

St. Joseph Sisters - 100 Years In Diocese

Diocesan Sisterhood, with 900 in ranks, staffs over 60 area institutions

Community started with 4 Nuns who came to St. Mary's Parish, Canandaigua, in 1854

THE STORY OF the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Diocese of Rochester is a story of God's Providence working in human affairs. Only the guiding hand of a wise Providence can explain the growth of this diocesan Sisterhood from a small band of four to a community of almost 900 and all in one hundred years. The Community that opened its first convent (a humble frame dwelling) in New York State a century ago at Canandaigua today staffs over 60 institutions throughout the 11-county area of the Rochester Diocese.

Included in these institutions now directed by the Sisters of St. Joseph are 52 elementary schools, 3 high schools, a women's college, a school for exceptional children, a home for dependent children, a home for the aged, a hospital and a cadet school for boys. As a contribution to the home missions, the Sisters of St. Joseph also conduct a school and hospital for the Colored in Selma, Alabama.

Today in the Diocese of Rochester the Sisters of St. Joseph are directly in charge of the instruction and training of 22,424 elementary school pupils, 2,024 high school students, and 438 young women in college. During the regular school year, the Sisters also give religious instruction to more than 1,200 children at 11 catechetical centers. Last summer they conducted 25 Religious Vacation Schools with an enrollment of 1,679.

These are impressive statistics. But they are only statistics, and as such they give us only a faint hint of the almost immeasurable spiritual influence which the Sisters of St. Joseph have exercised upon souls, particularly those of youth, during a century of dedicated service to the Church in the Diocese of Rochester. But the tangible picture of achievement afforded by the mere recitation of the century-old chronology of the Sisters of St. Joseph is sufficient to show that God still works in His own way in this troubled world. Highly talented and highly educated as the Sisters of St. Joseph are, their phenomenal success and progress cannot be explained except by the fact that God has led them. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it."



Sisters of St. Joseph teach 22,424 elementary school pupils in the Rochester Diocese

A CENTURY OF Progress under God! The history of Sisters of St. Joseph during the last hundred years in the Rochester Diocese is written against a world backdrop of turmoil, wars and rumors of wars, financial depressions, and widespread upheavals. In this hour, when hydrogen bombs threaten to annihilate all mankind, the reading of the glorious record of the Sisters of St. Joseph gives us this happy vision of hope—God always gets His work done, even when the world seems to be at its worst.

How did the Sisters of St. Joseph come into the New York State area which is now the Diocese of Rochester?

This community of sisters traces its origins back to seventeenth-century France. In the city of LePuy, not far from Lyons, Bishop Henry de Maupas and the Jesuit priest Father Peter Medaille gave the now familiar habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph to the first band of these nuns. From this historic date, Oct. 25, 1650, the story of the Sisters of St. Joseph has been a narrative of devotion, zeal, achievement.

The first sisters were women who had heard Father Medaille in his mission sermons appeal for apostles to care for the souls that searched for truth and love but could not find it. These women bound themselves by religious vow and garb to a life of serving God and their fellowman.

Their desire to form this congregation, a new kind of religious community life in those days, led Bishop de Maupas to enter eagerly into the proposed plan.

The three vows of religion (poverty, chastity, obedience) were to be the foundation stones of the new community. The practice of humility and charity to an exceptional degree would produce the spirit characterizing the Sisters of St. Joseph.

After the first Sisters had been received, they were entrusted with the care of the orphanage of LePuy. Other establishments followed rapidly and today everywhere the Sisters of St. Joseph are engaged in the instruction of youth, the care of the sick and aged, and in procuring for their neighbors all the spiritual and temporal helps of which he stands in need.

Early in the history of the Congregation, the Sisters of St. Joseph were called upon to manifest a courage born of a strong faith. From the time of the French Revolution in 1789 down to the present in parishes and mission areas, these Sisters have exposed themselves to hardships with a bravery that the fainthearted might call rashness.

America invited the Sisters to this new land soon after the Republic was established. In 1834, Bishop Rosati of St. Louis asked Mother St. John Koutbonne who was then the Superior General in Lyons, to send missionary nuns to the United States.

Complying with this request, the first Sisters arrived on March 25, feast of the Annunciation, 1836. They were greeted in New Orleans by Father John Timon, later to become Bishop of Buffalo. At that time, Rochester was not yet a diocese, but was subject in jurisdiction to the Buffalo bishop.

CANANDAIGUA was to be gateway for the Sisters of St. Joseph to enter the Rochester diocesan area. In 1854, they opened a boarding school for girls, an orphanage, and a community novitiate. In addition, they conducted a free school for children who would otherwise be deprived of Catholic education.

New candidates presented themselves and in 1857, three received the habit—the first Sisters of St. Joseph to receive the habit in New York

State. Among these aspirants to religious life was one who was later to figure largely in the history of the Congregation. This was Mother Stanislaus Leary who became the first General Superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph when the Congregation became formally identified with the newly-erected Diocese of Rochester in 1868.

It was at the request of Bishop McQuaid that these Sisters undertook to devote themselves fully to the needs of the Church in his Diocese. From that time on, the variety of their labors in this Diocese has been in full accord with the primitive spirit of the founders—to labor in the instruction of children, to care for the sick, to render every service implied by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Many guideposts along the century are represented by dates in the history of the Rochester Congregation. To many Catholics who have come under their benevolent guidance and care, some of these dates must stand out as a light and an inspiration.

The opening in Rochester of the first Nazareth Convent and Academy on Jay and Frank Streets, which is now Plymouth Avenue North, was in 1871. Simultaneous events of that same year included the establishment of a parochial school system marked by the opening also in Rochester of the Cathedral and the Immaculate Conception Schools. From that period on, the Sisters were called upon to meet the teaching needs of newly-erected schools.

1882 marks the beginning of the superintendency of Reverend Mother Agnes Hines at which time the Sisters of St. Joseph were staffing twelve parochial schools. Three orphan asylums and the Home of Industry begun by Mother Hieronymo were under Community leadership. Nazareth Hall for boys followed in two years.

By 1883 Rochester was celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the erection of the Diocese of Rochester, and the Sisters of St. Joseph were now engaged in many of the thirty-four parochial schools.

ADAPTING itself to local need, in 1898 the Sisters of St. Joseph opened Nazareth Normal School for the training of Sister-teachers. Since that time, religious from many sections of the United States and Canada have received their teacher education under the direction of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

In 1906, the opening of St. Ann's Home for the Aged which presently houses some two hundred guests was an additional field of endeavor for the Community.

1908 marks the beginnings of St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira, New York, under the auspices of the Sisters of St. Joseph. At the present time, St. Joseph's ranks as a modern and fully equipped hospital and school of nursing. This same year witnessed the opening of the New Nazareth Hall Academy for Boys in Rochester.

By 1912 there was need for a high school in Geneva. DeSales High School was opened and has since been staffed by Sisters of St. Joseph. A similar need in Elmira was met by the Sisters who have served Elmira Catholic High School since its beginning.

In 1921 Mother Sylvester, was elected third General Superior of the Congregation. Under her leadership was built the new Nazareth Motherhouse in Pittsford. There were sixty-five parochial schools in the Diocese of Rochester by the close of the year 1922. Besides these, diocesan history records three high schools, three academies for young women, a pri-

(Continued on Page 13)