

## **Timeline of Thea's Triumphs**

from *Thea Bowman: A Story of Triumph*

By Mary G. Verrill

1937 – Bertha (Birdie) Elizabeth Bowman is born to Dr. Theon and Mary Esther Bowman.

1947 – At age 9, Birdie tells her parents she wants to become a Catholic.

1949 – At age 12, Birdie is enrolled in Grade 6, Holy Child Jesus School.

1952 – At age 15, Birdie tells her parents she wants to join the FSPA and study at St. Rose High School in La Crosse, Wisconsin, then go to college and become a teacher.

1953 – Birdie goes to La Crosse with Lina Putz, FSPA, on the train.

1953 – Birdie adjusts to a new culture and being far from home. She lives in a dorm and has a strict schedule. She is positive that she will do well in high school, and she does!

January 1955 – Birdie graduates from Saint Rose High School in La Crosse.

May 1955 to March 1956 – Birdie gets tuberculosis (TB) and misses her high school graduation ceremony in May. She recovers at River Pines Sanatorium in northern Wisconsin. She loses the whole first year of college, but triumphs by getting well and returning to Viterbo to start college.

1956 – On August 12, Birdie formally enters the FSPA and has a new name, Sister Mary Thea Bowman.

1958 – Sister Thea takes first vows to join the FSPA.

1959 – Sister Thea, age 21, begins teaching. She triumphs over school parents' prejudice by being professional and using her warm personality. She teaches students spirituals, and they enjoy exchanging letters and pictures with students at Holy Child Jesus.

1961 – Sister Thea returns to Canton to teach at Holy Child Jesus. She lives in the convent and enjoys Southern cooking and being near family. She leads a high school choir and records an album, adding her own poetry to it.

1961 to 1965 – Sister Thea spends summers at Viterbo College to finish a Bachelor of Arts degree.

1963 – Sister Thea takes her final, perpetual vows to join the FSPA.

1966 – The FSPA send Sister Thea to graduate school at Catholic American University in Washington, DC.

1969 – Sister Thea earns a Master of Arts degree in English.

1972 – Sister Thea earns a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in English and linguistics.

Fall 1972 to May 1978 – Sister Thea teaches at Viterbo College, becoming Chair of the English Department.

1974 – Sister Thea attends the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, hosted by the University of Mississippi, where she becomes a popular presenter and speaker.

1974 to 1978 – Sister Thea takes student groups to Canton. Like “a bridge,” she creates chances for students from different cultures to know and understand each other.

1978 – Sister Thea returns to Canton to take care of her elderly parents and to teach. She is appointed Director of Intercultural Awareness for the Catholic Diocese of Jackson and shortens her name to “Thea,” still a member of the FSPA.

1979 and onward – Thea travels to preach faith, love, and spiritual healing by hosting revivals, lectures, and concerts.

1984 – Thea is diagnosed with cancer and begins treatments. Both parents die this same year. She continues to travel and host revivals, receiving many invitations.

1985 – Thea travels to Kenya and Tanzania to participate in a conference on racism. It is a triumph to visit Africa while undergoing cancer treatments.

1987 – Thea and friends appear on the TV news show *60 Minutes*, where she prompts interviewer Mike Wallace to say “Black is beautiful.”

1989 – Thea speaks at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and leads them in singing “We Shall Overcome.” She is the first woman to address the Conference.

1990 – Thea dies peacefully on March 30.

2018 – Servant of God Thea Bowman, FSPA, is voted by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops to advance in becoming named a saint for her faithful joy and ministering to others.