

Book Launch of Sister M. Francine (Pauline) Shaw's New Publication *Elizabeth Hayes: Pioneer Franciscan Journalist*

(Jeanette Gaudet, mfic)

On 18-19 September, 2009, the group which call themselves the History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland held their annual conference in the 17th century Bar Convent of Mary Ward (1585-1645) in York, England. It was at this occasion that Sr. M. Francine Shaw's new book on our foundress, *Elizabeth Hayes: Pioneer Franciscan Journalist*, was launched. Although we have other private printings on Elizabeth, this new book is singular in that it is the first one published by a company, Gracewing Ltd of Leominster, England. This fact in itself offers the chance for Elizabeth to become much more widely known.



The two day conference featured papers by a number of men and women, some religious but mostly lay, on various aspects of the theme: **“Consecrated Women: Crossing Boundaries.”** It was most surprising to find such interest in the lives and times of religious women throughout the centuries. Even young university students were among the participants. The theme seemed particularly relevant in that our contemporary wording of the mission statement and charism of Elizabeth calls us to create “ever-widening circles of communion.” Elizabeth's life attests to the many boundaries not only geographical but religious, social and cultural that she crossed throughout her lifetime.



It was a very fitting setting for Francine's new book to be launched. The publisher of Gracewing was there to promote the book as well as Sr. Jeanette Gaudet who introduced the launching. This took place at a pre-dinner cocktail hour at which a table was set up with various new publications of Gracewing. Holding prominent place was the new work on Elizabeth. After the introductory talks, Francine graciously thanked all those who had been instrumental in opening doors for her to continue her research, not least among them, Sr. Helen Connelly in Braintree who gave Francine access to the wonderful Braintree Convent library. Francine then autographed copies for interested buyers and friends.

I found it very interesting that religious communities have opened their archives to several of the laity who are involved in researching their foundress and history. Moreover, there are no several websites which have been established to help in such research. Two of these are www.rhul.ac.uk/bedford-centre/history-women-religious and wwtn.history.gmul.ac.uk. The latter is a database called “Who were the Nuns?” This site, soon to be opened, features all the 17th and 18th century women religious who were exiled during the times of persecution in England.

Needless to say we can all be very proud of Francine’s crowning jewel after her years of meticulous and painstaking research. Our remaining “Annals” sisters in particular can rejoice that their ministry has found its rightful place in the annals of history. At a time when there is so much questioning of the future of religious life and of this time of transition in which we live, it is very encouraging to see our Foundress, Elizabeth Hayes, recognized among the many great consecrated women of her century. The words which so encouraged her when her future was questionable also resound to us today, “Go onward, do not doubt!”



Sister M. Francine signing a copy of her book