



Proclamation

Mayor Mitch Reynolds

City of La Crosse

WHEREAS, Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA, the granddaughter of slaves, was born in Mississippi, Dec. 29, 1937, to Dr. Theon Bowman, a physician, and Mary Esther Bowman, a teacher, and was given the name Bertha Elizabeth Bowman; and

WHEREAS, as a child Sr. Thea converted to Catholicism through the inspiration of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity who were her teachers and pastors at Holy Child Jesus Church and School in Canton; and

WHEREAS, Sr. Thea was attracted to the Catholic Church by the example of how Catholics put their faith into action demonstrating love and care for one another, most especially the poor and needy. At the age of 15 she told her parents and friends she wanted to join the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and ventured to the unfamiliar town of La Crosse, and entered St. Rose Convent where she would be the only African-American member of her religious community; and

WHEREAS, given the name, “Sr. Mary Thea” at her religious profession, Sr. Thea graduated from Viterbo College in 1965 with a Bachelor of Arts in English with the goal of becoming a teacher. She went on to attend The Catholic University of America and earn a Master of Arts in English in 1969 and a PhD in English in 1972. She taught at the middle school and high school levels, eventually becoming a college professor of English and linguistics at Viterbo College, Catholic University of America, and Xavier University; and

WHEREAS, from the perspective of a black woman, Sr. Thea believed that our personal history has been formed and enriched by all we have experienced. “We must work together so that all of us have equal access to input, equal access to opportunity, and equal access to participation;” and

WHEREAS, blessed with extraordinary talent, Sr. Thea became a master teacher, evangelist, change-maker, singer, poet, preacher, and nationally renowned speaker who was featured on the national television program *60 Minutes*; and

WHEREAS, Sr. Thea’s life-work supporting inclusivity, “Living in Love,” and eliminating oppression left a lasting mark on U.S. Catholic life in the late 20th century and her cause for sainthood has been endorsed by the US bishops; and



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WHEREAS, in 1984, Sr. Thea faced devastating challenges - both her parents died and she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Even when it became increasingly painful and difficult to travel, she was undeterred from witnessing and sharing her boundless love for God and the joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as well as her passion for diversity, equity and social justice; and

WHEREAS, Sister Thea Bowman died peacefully on March 30, 1990, in the home where she was reared in Canton, Mississippi. She wanted inscribed on her tombstone the simple, yet profound words: "She tried." "I want people to remember that I tried to love the Lord and that I tried to love them..." She was buried beside her parents and an uncle at the Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis, Tennessee.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, MITCH REYNOLDS, MAYOR OF THE CITY OF LA CROSSE, do hereby proclaim March 30th, 2022 as

"SISTER THEA BOWMAN DAY"

Dated on this 30th day of March in the year Two Thousand Twenty-Two.



MAYOR MITCH REYNOLDS