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Jan.5, St. John Neumann, C.Ss.R.

Gerelyn Hollingsworth | Jan. 5, 2010 NCR Today

"Cardinal Justin Rigali, Archbishop of Philadelphia, will commemorate the 150th anniversary of the death of Saint John Neumann [1] with a special feast day Mass at the National Shrine. Saint John Neumann was the fourth Bishop of Philadelphia from 1852 until his death on January 5, 1860 at the age of 48. As Bishop, he was the founder of Catholic education in America and the first to organize a Diocesan Catholic school system."

"Saint John Neumann's body lies beneath the altar at the National Shrine [2] which bears his name at Saint Peter the Apostle Church in Philadelphia."

Reading the introduction to the essay on the meaning of religious life [3] by Sr. Sandra Schneiders, IHM, and reading about the death of Mary Daly made it easy for me to decide on a book to recommend on the feast day of St. John Neumann: *Building Sisterhood: A Feminist History of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.* [4]

Try search terms like "Neumann", "hamburgers", "bathrobes", "mulatto", and "Rosalita".

I recommend Chapter 4, "The Roughest Kind of Prose", which explains "'acts of coding--covert expressions of disturbing or subversive ideas--a common phenomenon in the lives of women, who have so often been dominated, silenced, and marginalized by men'". (It is interesting, given the context, to see how dismissively the author of the chapter treats the writings of other women, including Karen Armstrong, in footnote 2.)

I recommend the Introduction and The Context sections by Margaret S. Thompson, who is mentioned by Sr. Schneiders in her essay.

I recommend "The Twentieth Century: Leocadia Delanty", starting on page 129; "Beyond Mentors: Formation Through Clothing", page 134; "Redefining Beauty", page 138; Chapter 6, on friendships; and Chapter 7, on illness.

Page 33 tells of the difficulties an earlier IHM author, Sr. Rosalita Kelly, faced when writing her book, [5] http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/3668001&referer=brief_results> *No Greater Service: The History of the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, Michigan, 1845-1945.* This fascinating book is not available to read online, but is easily found in libraries.

Sr. Kelly provides many details about the role played by Bishop Neumann in separating the Scranton, Pennsylvania, congregation from the Monroe, Michigan, congregation. (She also tells of the friendship between Mother Ruth Hankerd and Sister Miriam Raymo, who went out for hamburgers at a time when the other nuns observed a level of poverty so strict that they had no bathrobes.)

The treatment by Bishop Neumann and Bishop Peter Lefevere of Mother Theresa Maxis Duchemin, [6] a founding member of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, and co-founder, with Father Louis Gillet, of the Sisters,

Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, resulted in her years of exile with the Grey Nuns of Ottawa, Canada. The "strategic suppression of Maxis's legacy" meant that she was forgotten by the congregation she founded.

Reading and decoding all the available histories of a particular congregation and all of its offshoots can make it distressingly clear that the behavior of the hierarchy of today to the nuns of today is nothing new.

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