

Sisters of Divine Providence

Historical beginnings in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, MO

The Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence was founded in 1851 by the Most Reverend William Emmanuel Baron von Ketteler, Bishop of Mainz, Germany, and pioneer of social justice, and Marie de la Roche, a French noble woman whom he instructed and baptized in the Catholic faith. When the May Laws went into effect in Germany, Bishop Ketteler sent six of his daughters to America in 1876. The first foundation of the Sisters of Divine Providence was in Pittsburgh, PA. In 1930 the community began a new province in the Midwest, establishing the St. Louis Province on August 1, 1930, the anniversary of the death of its foundress, Marie de la Roche. The temporary headquarters of the new province was located at St. Elizabeth hospital in Granite City, Illinois and Mother Rosalia Weaver was installed as its first Provincial Superior.

During this time Mother Rosalia Weaver continued to look for property for the newly established province. On one of the trips with the realtor they came to the beautifully wooded Normandy hills, and the realtor turned into a driveway of the Benoist Estate. To her surprise, the property was for sale. Negotiations began. Mother Rosalia visited the Bishop of the Archdiocese of St. Louis and secured permission to establish a provincial house and novitiate there. She was given permission to do so with the understanding that she would begin a boarding school for boys, as that was needed at the time in the Archdiocese. She agreed and a short time later, the St. Louis, Missouri province was established and possession of the Mount Providence property in Normandy, MO took place on September 29, 1932.

In the early days of the province the Sisters ministered at St. Elizabeth Hospital and several parish schools in Illinois, namely, St. Mark's in Venice, St. Mary's in Madison, St. Mary's grade school in Brussels, Brussels public high school, St. Joseph in Meppen, Divine Providence in West Chester, Chicago, and St. Elizabeth in Granite City.

In Missouri, the Sisters ministered at Mount Providence School for Boys, Ascension School in Normandy, St. John's School in Imperial, Mary Queen of the Universe School in Affton, and North American Martyrs School in Florissant. In the Jefferson City diocese they ministered at St. Stanislaus School in Wardsville, St. Andrew in Tipton, Annunciation in California, and St. Louis in Bonnets Mill, as well as the public high school there.

Current Presence in the Archdiocese of St. Louis

In the summer of 2001 the three provinces of St. Louis, MO, Pittsburgh, PA and Kingston, MA and the region of Puerto Rico of the Sisters of Divine Providence formed a new province headquartered in Pittsburgh. However, there is still a contingent of Sisters who live and work in the Archdiocese of St. Louis and beyond.

Today we have Sisters serving by presence and those ministering with the elderly and mentally ill. We continue our commitment to serve the homeless, victims of social injustice and support efforts to modify social structures that impinge on human dignity.

The Sisters of Divine Providence continue to serve at Room at the Inn, a temporary, emergency shelter for homeless women and families in St. Louis North County, by board participation and a lasting legacy

which began in 1989. ROOM empowers program participants to create their own solution to their homelessness through education and referrals. They partner with fifty outside agencies to make needed services available to our families. They are also the catalyst for engaging the faith-based community as night sites in helping families struggling with homelessness.

Begun around the same time as ROOM, the Sisters of Divine Providence sponsor La Posada Providencia, a shelter for immigrants and asylum seekers in the process of seeking legal refuge in this country. This shelter provides a safe and welcoming home, a haven to recover from past hardships, a place to learn English, life skills, and all that is necessary to become self-sufficient, and integrate more quickly and effectively into the United States culture.