

History of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi



Ettenbeuren

1848 Pastor and assistant pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption in Ettenbeuren, Bavaria, respond to the pleas of Bishop John Martin Henni of Milwaukee, Wis.

1849 March 6 – May 10: Tertiaries journey from Ettenbeuren to Milwaukee

Priests: Father Francis Anthony Keppeler, Father Mathias Steiger

Women: Otilie Dirr, Krescentia Eberle, Anna Ritter, Theresia Moser, Maria Saumweber, Margaret Keppeler

Men: Anton Joseph Zahler, Leo Bernard, Joseph Suess, William Reder, John Spitzelberger

May 28 – The men and women present themselves to Bishop Henni - Foundation Day for the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi; Otilie Dirr chosen to be leader – known as Mother Aemiliana



Bishop Henni



Mother Aemiliana



1849 Convent

December – Sisters move in to first convent: 60-foot long, 60-foot wide enclosing a courtyard with a well in the center. The Assisium on present-day convent grounds is a model of first convent.

1851 First Crisis

Cholera epidemic takes the lives of both Rev. Keppeler and Rev. Steiger – just days apart. The leaders are gone. Their dreams vanish.

1852 Father Michael Heiss becomes community's spiritual director/ "spiritual father"

Bishop Henni approves Father Heiss Rule: threefold workload: care and instruction of orphans; carry out women's tasks at the seminary; give Christian instruction to the young, especially through schools. Time allocated for manual labor: 11 hours; and for prayer: 3 hours



Keppeler & Steiger Gravesites

1854 – 2000

St. Aemilian Orphanage moves to Nojoshing. The Sisters care for the boys.

July 16: the six foundresses make first profession of vows.



St. Aemilian



Seminary



Gravestones of Foundresses



New Convent



Mother Crescentia Nondorf



St. Lawrence Church

1856 Dedication of St. Francis de Sales Seminary – built on land originally purchased by the Ettenbeuren Tertiaries.

1856 – 1860

Growth of the seminary outpaces congregation's growth. Seminary's decision: new membership limited strictly to the number needed to do seminary work. Remuneration consists of room and board, and a small amount for purchasing clothing. Sisters are disheartened.

1860 June 6 – **Second Crisis**

Foundresses, convinced they failed, leave the community – Mother Aemiliana, Sisters Frances Eberle, Johanna Ritter, Angela Moser, Margaret Saumweber and novice Margaret Geiger; Sister Clara Eisenschmid departs a year earlier. Eleven Sisters and postulants remain.

1860 - 1861

Seminary builds new convent for Sisters at a cost of \$3500. Sisters agree to work at seminary for \$200 per year for next two years. In some months, no payment is received; in others, furnishings or other necessities in lieu of payment.

1860 – 1862

Mother Seraphine Sanders becomes Superior General.

1862 First election: Mother Crescentia Nondorf. Sister Antonia Zimmer designs new habit.

1863 – 1873

Mother Antonia Zimmer becomes Mother General.

A three-fold plan:

- 1.** Secure Motherhouse independent of the seminary
- 2.** Remove seminary's restriction of limiting number of postulants
- 3.** Begin preparations for teaching in parochial schools

1864 A quasi-normal school is established to instruct Sisters becoming teachers. More postulants are accepted. Mother Antonia moves Motherhouse to near St. Lawrence Church in Jefferson, Wis. St. Coletta is patron of convent upon Bishop Henni's insistence.



St. Coletta

1865 Establishes teaching missions in Jefferson, Wis.: St. Lawrence and the city school at St. John's. The new brick St. Coletta's convent is completed.

1865 – 1873

Outlying missions open in Wisconsin, Iowa, Ohio.

1868 STORM IS BREWING Third crisis

September 29: As Father Michael Heiss becomes bishop of La Crosse Diocese, Wis., he can no longer be spiritual director at St. Francis Convent. News devastates Mother Antonia and formulates a plan of action.



Bishop Heiss



Mother Antonia Herb

1869 Father F. X. Obermueller, Jefferson's chaplain, visits Bishop Heiss in La Crosse; suggests an established sisterhood would benefit the poor diocese. Land is purchased by Brother Bernard Gerleman and, in secret, by Mother Antonia.

