they would not return without long awaited news.

Pope Pius IX accepted the Sacred Congregation's report concerning the Felician's Constitution on May 14 and granted his approval; however, certain issues required revision. The first stage in the process was complete; the Holy See officially recognized the congregation and issued a decree of praise. At this point, the two Felicians returned with the document to Cracow, to the Spirit's guidance and Angela's further inspiration. Other grace-filled moments soon followed.

When she returned from Rome, Mother Magdalen found a letter waiting. Uncertain what Angela would do with this new proposal, she took it to the foundress' room. Once before Angela had enthusiastically pursued a request for sisters from America. Her hope quickened, but Angela was practical. Detailed information regarding the sisters' security and activities, as well as the safeguards for their spiritual development, had not come forth, and the project dissolved. Now, Fr. Joseph Dabrowski, a nephew to Sr. Wenceslaus, presented a request for sisters to work with Polish immigrants in Wisconsin and Michigan. The priest had offered Mass in the Smolensk Street chapel, and Angela remembered the young man well. A chapter was to convene in August of that year; Angela was confident that the application would be well researched, presented, and accepted. She believed that, this time, her daughters would be missionaries.

The entire household of sisters gathered round in the foyer of the convent; Mother Monica Sybilski, Sister Wenceslaus Zubrzycka, Mother Cajetan Jankiewicz, Sister Vincent Kalva and Sister Rafaela Swozenowska knelt before Angela and Magdalen. Their luggage had already been secured in the wagons, and it was time for bidding farewell. All three, Angela, Magdalen, and Anna, could not help but recall a similar scene in Warsaw so long ago, but for the present, joy mingled with their tears. It was true; most probably they would not see these sisters again. The conditions in America, especially the frontier, merited courage beyond the heroic. Angela told her daughters to be strong, to love without ever looking back, to go even where they might not be wanted. Fr. Dabrowski did not hide the fact that hardship awaited whoever came. Still, they were about to begin a wondrous voyage, and they went forever with her love and blessing. Nearly a month later, on November 20, 1874, the five reached Polonia, Wisconsin. On both sides of the Atlantic, the sisters celebrated their congregational founding the next day.

Winters, springs, summers, and autumns followed close upon each other; the daily cycle of living and dying continued its pace. Angela waited for Magdalen's arrival; the superior asked Mother Joseph if Angela was up to company. Magdalen entered the bedroom and, pulling a chair close beside Angela, was careful to adjust its angle so that she could face her and allow Angela to read her lips. She also brought paper just in case. Magdalen leaned over to admire the chasuble Angela embroidered, a

garland of dogwood set against a cross of various shades, intricate and elegantly beautiful. Angela occupied the hours she could not spend in the garden making vestments and altar linens; furthermore, if she were not on her knees then likely she could be found arranging the chapel flowers. Several times, Mothers Magdalen or Anna tried to assign a postulant to help with the garden work; each time they found the younger sister sent on an errand or to chapel, or treated to a portion of Angela's meager possessions or even food.

Magdalen pointed to the chasuble on Angela's knees; she was told it was for the sisters in America. Mother Monica wrote that the complex had been burnt again by natives of the area. Everything had to be replaced. The sisters did not know where to purchase the linen, and when they requested that Magdalen provide at least several pieces, she shared the information with Angela. The American province would not only have the materials, but as Angela explained, something to remind them of her. It was little that she could give them. Magdalen began to disagree but stopped; Angela would simply brush aside her protest.

If only she could convince Angela how deeply honored the American sisters would be to receive that embroidered vestment; how beloved, indeed, she was to the community who in the recent past moved forward too often oblivious of her. Hidden in the garden, alone in the chapel during hours of adoration, bound to her sickbed, Angela appeared an outcast in the world she founded. Nevertheless, even in retirement, she put the congregation's needs before her own. It was no small accomplishment in 1882 when Angela procured the right of perpetual adoration from the Holy See. The practice was not common, yet Angela's profound love of the Eucharistic Lord and her desire to imbue her sisters with an appreciation for adoration drove her through endless hours of petitions, rejections, and appeals. A decade later, as the sisters savored the sweetness and honor of God's Eucharistic Presence always in their midst, how often did they acknowledge the woman responsible for it? Regretfully, Magdalen watched as postulants and young sisters hurried past Angela; to be sure they were courteous, solicitous to her needs, but they did not have the exquisite opportunity of knowing the woman who carried their hearts in her own.

