

SALESIAN MISSIONARIES OF MARY IMMACULATE

A Brief History of Our Institute

The Institute of the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (SMMI), the religious missionary branch, was born from the Society of the Daughters of Saint Francis de Sales, founded in Paris in 1872 by Father Henry Chaumont, a diocesan priest, and Madame Carré de Malberg, a housewife and mother. They founded this society for lay women to “live the Gospel” and spread its spirit in the world. In 1885, from this lay society a missionary branch was founded, the Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate. The first group of four lay missionary Daughters of St. Francis de Sales were sent to India under the leadership of Mother Marie Gertrude, co-foundress of our missions, with the charism of evangelization and empowerment of women and the poor.

In 1968, this missionary branch became an apostolic religious Institute of Pontifical Rite. Today, we are over 1400 sisters, present on five continents in 21 countries: Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Chili, France, Ghana, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius Island, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Reunion Island, United States and Vietnam. Mainly focusing on women, girls, the poorest of the poor, and the marginalized persons of the society, we adapt our ministries to respond to a wide range of pressing needs of the people where we are sent.

Historical Beginnings in the Archdiocese of St. Louis

The lay Daughters of Saint Francis de Sales, today known as the Association of Saint Francis de Sales, are numerous in the United States. For several years, it was their desire to have the presence of their missionary branch in the country. In response to this desire, Sister Jane Scaria, Superior General, visited St. Louis, Missouri in 2007, and met with The Most Reverend, Raymond L. Burke, Archbishop of St. Louis. Following that visit, the archbishop officially invited our institute to establish a foundation in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. He proposed to begin our apostolic work by serving the Catholic Charities Housing Resource Center as pastoral care workers and to witness to consecrated life as a source of great blessing to the many poor whom these centers serve. Our General Council responded to this invitation and decided to open a house in the Archdiocese of St. Louis and send four sisters for this first house of the institute in the United States. St. Matthias the Apostle Parish in Lemay, south of St. Louis, was chosen, as there was an existing convent for our residence. The pastor, Father Dennis Port, was extremely gracious, enthusiastic, and supportive to have sisters back in the parish.

Archbishop Raymond L. Burke entrusted Sister Eva-Maria Ackerman, FSGM, Director of the Office of Consecrated Life, to follow up the civil legal papers (visas) for the sisters. She, along with the members of the Association of Saint Francis de Sales in St. Louis, Elizabeth Westhoff and Katey Charles Darpel, took the lead in the process of establishing our community in St. Matthias the Apostle Parish. Meanwhile, Pope Benedict XVI appointed Archbishop Raymond L. Burke Apostolic Signatura of the Supreme Tribunal in Rome. Archbishop Burke entrusted the process of our new foundation to the Archdiocesan Administrator, Bishop Robert J. Hermann, Auxiliary Bishop of St. Louis.

St. Matthias Parish undertook great efforts to renovate, furnish, and prepare the convent for our arrival. To raise funds for these efforts, the parish established "Christmas in July." Additionally, the archdiocesan Annual Catholic Appeal awarded a grant to the parish for the renovation of the convent as well as to Catholic Charities for remuneration of the sisters' ministry. The collaboration of the members of the Association of Saint Francis de Sales is praiseworthy. The archdiocese also took keen interest in finding a ministry setting for us, and Ms. Karen Wallensak, Director of Catholic Charities Housing Resource Center, gladly accepted our presence and service in the agency.

The four pioneer sisters to this new mission arrived in St. Louis on December 7th, 2008: Sister Elsy Joyce, Sister Annie John, Sister Jolly Joseph, and Sister Mary Prathibha Jose. They were accompanied by Sister Therese Leena, a member of our congregation's General Council who is now our Superior General. At the airport, representatives of St. Matthias the Apostle Parish, Father Dennis Port, Sister Eva-Maria Ackerman, and members of the Association of Saint Francis de Sales welcomed us. Our mission in St. Louis was officially inaugurated on December 8th, with a Mass on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. During the Mass, Sister Eva-Maria read a letter from then Superior General, Sister Jane Scaria, thanking Father Dennis Port and the parish for all they did to welcome us. The convent was placed under the patronage of Mother Mary and named "Mary Immaculate Convent."

Current Ministry

In 2018, our community expanded to the Archdiocese of Chicago with three sisters. There, sisters are directly involved with women who are facing unexpected pregnancies through an agency known as "Aid for the Women".

In the St. Louis area, sisters are involved in different apostolic activities. One is engaged in the pastoral care activity in our St. Matthias Parish. She visits people who are at the nursing homes, senior living centers, and in the hospitals. Two sisters are involved in healing ministry: one is an Assistant Nursing Director at St. Agnes Home and the other is a lab technologist at St. Joseph Hospital.