1870 Minor Conventuals' General-Superior offers the opinion: Bishop Henni cannot interfere if the Sisters wish to transfer to another diocese. Neither Bishop Henni nor the Sisters know of this plan of action!



St. Rose Convent, LaCrosse, WI

1871 July 10: St. Rose of Viterbo Convent in La Crosse completed. Mother Antonia strips St. Coletta Convent of possessions and personnel, but claims jurisdiction over St. Coletta and houses in St. Francis. Bishop Henni still has not been told of this move!

1872 – 1873 THE STORM ARRIVES

Mother Antonia writes ultimatum to "Seminary Sisters" – convent is independent of La Crosse in temporal matters, but Mother Antonia maintains jurisdiction of spiritual matters; Sisters to continue seminary work until vacation; if 10 Sisters decide to stay at St. Francis, may retain their religious habit, otherwise not; elect Sister Crescentia Nondorf as superior; remaining Sisters live at St. Aemilian's Orphanage; certain Sisters should be dismissed along with all novices and postulants.

Upon learning of Mother Antonia's ultimatum, Bishop Henni dispenses the Sisters from their vow of obedience to Mother Antonia.

March 13: Mother Antonia gains entrance into St. Francis Convent, heavily veiled and under false pretenses. No Sisters come to talk with Mother; no Sisters leave.



St. Coletta



St. John's School for the Deaf



Sister Antonine Thren



Mother Thecla Thren



St. Francis Chapel



St. Francis Chapel, prior 2019

March 15: Mother Antonia leaves St. Francis, becoming superior of the La Crosse Convent (Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration) – 65 professed Sisters, 15 novices, 10 postulants.

1873 Mother Crescentia Nondorf appointed as St. Francis Convent superior of 37 Sisters and one postulant. June 27: Rome accepts the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi as a separate community

1874 Rev. Charles Wapelhorst compiles Rule for the Sisters and is approved by Bishop Henni

1877 With assistance from Father Wapelhorst, "Seminary Sisters" purchase St. Coletta property in Jefferson, Wis.

1877 – 1880 Mother Catherine Murphy is elected superior-general: establishes Motherhouse and novitiate along with a normal school at St. Coletta in Jefferson. One year later, Motherhouse and school return to St. Francis.

1880 – 1886 Sister Helen Wager is elected as Mother General.

1882 A discussion ensues – Sisters are to consolidate with Greenfield Park Sisters (School Sisters of St. Francis) or Silver Lake Franciscans (Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity). The plan is suppressed due to Father August Zeininger's protest.

1885 – 1983 St. John's School for the Deaf: Sisters take charge of teaching, household duties and act as housemothers at the archdiocesan-owned school.

1886 – 1898 Sister Antonine Thren becomes Mother General: doubles membership to 128 Sisters; builds 1888 addition; builds Gothic-style St. Francis Chapel in 1895; obtains financial independence from the seminary and a deed to 23.72 acres.

1898 Gains legal designation: Incorporation of congregation as a religious, charitable and educational corporation as Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi.

1898 – 1925 Mother Thecla Thren is elected: improves entire Motherhouse complex with beauty and additional buildings; gives Sisters permission to attend Catholic colleges; establishes St. Catherine Normal School; opens 57 schools in Midwest.



St. Mary's Academy first building



Mother Celestine Stark



Mother Frederick Bartholmew



St. Clare College, forerunner of Cardinal Stritch University



Archbishop Cardinal Stritch



First group of missionaries sent to China

1904 St. Mary's Academy for girls opens on convent grounds

St. Coletta School for Exceptional Children is founded in Jefferson, Wis.

1904 – 1924

Improvements include: new addition in 1914, electrified buildings, a powerhouse, first radio in convent, gas line to convent

1924 Approval of Constitutions, becoming a pontifical congregation.

1925 – 1937

Mother Celestine Stark serves community in several capacities; also known as community photographer, needlework instructor, and stamp collector.

Continues to beautify convent grounds; builds Rosary Hall in 1930 – a large addition to St. Mary's Academy

1929 – 1948

Mother Celestine sends first group of missionaries to Hungkialou, Shantung, China: Sisters Virginia Wegenek, Reginald Hary, Mercedes Tintel, Caecilia Raedler; accepts first Chinese candidates in 1931. After closing, 20 Chinese Sisters and one postulant return with American Sisters.

