

# THE HOUSATONIC TIMES

THE VOICE OF NEW MILFORD • BROOKFIELD • WASHINGTON • BRIDGEWATER • ROXBURY • SHERMAN

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 49

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2009

\$1.00

## *Lessons from Mother Teresa* *Taking One's Faith 'Out in the Streets'*

By ALICE TESSIER



**Donna Marie  
Cooper O'Boyle**

In this season of extending one's hand in an expression of good will and sharing with those we hold most dear, a New Milford author brings the message that this is, at heart, what we have to offer anyone and what the impoverished of life's circumstances, or of spirit, most need.

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle, in her new book, "Mother Teresa and Me: Ten Years of Friendship," shares lessons of personal action as well as spiritual growth she learned from a stellar guide, the Roman Catholic nun who forced the world to recognize its neglect of the poor and to do something about it.

Mother Teresa, who was born in Macedonia of Albanian descent and entered the Sisters of Loreto, an Irish religious order that had missions in India, became a catalyst for change through the immediacy of her ministrations to the most wretched populations in the slums of Calcutta and then beyond. The results the author cites in her book are staggering: "...this humble but feisty and persistent woman established 610 foundations in 123 countries on every continent with nearly 4,000 sisters by the time of her death (in 1997, at age 87).

"She also established the Missionaries of Charity brothers, fathers, coworkers, coworkers of the sick and suffering, and the lay Missionaries of Charity," Ms. Cooper O'Boyle stated, noting that she

herself is a lay member.

"One woman's 'yes' was the catalyst for change," the author said. "She made a profound impact in the world, but she said of herself, 'I'm just a stubby little pencil in His [God's] hand.'"

Although the suburban mother, who is dedicated to living her faith through her

decades ago after attending the same Mass in Washington, D.C.

Ms. Cooper O'Boyle had traveled to Georgetown University so she could meet privately with a "renowned teacher and holy man," the Jesuit priest Rev. John Hardon, for "spiritual direction."

After her encounter with Mother Teresa,

*'Calcutta is all over the world for  
those who are willing to see it.'*  
—Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle

everyday life, has not traveled the world to minister to the needs of the impoverished, she said she understands the greater lesson to be learned from the example of Blessed Mother Teresa, who has been beatified by the Catholic Church.

"Calcutta is all over the world for those who are willing to see it," she said in an interview last week. "We are to love people in our midst—our homes, workplaces, communities—the need is there."

Ms. Cooper O'Boyle strives to help those within her reach—which is now a broad reach indeed—through her books, columns, blog and other writings; speaking engagements at retreats and other venues; and her television appearances, on the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN).

And even more directly, welcoming personal exchanges.

The author, in her new book, tells of how they, most serendipitously, met two

when the internationally-known religious figure met the author's husband and young children as well, Ms. Cooper O'Boyle felt moved to correspond with the popularly regarded "living saint."

She was encouraged to do so by a mother superior of the religious order, hardly expecting, however, that Mother Teresa, the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for Peace in 1979, would respond. But reply Mother Teresa did, offering spiritual guidance in the 22 letters she sent over a number of years, extracts of several of which appear in the book, as well as in other ways.

"She helped me a lot to grow in my spirituality through her messages, which I felt I could share with other people as well," Ms. Cooper O'Boyle said.

For the author, her faith is "a way of life." Growing up in Ridgefield, she said, "We talked about faith at home, we always said 'grace' at the table, and my mother had us

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—*Donna-Marie Cooper O’Boyle*

say the rosary together on occasions. As I got older, I stayed with my faith, even though it was a challenge. In the comfort and safety net of your home, it’s easier.”

Because she has had the “blessings” of guidance, she has dedicated herself to sharing with others the hard-won insights she has gleaned.

It has, somewhat surprisingly Ms. Cooper O’Boyle said, become for her “a career and a ministry,” though in reality the two terms should be switched regarding which came first.

She has, for example, long been active in her parish, St. Francis Xavier—she helped to establish Friends of Veronica, a lay missionary group. “My focus is on the lonely, such as people in nursing homes—they’re starving for love,” she explained of the group. “Our other big mission is to reach out to mothers, who need a lot of encouragement.”

Her speaking appearances at retreats and other talks now take her around the country, due to an increased visibility and popularity that began shortly after the publication of her first book, “A Catholic Prayerbook for Mothers,” in 2005.

It quickly found its way onto the Catholic best-seller list, and the author has had seven books published since then.

She is currently preparing a book on Catholicism for Alpha/ Penguin, tentative-

ly slated for publication in 2011.

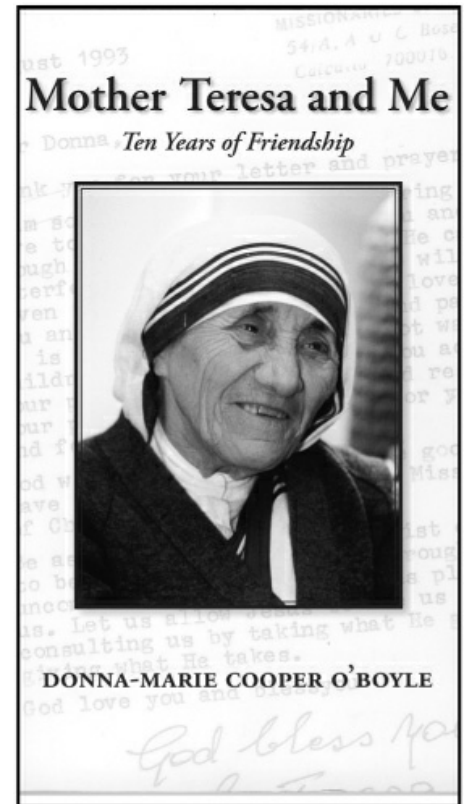
Ms. Cooper O’Boyle, whose books have been published abroad, now travels around the world in connection to her faith-based career.

Among her journalistic endeavors, she has recently been published in the English edition of the Vatican newspaper L’osservatore Romano. And on the immediate horizon, she will be featured on ETWN in her own spot, Everyday Blessings for Catholic Moms, for which 25 five-minute programs have already been taped.

“You don’t have to run off to Calcutta to be able to help people,” Ms. Cooper O’Boyle said. “But we should try to do what we can wherever it is possible. I think I have found a way I can do it.

“I take my faith out into the streets,” she said. “I had to share all the blessings I received from Mother Teresa, how her spirituality impacted the world, one by one—the ripple effect—and, of course, how it impacted me.”

Even though displays of faith are no longer allowed, as they had been for centuries, on public grounds, it does not really bother her, not even during this holy season of the Christian tradition. “Even though the crèches are not there as publicly as before in our communities, we can still celebrate our faith openly,” Ms. Cooper



**An extract from the cover of New Milford author Donna-Marie Cooper O’Boyle’s new book.**

O’Boyle said. “It doesn’t have to bother you ... if you love your faith, you don’t have to have the representations. You just have to live your faith, and doing this can even transform a human heart.

“Mother Teresa and Me: Ten Years of Friendship,” published by Circle Press (\$14.95; 192 pages) as well as Mrs. Cooper O’Boyle’s earlier books can be purchased in Catholic and other bookstores, on Amazon.com and through the author’s Web site, [www.donnacooper-oboye.com](http://www.donnacooper-oboye.com).