



Celebrating 150 Years: First U. S. Mission Begins

A unique species they are, those women who leave stable families and familiar cultures to do God's work wherever God calls.

Such were the five IBVM sisters who left Ireland in 1847 to found the first Loretto schools in North America. And such were Sisters Gonzaga Gallivan, Dosithea Gibney and Lidwina Doyle, who, in response to an invitation from Reverend William Power of St. Patrick Parish in Joliet, Illinois, left Canada in 1880 to begin the first Loretto school in the United States.

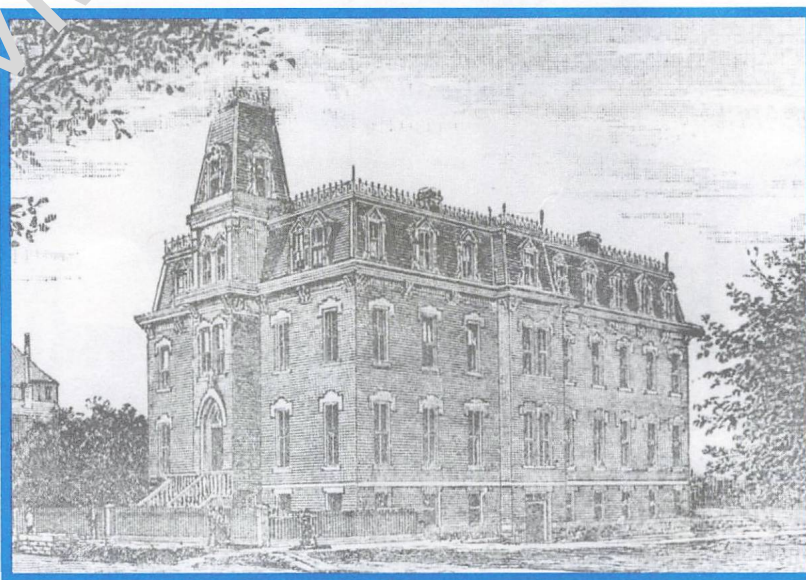
With horse and carriage, Father Power met the train to welcome the sisters to the United States. Imagine their surprise when, en route to the parish and discussing their housing, he expressed dismay that the new sisters had not brought with them funding to build a convent and an academy/boarding school!

Poverty was conspicuous in their temporary dwelling. Winter came with snowdrifts so high that the sisters had recourse to ladders to enter and leave the house. When snows melted, ladders continued to be necessary in order to descend into boats that moved them to school and church. Coal, warm clothing, boots, food, medicine, all were in short supply. At Christmas the parents of the children gifted the thankful sisters with buckets of coal, potatoes, apples, black walnuts (in abundant supply

in Illinois at that time), wonderful home-baked goods, and a blessed sewing machine.

In May of 1881, Archbishop Feehan, Metropolitan of Chicago's Archdiocese of which Joliet was still a part, suggested that the sisters move to St. Mary Parish. Until a convent could be built, they would live in rented quarters, financing to be assumed by the pastor, Rev. Maurice Burke. Father Burke graciously accepted this responsibility despite his current project, putting up a church. He located a house which rented for \$420 a year and helped the sisters furnish their chapel by donating many of the appointments.

St. Mary Convent housed an accredited academy



St. Mary's Academy in Joliet, Illinois, was chartered in 1882. Besides classrooms, the building housed a sizeable boarding school, and was the residence for all IBVM sisters teaching in Joliet. It was razed in 1959.

and a girls' boarding school. The sisters in Joliet exhibited proficiency in Latin, French, German, music, painting, embroidery, physiology, elocution, ciphering, and of course, Christian Doctrine. In the days of pre-mechanized kitchens and laundries, the teaching sisters were assisted by sisters who devoted themselves to domestic work. Sisters like Francesca Sweetman earned the convent's reputation for spotless linen and gleaming waxed floors, and creations by cooks like Marcella Armstrong devised palatable desserts for eight from one egg and a "pinch of salt."



Linnie Moore, 1901 graduate of St. Mary Academy, mother of Mary Clare Mracek, IBVM.

By 1913 the ministry of the IBVM in Joliet had grown to include schools in four parishes, St. Mary, Sacred Heart, St. Patrick, and St. Bernard, and their own St. Mary Academy. When it became clear that the community was unable to fulfill the desire of the Joliet pastors that all teachers in their schools

be women religious, the IBVM Sisters withdrew from Joliet in 1919. As they were preparing to leave, they received a letter from Father Burke, the pastor who had welcomed them so warmly to St. Mary Parish and who had gone on to be the Bishop of St. Joseph, Missouri. "I regret beyond expression your departure, as your coming was one of the proudest events of the best part of my life," he wrote. "I always felt that one of the best things I ever did for the devoted people of Joliet was the establishment there of the Ladies of Loretto. You have at least the consolation to know that you did your work in Joliet nobly and devotedly and that your work there will ever remain."

With great joy the IBVM Sisters answered God's call to return to Joliet in August of 1982 when the community assumed the administration of St. Raymond Cathedral Parish School. What had begun in 1880 had then come full circle.

Alice Whitehead

A quiz for IBVM history buffs . . .

1. Which two schools staffed by the IBVM opened in the same year?
2. What was the original name of Loretto High School (Englewood) in Chicago?
3. What was the first location of St. Cyril Elementary School in Chicago?
4. How many elementary schools in Joliet, Illinois, were staffed by members of the IBVM in the early 1900's?
5. Which three religious communities collaborated in 1957 to staff St. Francis High School in Wheaton, Illinois?
6. Which all-girl's high school today is administered by the IBVM?

1. In August, 1949, Mother Victorine O'Meara sent five sisters to Sacramento, California, to open St. Philomene School.
2. The seven members of St. Bernard graduating class of 1893, in a great burst of enthusiasm and probably nostalgia, begged their teacher and principal, Mother St. Roque Canty, to let them return in the fall to have high school classes with her. The parents supported their children's request. After four years St. Bernard High School was moved into the new convent. The name remained St. Bernard for 20 years or more.
3. In the newly-built Loretto Academy, Woodlawn.
4. Four elementary schools (St. Patrick, St. Mary, Sacred Heart, St. Bernard) and one high school (St. Mary Academy).
5. Brothers of the Christian Schools (St. Louis District), Wheaton Franciscans, and the IBVM Sisters.
6. Loretto High School, Sacramento, California, which was opened in 1955.