1932 September 12th: St. Clare Junior College opens on Motherhouse campus.

1937 July: Articles of Incorporation are filed - St. Clare College can grant degrees as a four-year college; advanced education for Sisters begin.

Ministries: 25 new schools, 2 orphanages, 3 bishop residences

1937 – 1949

Sisters elect Mother Bartholomew Frederick, one of the first two members to earn master's degrees in 1927. Work at Motherhouse is departmentalized: i.e. book bindery, altar bread, vestment, laundry, bakery, kitchen, greenhouse, and gardening.

1940s Congregation joins World War II efforts: begins "prayer front;" ask unnaturalized members to be U. S. citizens; receive air-raid and fire-watcher training; take Red Cross courses; send items to overseas chaplains.

1943 – 1945

War in China: American missionary Sisters sent to the Japanese Weihsein internment camp



Adoration Chapel



Cardinal Cushing



Chinese and American Sisters arriving in the US



St. Ann Health Center



Mother Madeline Heimann



Mother Romuald Nolz



Cardinal Stritch College

1944 June 13: Pope Pius XII grants privilege of perpetual adoration; War Department grants permission to remodel a chapel's wing. September 8: Sisters begin adoration in St. Clare Adoration Chapel.

1946 June 27: Mother Bartholomew announces college is open to laywomen; called The Cardinal Stritch College, after Samuel Cardinal Stritch – a staunch promoter of higher education for women.

1947 Archbishop Cardinal Stritch of Chicago invites Sisters to establish St. Coletta's of Illinois in Palos Park – presently located in Tinley Park, Ill.

Archbishop Richard Cushing of Boston encourages Sisters to open St. Coletta by-the-Sea in Hanover, Mass. – known today as Cardinal Cushing Centers.

1948 Chinese and American Sisters came home to the USA. They were expelled by Communist regime.

1949 Expansion of convent – addition of St. Ann Health Center.

Sisters celebrate Centennial at St. Francis Convent.

1949 – 1961

Mother Madeline Heimann is Major Superior: expansion of Catholic school systems exert pressure on Sisters; Sisters are resolved to hold the education of younger members as a priority.

1953 Mother Madeline undertakes major renovation of 1895 St. Francis Chapel.

1962 Cardinal Stritch College leaves convent campus, moves to 6801 N. Yates Road, Fox Point, Wis.; earns university status in 1998

1961 – 1971

Mother Romuald Nolz is elected. Vatican II opens door to changes. Mother Romuald's vision and wisdom realize the time for change is inevitable: immediate need for proper and thorough academic formation; program development for ongoing spiritual development.

1967 Mother Romuald is reelected in 1967. Vatican II Council mandates all religious congregations to conduct a "Chapter of Renewal" – go back to the spirit and charism of foundresses.



Associate Gathering

1967 – 1971

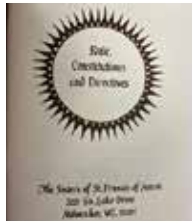
Staffing of elementary schools greatly decreases.

Chapter of Renewal of 1967: Collegial structures develop; re-entry into foreign missions (Taiwan); corporate stands on justice and peace issues; reorganization of congregational government; introduce Associate Relationship

Committee work: Major vehicle for implementing the acts of Chapter. Newly written Constitutions, "A Call to Community," provisionally adopted.



Call and Response



1967 – 1975

Corporations become independent: They are now sponsored by the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi.

1971 – 1979

Sister Leandra Eckelkamp, Director; Associate Directors are elected to office.

Chapter creates "Response '71" – attempt to put current understandings of life, goals, manner of community life in words. Sisters no longer assigned to missions – need to find own employment and receive lay salaries with benefits.



Sister Leandra Eckelkamp



Sister Joanne Meyer

1979 Sister Leandra Eckelkamp is reelected.

Supportive services for administration is established.

Changes occur: new and expanded ministries; decrease in staffing parochial schools; loss of members.



Sister Joanne Meyer (left) delivering new constitutions

1979 – 1983

Sister Joanne Meyer is elected Director of Congregation with Sisters Margaret Halaska and Nancy Kazik as Associate Directors.