It was this concern, that the community itself might forget the life Angela gave it, which convinced Magdalen and her council to request from

the Holy See a rare privilege. As she sat beside Angela, Magdalen unrolled a parchment and handed it to her. The Holy Father received the congregation's petition and mandated that Mother Mary Angela, Sophia Truszkowska, foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Felix, retain her right, responsibility, and honor to vote in all chapters and matters concerning the welfare of the congregation for her entire lifetime. Angela merely nodded a smile; so be it.

The flowers during the spring and early summer of 1899 had been the loveliest Angela hoped for. Even though she had spent very little time outdoors, Mother Anna had assigned another sister to do the planting and watering, Angela was proud of the results. The young sister who came up the walk with her had arms filled with roses of every hue. She clumsily reached out a hand as if to steady Angela and was amazed at the older sister's energy. Angela allowed the gesture and followed behind.

It was evident that the future days were already counted. Doctors, months ago, confirmed that she was in the advanced stages of cancer, but Angela had not permitted them to reveal the worst of her physical condition. Yet, the days grew tiresome; pain was ever constant, and her greatest fear was that she would leave the earth before the congregation received official approbation by the Holy See. The death of Pius IX and the succession of Pope Leo XIII no doubt delayed the process; however, the Constitutions were still not approved. News from Rome was encouraging, the Sacred Congregation for Religious was favorable, yet no official word came.

Although she struggled to continue her work, Angela finally relented. Mothers Joseph, Anna and Magdalen pleaded that she let them make her final days as comfortable as possible. Angela would not hear of a cushioned bed which doctors recommended; her own was sufficient. But, yes, she would accept their kindness. Anna immediately had a special tunic sewn, lined with soft cotton to prevent the coarse material from irritating the tumors on Angela's breasts. Joseph rarely left the room, while Magdalen was not more than a call away. In July, the long delayed proclamation joyously made its way to Cracow. Rome had accepted its daughters; Leo XIII approved the congregation and, by Canon Law, its Constitutions for seven years. That September, John Cardinal Puzyna held Angela's frail hands in his own; then ever so gently, he placed the first,

official copy of the approved Constitutions in them. A photographer had been summoned to record the historic event. Unable to stand or sit on her own, Angela was carried outdoors to a prepared setting. She had suffered a stroke, and the tumors on her head were visible through the black veil. She had submitted to the photograph only when Magdalen pleaded that the American sisters desired the picture. The woman realized that Angela would not refuse these daughters whom she had never seen.

Her last official task completed, Angela was taken back to her room. On the way, she pointed in the direction of the chapel. The visit was brief, yet it was a comfort. Her life had come full circle; peace was a gift of God, and Angela opened her heart to its fullness. The feast of St. Francis, October 4, 1899, marked Angela's last confession; realizing she was too weak to speak or write, the confessor accepted her unspoken words and offered her the compassion and mercy of a caring father. One last request was eagerly granted -- to see the sisters. As each sister took her turn to kneel before the dying foundress, kiss her hands, and bid farewell, she was not aware of the silent blessing Angela bestowed upon her. Mornings and evenings mingled; time flowed gently, and Angela waited for her God to come.

Early on the morning of October 10, Angela's physician summoned Magdalen; death was imminent. Visiting briefly, Magdalen told Mother Joseph to call her at once if Angela's condition changed even slightly. She was expecting the knock on her door before Joseph put her hand to it. Both left the room and rushed down the hallway.

Fully aware that Magdalen and Anna were there beside her, Angela looked for Joseph. Suddenly amazed, she strained to listen; how could she possibly have managed to hear them? Angela opened her eyes and scanned the room. Without doubt, the rosary was being said, her hand rested in someone's; there was a rustle in the room as shadows moved along the walls. She would want to remember this moment, the faces of those whom she loved. The image burned in her mind, with others of Warsaw, and Lowicz, and Cracow. There would always be a time to leave, but not forever. She had learned that; above all, she knew they would meet again. The movement and the hushed voices she heard had stopped; all was silent once more. Sighing deeply, as one who has traveled hard and far, Angela longed for rest. Lying back, she nestled her head into the soft folds of the

pillows Joseph propped behind her. The pain somehow floated above and beyond her; she was prepared to go home, and she surrendered herself to the waiting arms of her God and Father.

ENDNOTES

1. Details of Sophia Camille Truskowska's birth and baptism are based upon certificated found in Sr. Maria Bronisława Dmowska's text *Zalozycielka Zgromadzenia Siostr Felicjanek* (1825-1899). Buffalo: Congregation of Felician Sisters, 1949.

