

APOSTLES OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

The Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a Congregation of religious women that claims Mother Clelia Merloni as its foundress, first arrived in St. Louis to bring the Faith to the Italian immigrants. Since those early years downtown when they were known as “Missionary Zelatrices of the Sacred Heart,” the Sisters have served in over 20 different locations in greater St. Louis. The Apostles’ role in the great story of the Archdiocese of St. Louis began on January 24, 1913, at Our Lady Help of Christians Parish on 11th Avenue and Wash Street (now Cole). The first five pioneer spirits, transplanted from Italy and from the East Coast, came to assist the Italian immigrants and immediately began teaching in new “free Italian school.” They worked hard with very little...much like the people among whom they lived and served. Deterioration of the area contributed to the eventual closing of the school in 1951.

Sacred Heart Villa opened on the Hill in 1939 as a Day Nursery and Kindergarten. Even though the first class of 16 children was comprised mostly of nieces and nephews of the Sisters, the idea of Pre-Kindergarten became more popular as more and more families needed both parents to work and wanted a safe environment in which to entrust their little ones. The Villa’s commitment to the Faith and curricular innovation continues to the present, with programs like *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*. All the “modern” ideas introduced over the years, however, have never been able to improve upon the Sisters’ good old-fashioned tenderness and nurturing of the little souls.

In 1941, the Sisters staffed St. Ambrose School, and since those early days, the tremendous spirit of family and unity that belongs uniquely to The Hill has brought the Sisters and the people together in a myriad of ways: teaching, visiting the sick and bereaved, parish census, processions and, of course, the food—in restaurants, in homes, and at fund-raisers. The school has always been busy with projects, contests, and awards. Since it was important that every Catholic child deserved a Catholic education, a Learning Center was created in the early 1990s to assist children with learning disabilities. Today, technology and curriculum remain cutting edge.

When Fr. Carl Poelker established Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish and School in 1951 in the expanding suburbs of Bellefontaine Neighbors, he asked the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to staff his new school. Over 400 children filled the new building that first day in September of 1953. After many successful years, the school fell victim to shifting populations and mergers of schools, and closed in 2005.

Cor Jesu Academy actually began on the Hill in the Sacred Heart Villa building in 1956 with 17 freshman students. The reputation of this new high school had to be built from scratch in what

was already a highly competitive field. The school moved to Affton in 1965 and grew to the large campus it has now. Academic excellence, Catholic identity, and community spirit are the hallmarks of this school from which 100% of the graduating seniors go on to college. Cor Jesu Academy is looking forward to an expansion that will include a gym and Student Commons.

Montebello estate property in Imperial, purchased in 1969, became a children's day care in 1981 that then grew into a Pre-School in 1988, eventually becoming one of the finest early childhood centers in Jefferson County until it closed in 2005. Today, the old Montebello estate serves as a Spiritual Life Center.

Apostles in St. Louis have also served at: Helping Hands Food Pantry in St. Joseph Parish, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Ambrose Pastoral and Social Ministry to the Elderly, St. Joseph School and Parish, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque School and Parish, and St. Clare of Assisi School, the Archdiocesan School Office, Christ Prince of Peace School, Doisy College of Health Services at St. Louis University, St. Luke the Evangelist School, St. Joseph Academy, St. Catherine Labouré School, St. Martin of Tours Parish, Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, and St. Anthony Medical Center.

The Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are privileged and grateful to be a part of the grand cooperation that exists in the Archdiocese of St. Louis in a common mission with bishops and priests, students and their families, teachers and staff members, parishioners and co-workers, neighbors, friends, and benefactors. The Sisters will continue to witness to the Love of the Heart of Christ among God's people here and build on the labors of those who have gone before them.