"Bringing order out of chaos" – elements of new collegial government structure are implemented; prepare and submit to Rome new Constitutions in June 1981.

1982 First OSF Associate commitment ceremony

1983 Sister Joanne Meyer is re-elected Director and Sisters Nancy Kazik and Marcia Lunz elected as Associate Directors.

Corporate Stands: nuclear disarmament; standing with the poor, oppressed, women; land; environmental issues



Sister Doris Pehowski

1984 December 8: final approval to new Constitutions, "Call and Response."



Clare Hall



Hermitage



Sister Marita Maschmann



Sister Marcia Lunz



St. Mary's Academy



Clare Court



Becoming One

1987 – 1991

Sister Doris Pehowski elected Director with Sisters Marcia Lunz and Patricia Zolecki as Associate Directors.

Celebrate 140th anniversary of foundation with La Crosse Sisters; build Hermitage on grounds; St. Ann Adult Day Care Center expands; build HUD project – Canticle Court

1989 – 2019

Clare Hall, a residence for retired Sisters, opens

1949 – 1990

St. Ann Health Center closes; growth and challenges in Associate Relationship

1991 – 1995

Sister Doris Pehowski is re-elected as Director with Sisters Pat Zolecki and Rose-marie Klotz as Associate Directors.

1904 – 1991

St. Mary's Academy closes – becomes Marian Center for Non-profits

1993 The renovation of health center – Juniper Court offers affordable housing

1995 – 1999

Sister Marita Maschmann is elected Director with Joanne Schatzlein and Charlotte Roost as Associate Directors.

1997 Invitation is extended to Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore to merge

1999 Joint 150th anniversary celebration of Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi with Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (La Crosse, Wis.) and Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist (Meriden, Conn). Establish Common Venture with the Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis in Cameroon, Africa

1999 – 2003

Sister Marcia Lunz elected Director of congregation with Sisters Charlotte Roost and Rose Sevenich as Associate Directors.

Oversees merger process with Sister Mary Therese White of Baltimore

2001 Celebrate the merger of Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore with Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi

2003 Sister Marcia Lunz re-elected as Director with Sisters Kathleen Hurley and Linda Tan as Associate Directors.

2005 St. Elizabeth Convent in Baltimore partners with Homes for America to renovate Motherhouse into Clare Court



Sister Florence Deacon Sister Diana De Bruin

2007 – 2011

Sister Florence Deacon elected Director of congregation with Sisters Diana De Bruin and Margaret Kruse as Associate Directors

2011-2015

Sister Florence Deacon re-elected with Sisters Diana De Bruin and Margaret Kruse as Associate Directors

Navigates congregation through Rome’s Apostolic Visitation; as LCWR President, becomes “spokesperson” for women religious in United States.



Skyline prior to deconstruction of Motherhouse and St. Mary’s Academy, 2017

2015-2019

Sister Diana De Bruin elected as Director with Sisters Marcia Lunz and Sylvia Anne Sheldon as Associate Directors.

Decision to build new convent on site of St. Mary’s Academy, now deconstructed

May 2019: Sisters and offices move into new convent; Motherhouse and chapel are deconstructed



New convent

2019-2023

Sister Diana De Bruin re-elected as Directory of the Congregation, along with Sisters Ellen Carr and KD Strandell.

COVID-19 epidemic arrives in Milwaukee, Wis. with all its mandates and vaccines

Navigating through process to transfer OSF sponsorship to each Corporate Ministry

Move graves from Clare Court Cemetery to New Cathedral Cemetery

Sale of St. Clare Court in Baltimore to Homes for America



Leadership Team – 2023

2023 – 2027

Sister Joanne Schatzlein elected as Director of Congregation with Sisters Charlotte Roost and Sylvia Anne Sheldon as Associate Directors

Continue transfer of sponsorship of OSF Corporate Ministries



Sister Joanne Schatzlein, OSF, Michael Heine, OFM

2023 In May, Cardinal Stritch University celebrated its final commencement.

In June, the land and buildings of Cardinal Stritch were purchased by St. Augustine Preparatory Academy.



Franciscan Center

2023 On November 29, the OSF sponsorship of the Franciscan Center is transferred to the Franciscan Friars Conventual of Our Lady of the Angels Province, located in Ellicott City, Md.