



Servant of God Sister Ida Peterfy, SDSH
(1922-2000)

foundress of the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Sister Ida was born on October 7, 1922, of a Hungarian Catholic family. A smiley and determined child, Ida knew God was close to her family. Although they were not overly pious, they knew Him, trusted Him and referred to Him in everyday events.



“Why did God give me the gift of Faith? Out of His 100% love, so that I would know Him. We cannot love someone we do not know, and therefore, I think that the gift of faith precedes any other gift. That gift was given to me very early in my childhood. We were not very religious at home, just ‘nice and Catholic.’”

From her early youth, God prepared her to be a leader and to work for others. In the Girl Scout movement, Ida shared the common ideal of loving God and one’s neighbor. They were active in many areas, often helping the poor with food and clothes, but the highlight was their summer camp. She learned ecumenism in these camps where Catholics, Protestants and Jews all prayed together each day.

In the summer of 1939, the Girl Scouts were asked by the Mayor of Kassa to direct a two week camp for 120 children. When asked by her teacher if she could substitute for her as Camp Director, Ida abandoned her promising, fun-filled vacation at a lake resort in order to take the lead. She was 16 years old.

The summer camp was a joyful gathering in which the budding leader, Ida, used simple tools from nature and everyday existence to teach the children of God’s unique and deeply loving relationship with them. Following God’s inspiration and using her vivid imagination she was able to express the grace and love of God to the children. This was the beginning of her unique catechetical charism for Heart

teaching religion (now known as the *Five Step Illustrated Method*). She demonstrated the gift of leadership with joy and compassion, caring and humor. Her efforts were so successful that a second summer camp was arranged in 1940. At its conclusion, Ida made her first three-day silent retreat.



“A great change in my relationship to God took place during the first silent retreat in my life, before my senior year. It was held right after the summer camp for the poor children. In the quietness of the retreat, two ideas struck me, stood out as vital; something that had never occurred to me before. One thought was God’s relationship to me. Until then, I felt that the initiative to contact God, to know, love and serve Him was ‘my doing.’ During this retreat, the newness of God loving me first, knowing me by name, choosing me as His child in Baptism, brought forth a new response of awe and a very personal love. Jesus became totally an ‘insider’ who did not only love me ‘in general’ but one who was in love with me very personally.

The thought that ‘the Church’ needs to do something to teach the children became an urgent reality especially as the threat of Nazi invasion of the country became more evident. The solution seemed very clear and simple in the light of the retreat, ‘You are the Church; you teach the children.’”



Although Ida understood only a fraction of what would be asked of her, with faith she answered yes. Her acceptance of God's love fueled her life to share the Good News passionately and unfailingly. On October 7, 1940, her 18th birthday, Ida professed private perpetual vows before the Blessed Sacrament in the Franciscan Church in Kassa, Hungary, with the approval of her spiritual director. This marks the Foundation Day of the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Sister Ida was soon joined by others who committed their lives to God in the community. Sister Ida, with her earliest companions lived the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience in community life, without wearing a traditional religious habit, in order to be more approachable to those who were alienated from the Church by Nazism and later by Communism.



In 1942, following the 1st Community Retreat. Sister Hermine Jaschko on left, Sister Ida in the center, Sister Aurelia Majorossy in the front. Sister Ida's mother is behind in black

Following the arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty, in 1949, Sister Ida and her companions were advised by Church leaders to leave the country, develop the community in the free world and some day return to Hungary.

A new beginning awaited Sister Ida and the Sisters when they arrived penniless in Toronto, Canada, in 1950. Working as domestic servants and in the tobacco harvest, they earned enough for a down-payment towards a small house and printing machines. Through their new St. Joseph's Press, they had a modest livelihood while they were learning English.



St. Joseph's Press in Canada, Sister Ida in center

Cardinal James Francis McIntyre personally welcomed the young community to Los Angeles in 1956 and warmly supported them in their life and apostolate. When Sister Ida asked him about possibly adopting a more traditional veil and habit, Cardinal McIntyre assured her:



Sister Ida with Cardinal McIntyre

"Don't change. The Church will need you as you are." The Cardinal's support and Sister Ida's obedience affirmed the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a faithful Community of Consecrated Religious Life.

The "Joyful Apostolate," originally the name of the Community Newsletter, became identified with the religious education charism of the growing Religious Community. Sister Ida expanded the Community's catechetical work to include a variety of religious education ministries from teaching children, youth and adults to directing parish religious education programs, sacramental programs, RCIA,

catechist formation, summer camps, family retreats, indeed any place where the love of God needed to be proclaimed.

The Holy See formally erected the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart as a Religious Institute in 1985. That same year Sister Ida sent Sisters to open a Mission in the Archdiocese of Taipei where the community's catechetical apostolate is complemented with significant medical work.

After the collapse of Communism in 1992, Sister Ida opened a mission in the Archdiocese of Budapest in Hungary where the Sisters conduct catechist formation and extend their catechetical works throughout Hungary and to neighboring countries.



Sister Ida with Saint John Paul II, 1991
His words to her and the Community:
"You are a blessing for the Pope."

With her undaunted receptivity to the Holy Spirit, Sister Ida continually inspired the Community to follow God's will wherever it might lead: whether it be in producing the *Sacred Heart Kids' Club* Video Series, encouraging new leadership in the Community, promoting a pilgrimage of gratitude, teaching novices or simply being present with her Sisters.

Sister Ida passed on to eternal life on February 8, 2000 in the Motherhouse of the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart in Northridge, California, lovingly surrounded by her Sisters. At the Mass of Resurrection the church was filled with many bishops, priests, friends, religious and families who had been personally touched by Sister Ida's love and inspired by her life of dedication to Jesus Christ and service to the Church.

"The Joyful Apostolate must go on," said then Archbishop Justin Rigali in his homily at the funeral. He continued:

“Sister Ida, in her legacy of generous love still speaks to us.” The love of God, manifested in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is “reflected in the gentle life and zealous devotion of our Sister Ida.”

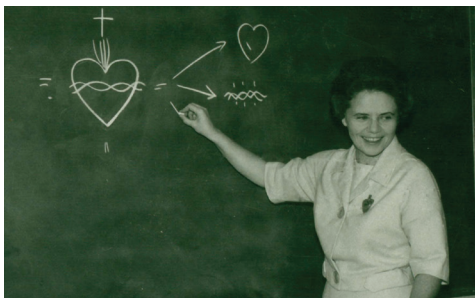


1999 - Sister Arlene Te and Sister Ida
This was the last Vow ceremony
Sister Ida attended on earth

Even though Sister Ida’s earthly life has ended, the Joyful Apostolate continues on through her Sisters’ catechetical works in her spirit. Every year thousands of catechists, children, youth, adults and families encounter the personal love of God through programs conducted by the Sacred Heart Sisters.

Sister Ida’s contributions in the field of religious education and in religious life are great treasures for generations to come. But what most touched those who spoke with her was the eloquent simplicity of her joyful spirituality that she often expressed in brief words:

“God has a Heart for you!”



Ask Sister Ida's intercession

Most Loving God,
you called Sister Ida to teach and live
your Truth and your message of love
in a joyful and inspiring way.

May her example also inspire us
to live in faith and draw others
to your Sacred Heart.

Through the intercession of your Servant,
grant us the following grace which we ask
from your loving kindness:
(here make your request).

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

For more information, to request materials,
to share a testimonial of Sister Ida's heroic virtue, or
to report any grace obtained through her intercession, contact:

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