

The making of the saints

Holy men and women have long benefited from spiritual directors

By Jennifer Lindberg

The relationship of saint to spiritual director is one of the most documented in Church history, especially between some of the best-known female saints and their male counterparts.

Saints such as Elizabeth Ann Seton, Margaret Mary Alcoque and Faustina Kowalska looked to their priest spiritual directors to guide them through serious doubts and to implement some of the greatest feasts and devotions the Church celebrates today.

In return, these men found kindred spirits to help them reach greater sanctity in their own vocation.

"Each had its own uniqueness, but each relationship provided an atmosphere of mutual support," said Sister Eleanor Casey, the archival assistant for the Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Md.

"Although initially one member may have been more important, it appears for real spiritual growth, a growing equality was needed."

Two-way street

A common thread between the saints and their spiritual directors is that they helped one another achieve sanctity and clarified some of their own inspirations.

This was prominently seen in the friendship of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, founder of the Daughters of Charity, and Servant of God Simon Gabriel Brute, the first bishop of Vincennes, Ind. Seton, the first American-born saint, became acquainted with Bishop Brute when they were both in Emmitsburg.

Her journey began as a Protestant when she left for Italy with her ill husband in hopes that a warmer climate would cure him. Instead, he died in Italy, leaving her widowed with five young children all under the age of 8.

While in Italy, she became acquainted with the Catholic faith and embraced it shortly



ABOVE: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton lived a life of supernatural charity for others to emulate as requested by her spiritual director Bishop Simon Gabriel Brute (LEFT). In her, the bishop found motherly comfort and encouragement for his priestly vocation.

ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON PHOTO FROM CROSIERS / BISHOP BRUTE PHOTO CNS PHOTO BY BRANDON EVANS

after her return to America. That decision set her on the path God had chosen for her — to found the Daughters of Charity and a free Catholic school for girls in the early 1800s. The endeavor gave her the name Mother Seton.

Bishop Brute, native to France, came to Emmitsburg to teach at Mount St. Mary's Seminary, before being given the task of spreading the faith to the then-wild woods of Indiana.

Seton and Bishop Brute found in each other a lasting spiritual friendship. It was Bishop Brute who advised her to live a life of supernatural charity for others to emulate. When her young daughter, Anna, died, Mother Seton was near despair. Bishop

Brute helped her see the blessings of eternity that her daughter was sharing with the Lord.

For her part, Mother Seton provided Bishop Brute with encouragement and practical help by translating his French into English for sermons and papers and praying unceasingly for him.

In her, he found comfort as in a mother and wrote of her: "No soul has so forcibly excited mine to see what it is to be a priest of my God."

Contagious sanctity

Other lasting legacies were seen through St. Margaret Mary and St. Faustina, who made known the devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Divine