

## Society of the Sacred Heart in St. Louis

The Society of the Sacred Heart was founded in France in 1800 by Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat. Four years later, Rose Philippine Duchesne entered the new community. In 1817, American Bishop William Du Bourg came to call at the motherhouse in Paris to recruit religious to open schools for Native Americans in his Diocese of Louisiana. Serving in the missions was Philippine's most ardent aspiration. She begged for permission, and Sophie reluctantly relented. Philippine set sail from Bordeaux, France with four other religious - Octavie Berthold, Eugénie Audé, Marguerite Manteau and Catherine Lamarre - providentially arriving in New Orleans on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, May 29, 1818. They later sailed up the Mississippi River, arriving at the Market Street landing in St. Louis on August 22, 1818, the first women religious in St. Louis. On September 14, 1818, Philippine and her companions opened the first free school west of the Mississippi, with twenty-two girls too poor to pay any tuition. This was the beginning of the [Academy of the Sacred Heart](#) and international Sacred Heart education, which now spans the globe. The adjacent boarding school opened on October 3.

The St. Charles location proved to be too remote to attract students, so on September 3-6, 1819, the nuns and their boarding pupils moved to a new location, in Florissant, now the [Old St. Ferdinand Shrine](#). The new site would become home to a boarding school and school for Indian girls, and eventually a novitiate. The first American vocation, Mary Anne Layton, entered the Society in 1820. Six years later, eight years after the Society's arrival in the St. Louis area, the Diocese St. Louis was created.

In 1827, with the help of philanthropist John Mullanphy, the Society finally established a house in St. Louis City. In urging Philippine to open a house in the City, Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat wrote, "I tell you candidly, I prefer (St. Louis) to all others just now. You must have a center, a Mother House in that part of the world, which will be able to support the other houses. St. Louis is the place to choose ... A Mother House for America is absolutely necessary. What city would be more suitable than St. Louis?" The "City House" was located in St. Louis, at Convent and Broadway, and included an orphanage – the first in St. Louis.

Philippine Duchesne died in St. Charles on November 18, 1852. Archbishop Kenrick declared her "the noblest and most virtuous soul he had ever known." When she was canonized in 1982, November 18 was declared Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne's feast day. The [Shrine](#) to St. Philippine Duchesne, designed by William Schickel, is at the Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Charles, and is open to the public.

In 1917, the Society opened Maryville College. In 1929, Villa Duchesne Academy opened when the academy at Maryville was transferred.

In 1982, the Society's five provinces in the United States become one and chose St. Louis as the headquarters for the United States Province. In 2013, the United States-Canada Province was formed and the headquarters remained in St. Louis.

Currently there are approximately thirty Religious of the Sacred Heart in St. Louis, many of whom are engaged in provincial administration, including at the provincial archives. Others serve at the [Academy of the Sacred Heart](#) or [Villa Duchesne and Oak Hill School](#) or in other school settings. Two work with the Network of Sacred Heart Schools, based in St. Charles. Several St. Louis-area RSCJ are writers; several serve in pastoral ministry or corporal service. One is a psychotherapist, serving at a nonprofit.

*For more about the Society of the Sacred Heart, visit [www.RSCJ.org](http://www.RSCJ.org) or [www.RSCJInternational.org](http://www.RSCJInternational.org). Women interested in exploring a religious vocation should call Mary Pat White, RSCJ at 888-844-7725.*