

History of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet

The first Sisters of St. Joseph came from Lyon to America in 1836 in response to a request from Bishop Joseph Rosati for a small group of religious to open a school for the deaf in St. Louis. Two convents were established—one in Cahokia, which closed in 1855, the other in Carondelet, a village on the outskirts of St. Louis. Carondelet was destined to become the cradle of the American congregation.

Bishop Rosati named Mother Celestine Pommerel superior of the Carondelet community in 1840. In 1847 the first foundation outside St. Louis was made in Philadelphia, to be followed shortly by foundations in St. Paul, Minnesota and Toronto. As foundations continued to multiply, the need for centralized government was recognized. At the invitation of Mother St. John Facemaz, successor to Mother Celestine, delegates from the several branches of the Sisters of St. Joseph met in St. Louis in May 1860, to approve a plan of general government. Three provinces were established: St. Louis, Missouri; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Troy, New York, with headquarters in St. Louis. Mother St. John Facemaz was elected first superior general for a term of six years. (At this time some communities made the decision to remain under diocesan jurisdiction.)

One of Mother St. John's first concerns was to secure papal approbation for the Constitutions of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. Shortly after her election, Mother St. John went to Rome and presented a copy of the Constitutions for approval. A decree of commendation was received in 1863. Some years later, the final approbation was received, dated May 16, 1877. This approval established the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet as a congregation of pontifical right.

A fourth province was added in 1876 with provincial headquarters in Tucson, Arizona. In 1903 the provincialate was moved to Los Angeles. In the course of the years several small groups appealed to Carondelet for admission into the congregation: Sisters of St. Joseph of Muskogee, Oklahoma, 1900; Sisters of St. Joseph of Georgia, 1922; Sisters of St. Joseph of Lewiston, Idaho, 1925; Sisters of St. Joseph of Superior, Wisconsin, 1985.

Foundations were established in Hawaii in 1938, in Japan in 1956, and in Peru in 1962. These have flourished and have attracted native members. The Hawaii community was given the status of a vice province in 1956; in 1978, Japan and Peru were established as vice provinces. The congregation opened a mission in Chile in 1987.

In response to the call of the Second Vatican Council, the congregation initiated a program of spiritual renewal as recommended in the document *Perfectae Caritatis*. The members of the congregation began an intensive study of the gospels and the spirit of John Peter Medaille, their founder, and undertook an appraisal of the needs of late twentieth-century society. A subsequent expansion of ministries designed to respond to contemporary situations in diverse cultures and different ways of living community were effected by these studies.

We continue to respond to the needs of our time. On June 4, 2008, at the invitation of Archbishop Odama, we began a new congregational ministry project in the Archdiocese of Gulu in Northern Uganda. Our sisters accompany the Acholi people, serving in health care, catechetical direction, and education.

With a 1972 Chapter recommendation that "the provinces be allowed to establish commissions to initiate lay associate membership on an experimental basis," the congregation, faithful to the original intent of Father Medaille, formally reintroduced lay association into its reality. At present, over 600 women and men have made formal commitments either as associates, consociates, Ohana, or Familia de San Jose.

Today as Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, we strive to be responsive to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as were our foremothers. We derive our strength and our hope from our deepening desire for Communion. Faithful to our heritage and to our gift of unifying love, we reach out in communion with creation, with the Church, with the dear neighbor, and with each other wherever the Spirit leads us.