

# Woman of the Light. People of Light

We celebrate this year the 225th Anniversary of Nano Nagle's death and the courage of her Companions. Celebrations are about memory, meaning and hope.

## Memory

We remember Nano, Woman of Light, the Lady of the Lantern. The quality of her presence brought light to people trapped in the darkness of ignorance, poverty and oppression. We remember Nano as a mystic, a contemplative—one present to the light, love and grace within the ordinary moments of her life. The days that transformed her life were just like the other days of her life, but she was attentive to God's call to let go and to live the Gospel more deeply. We know well the stories of these days—coming home from a ball in the early hours of the morning and seeing people huddled outside the church waiting for Mass; becoming aware of her sister Ann's generosity to those made poor; letting go of her dream for the Ursulines and starting all over again with a new congregation. We remember her commitment to the spiritual disciplines that nurtured the light within and kept her attentive to the music of God's Spirit in her life.

We remember Nano as a mystic in action, that is, a prophet. The light of her presence and her work lit sparks that transformed the unjust systems of her society. Her work as a prophet was rooted in her fidelity to the daily commitments of transformation—teaching unruly children, managing her schools under the harsh penal codes that forbade them, negotiating with Bishops, building schools and convents and a home for old women, begging, encouraging others, developing

friendships, praying, living in community. This practical fidelity was transformative and left a legacy that has continued to bring light to the world for 225 years.

## Meaning

Our celebration of this Anniversary is an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be Presentation, to be People of Light, in today's world. Keri Hulme in her poem "The Bone People" reflects on what it means to be part of a living tradition.

*They were nothing more than people,  
by themselves.*

*Even paired, any pairing,  
they would have been nothing  
more than people by themselves.*

*But all together,  
they have become the heart and  
muscles  
of something perilous and new,  
something strange and growing and  
great.*

*Together, all together,  
they are instruments of change.*

Together as People of Light, we are "instruments of change" when we listen to the cry of Earth heard most loudly in the cry of those made poor; when we reach out in faith, in a spirit of hospitality, compassion and simplicity to all of creation; when we engage in concrete actions to bring forth a sustainable society founded on respect



for Earth, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace; when we address the root causes of poverty, especially by confronting personal and corporate greed.

## Hope

The 225th Anniversary of Nano Nagle's death and the courage of her Companions renews in us the gift of hope. Nano was a woman who believed, in the words of Margaret Wheatley, that "we are creating the future every day by what we choose to do". In reflecting on the life of Nano and our Presentation foremothers, we can take heart that

*our own small stone of activism, which  
might not seem to measure up to the  
rugged boulders of heroism we have so  
admired, is a paltry offering towards the  
building of an edifice of hope ... For we  
can do nothing substantial toward  
changing our course on the planet, a  
destructive one, without rousing  
ourselves, individual by individual, and  
bringing our small, imperfect stones to  
the pile.*

*(Alice Walker)*

**That is why I must try to live a good and faithful life to my last breath; so that those who come after me do not have to start all over again.**

Etty Hillesum