Once again we visit Steinerberg, the cradle of the community, as we mark 169 years since the foundation by a group of young women. These women were all German, all came from southern Germany.

**Why did they go to Switzerland?** —because Germany would not allow new foundations.

**Why did they go to Steinerberg?** —because a young woman named Ursula made a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Anne in Steinerberg and though it the ideal place for a new foundation.

Ursula Behringer was born on April 12, 1821, in Wellendingen, a small town in the district of Rottweil, in Baden-Württemberg, Germany. The Steinerberg Diary tells her story, the little we know, in the eulogy given at her funeral.

Our dear good Sister M. Xaveria [Ursula’s religious name] deceased became the first Sister, the one who started our Community in the following manner:

Led by interior urging from God she went once to St. Anna on the Steinerberg to make a pilgrimage. She had been at this place of grace earlier and it pleased her so much. She had a childlike pious mind, and decided to live for God alone and to serve him. She did not know exactly how to carry this out, but because she constantly went around with this thought, the inner urge kept driving her to St. Anna. There would be the best opportunity for her to live a pious life because the place was so solitary, and the priests there were so pious, which she observed when she was there for the first time. In her enthusiasm she decided to go there in order to announce herself to the priests, suggesting to them an opportunity for young women who wished to live a solitary life for God alone in this place, and living together....

[S]he went to the Very Reverend Spiritual Fathers [Fathers Leonard Loser, the pastor, and Meinrad Holdner, the assistant] and asked them if it could be arranged that some young ladies could live together in this parish, to live entirely for God alone.
The Very Reverend Pastor said to her that it would be possible if they could be assured of a livelihood; he would be helpful to them in whatever way possible if they decided to make their foundation here. He told her at once that the sexton’s house would be serviceable for that. This news pleased her very much and then she prayerfully started for home and from there she went at once to our Very Reverend Spiritual Father [Fr. Karl Rolfus], who at that time was the Vicar at Friedensweiler, and related this story to him and said to him if we had six to seven hundred Gülder we could start a Convent at Steinerberg. She knew that he had many young women as penitents and thought for that reason he would be able to help that some might be inclined to go there.

**Digression: A Geography Lesson:**

The village or town of Steinerberg is located on the pilgrimage road to the Benedictine Abbey of Einsiedeln, site of the shrine of Our Lady of Einsiedeln, in the midst of the Glarus Alps.

Dominating the scene are two mountain peaks, Kleiner Mythen and south of it, Grosser Mythen, both not much over a mile high. Steinerberg lies on the sunny side of the Rossberg, a.k.a. Wildspitz, on a slope that ends at Lake Lauerz.
The two Mythen are east of Steinerberg and Lake Lauerz is to the south. It is not likely that the sisters could see the Lake from the Church or the convent, but climbing the Rossberg would give a marvelous view.

**Back to the Story:**

Ursula approached Fr. Rolfus before Mass in early summer, 1845, and gave him a note from Fr. Loser that stated that he was eager to start a convent in Steinerberg, but would need money to do so. Fr. Rolfus was not so enthusiastic; he had no means, nor did the young women for whom he served as confessor and spiritual director. However, if God willed it, they would find a way. So Fr. Rolfus wrote to the priests at St. Anne’s asking them to clarify their intention regarding starting a house for perpetual adoration. Upon receiving their reply, he himself went to Steinerberg and met with them. He took a round-about way to get there, first visiting the Precious Blood Fathers at Drei Aehren in the Alsace to learn their opinion about starting a convent devoted to the Precious Blood; they heartily approved. He made several more stops at established convents on the way, gathering information and receiving encouragement. Finally he came to the Benedictine Abbey of Einsiedeln, a pilgrimage site honoring the Blessed Mother. There he met Fr. Claudius Perrot, who years later would write the biography of Mother Theresa Weber. Fr. Perrot encouraged Fr. Rolfus to obtain some kind of commitment concerning the establishment of a convent before he left Steinerberg—which he did. The two Steinerberg priests and he made the decision the 20th of June, 1845 to establish a religious Community under the title of "Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood for the Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament."

The young women who were Fr. Rolfus’ directees were eager to begin. They had been promised a building owned by the parish and referred to sometimes as an inn [Fr. Rolfus’ term], a tavern, or a pension house which provided living quarters for the parish sexton’s family. The sexton had a home in the village and so it was no hardship for him to surrender the house for the use of the women. However—according to one account—twelve women from Glotterthal arrived in late August, a few weeks earlier than expected, to the joy of the parishioners and the embarrassment of the priests. The house was far from ready—the sexton had not even moved out yet. But since there was no other building available, they had to make do as boarders in cramped spaces.
Another account says that Ursula was the first to arrive and gives the date as September 5\textsuperscript{th}. The core of the new community had assembled by \textbf{September 8}, the feast of the Nativity of Mary, and that day has always been considered the \textbf{Foundation Day}. But the foundation was not completely secure yet.

Fr. Rolfus described the living arrangement: “As one entered the building the barroom was to the left [\textit{overseen by the sexton who was also the innkeeper}] and the convent to the right.” There were no beds in the convent; the women slept on the floor. They continued to wear the clothes they had worn at home. They had neither stove nor kitchen utensils, not even their own spoons. They had to borrow everything they needed. The sexton and his wife welcomed them to their table, so at least they didn’t go hungry.

The band of young women needed a leader, a superior, but this was not to be Ursula. Her eulogy as recorded in the \textit{Steinerberg Diary} [11-7-1847] states:

\begin{quote}
During the time that she was in the Convent she was always pious and virtuous: towards her co-Sisters she was always of service. When she saw that she could do a service for someone, she did it with heartfelt joy. Especially did she excel with the good example of humility. We never in the least noticed that she wanted to be preferred: on the contrary, she always wanted to be held as the least.
\end{quote}

Instead, Fr. Rolfus appointed as interim superior a woman, the oldest of the group, who had been a member of a community in Loewenberg (Switzerland). He did not know her well and it was an unfortunate choice. She preferred talking and drinking coffee to prayer and religious discipline. On October 10\textsuperscript{th} the community elected \textbf{Magdalena Weber}, our \textbf{Mother Theresa} to be their superior, even though she had only arrived at St. Anne on September 27\textsuperscript{th}. Mother Theresa led the community for three years until her death, August 28, 1848. Under her guidance, the sisters began perpetual adoration, two sisters assumed the role of teachers for the girls of the parish, and the community weathered severe persecutions along with poverty, sickness and death.

The sickness caused by the contaminated water source eventually took the lives of 26 sisters, including Mother Theresa. Ursula [Sr. Xaveria] is listed on the Memorial Plaque as the 17\textsuperscript{th} to die [\textit{age 26}]. She is buried in the cemetery in Steinerberg.

The \textit{Steinerberg Diary} records:

\begin{quote}
Very Reverend Confessor Pastor [Fr. Leonard Loser] had a short address in the church and told the people what this celebration meant, namely, that the Sister [Xaveria] was the first of the Sisters to come to Steinerberg. Through her the dear God provided that this Community took its beginning here. 
...[S]he was an instrument in the hand of God to help lay the foundation of this Spiritual Building.
\end{quote}

This Spiritual Building we now call the

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, Missouri.}
\end{quote}

\textbf{May Ursula (Sr. Xaveria) intercede for us.}

Sources of information for this newsletter

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