2. Sr. Mary Fidelia Chmiel, CSSF. *The Heart of Mother Angela: Mother Mary Angela Truskowska and the Felician Sisters against the backdrop of Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in Poland*, a translation and adaptation of *Angela Truszkowska: I Zgromadzenie SS. Felicjanek na tle Dziejow Mysli Religijnej w Polsce XIX w.* by Artut Gorski (Pittsburgh: The Shemco Corporation, 1986), p. 17.

3. Dmowska, p. 259.

4. Mother Mary Angela Truskowska, *Selected Writings: Letters to Fr. Honorat Kozminski*, Capuchin, vol. 2, part 1, trans. Sr. Mary Amelia Domarecka and Sr. Mary Lucentia Stasko (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1983), p. 36.

5. Chmiel, p. 32.

6. Truskowska, vol. 2, 1, p. 36.

7. Maria Winowska, *Go Repair My House*, trans. Claire Quintal (Lodi, New Jersey: Congregation of the Sisters of St. Felix, 1976), p. 18.

8. Truskowska, vol. 2, 1, pp. 16-21.

9. Detailed information regarding the historical and political events described throughout this work are based upon the following sources:

Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, Volume II -1795 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

R.F. Leslie, *Reform and Insurrection in Russian Poland*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1963)

Peter Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918. A History of East Central Europe Volume VII* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974)

10. Chmiel. p. 45.
11. Mother Mary Angela Truszkowska, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, trans. Sr. Mary Viterbia Kozłowska (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1984) pp. 152-155.
12. Mother Mary Angela Truszkowska, *Selected Writings: Letters to the Sisters*, vol. 1, trans. Sr. Mary Amelia Domarecka (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 109-110.
13. Refer to Truszkowska, vol. 2, 1, p. 56.
14. Ibid., pp. 55-56.
15. Ibid., p. 58.
16. Winowska, pp. 106-109.
17. Ibid., p. 118.
18. Truszkowska, vol. 2, 1, p. 67.
19. Ibid., p. 78.
20. Ibid., p. 112.
21. Ibid., p. 84.
22. Ibid., pp. 48-50.
23. Truszkowska, vol. 1, pp. 112, 146-148.
24. Detailed accounts of the sisters' activities during the Insurrection of 1863 are found in *Historja Zgromadzenia SS. Felicjanek na Podstawie Rekopisow*, czesc 1 (Milwaukee: Drukiem Nowin Polskich, 1924).
25. Truszkowska, vol. 1, pp. 138-139.
26. Dmowska, p. 230.
27. Fr. Honorat Kozminski, *Selected Circular Letters to the Felician Sisters, 1863-1909*, trans. Sr. Mary Dulcia Wierzbowski (Buffalo: Immaculate Heart of Mary Province, 1988), pp. 17-18.
28. Truszkowska, vol. 2, 1, pp. 148-49.
29. Ibid., pp. 154-55.
30. Ibid., pp. 157-58.
31. Ibid., pp. 159-60.
32. Ibid., p. 164.
33. Ibid., p. 246.
34. Ibid., p. 290.
35. Ibid., pp. 291-92.
36. Ibid., pp. 210-11.
37. Mother Mary Angela Truszkowska, *Selected Writings: Letters to Fr. Honorat Kozminski and Other Persons Outside the Congregation*, vol. 2, part 2,

trans. Sr. Celine Marie Malek (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1983), p. 175.

38. Truszkowska, vol. 1, p. 188.

39. Truszkowska, vol. 2, 2, p. 190.

40. Ibid., p. 196.

41. The practice of daily Eucharistic reception was not sanctioned by the Church. Mother Angela often secured the privilege for herself and the sisters by petitioning her confessors and Fr. Honorat.

42. I Peter 1:6-8.

Felician Sisters are located at:

Our Lady of Hope Provincial House

871 Mercer Road

Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania 15010-6815

On Earth As In Heaven

Sr Marie JoAnn Lewko, CSSF

On Earth As In Heaven is the life story of Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska, the foundress of the Felician Sisters. This brief and chronological biography recounts Mother Angela's personal history beginning with her family in Kalisz, Poland. It also provides a clear depiction of her involvement in the social, political and religious events of 19th century Poland. Excerpts from Mother Angela's letters to the sisters provide a glimpse of her total commitment to the growth of the Felician Congregation and the preservation of its active ministry. The author presents a simple, narrative style which highlights not only significant events but Mother Angela's vision and dreams for her spiritual daughters.

Sr. Marie JoAnn Lewko, CSSF is a member of Our Lady of the Angels Province, Enfield, Connecticut.

'Photo Credit: Sr. Mary Norberta Malinowski, CSSF

