DAUGHTERS OF THE CHURCH
DAUGHTERS OF THE CHURCH:
A POPULAR HISTORY OF
THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY
IN THE UNITED STATES
1809-1987

by
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New City Press
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FOREWORD

Throughout history, wise persons have reminded the world that to forget or to be ignorant of one's past is to limit, and perhaps even preclude, one's future. It is generally accepted that "the past is prologue" and an appreciative knowledge of the past provides perspective for the days that have not as yet dawned. Memory offers a shield against the two temptations of false optimism and faithless pessimism.

The popular history of the foundation and growth of the Daughters of Charity in the United States reveals visionary, dynamic Daughters of Charity who used every power of mind, body and spirit to advance the Kingdom, as they created an impressive network of services across this country. They make real the ideal of "audacious courage of the apostles" referred to in the Daughters' current Constitutions.

For the contemporary Daughter of Charity, this analysis of history awakens a deepened faith in God's Providence and a humble confidence in herself. The distillation of sanctity and creativity is also a source of gratitude and determination for Daughters in the five provinces of the United States.

We, the visitatrixes of these five United States provinces, dedicate this book to our early sisters, those strong, spiritual, community women who lived before us but continue to influence the present. May their example inspire and enlighten all of us that we may have the courage and the wisdom to continue to add to their harvest of good works by "honoring our Lord Jesus Christ as the source and model of all charity, serving him corporally and spiritually in the person of the Poor."
DAUGHTERS OF THE CHURCH, a popular history of the Daughters of Charity in the United States, was undertaken at the request of the Vincentian Studies Institute to be a companion volume to AMERICAN VINCENTIANS, a popular history of the Congregation of the Mission. Because of the complexity of the subject matter—the long span of years, the large number of sisters, locations, institutions and types of service, as well as the changes in Community administration—the history is related chronologically rather than topically.

The five visitatrixes of the United States who commissioned the work designated a sister from each province to provide information and materials, each from her respective province, and to review the manuscript for accuracy and adequacy in covering the development of the Community in each region. This Popular History Committee met for the first time in January 1983.

This history is intended primarily for use of the Community, particularly in formation, and for those who collaborate with the sisters or wish to know more about them. It aims to show the influences of historical trends and processes in the Church and nation on the development of the Community, and to suggest ways in which the Community may have influenced patterns of development in the Church and even in the nation. While every establishment is mentioned, however briefly, no attempt is made to name or rank in importance the thousands of sisters who gave their lives to God in the Community. Those foundations are more strongly featured which were pioneer works of their kind in the United States, first services of the Community in a particular state, or more colorful examples of trends of the times. Sisters named in the history are not necessarily holier or more important than others; but their words and actions are verifiable and exemplify the essential spirit of the Community.
Editorial Guidelines

The Chicago Manual of Style, 13th Edition (1982) was used as the basis for style and format. A few adaptations were made in capitalizations for the sake of clarity: Church, when speaking of the Catholic Church as a body of believers; Community, or Company, when referring to the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s (before 1850) and the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul; Council, when used to describe the decision-making body of the Community; Province, when part of a proper name. Since this is a popular history, footnotes are used sparingly for explanatory material that does not properly belong in the text; endnotes are used only for direct quotations.

Family names of sisters are not always available. Where they are given, variant spellings of them are common. Variants that are too divergent are given in a footnote. Otherwise, the spelling with the best documentation was chosen—documentation such as personnel registers, signed letters, passports, tombstones if buried at the provincial house, and, in some cases, corroboration from outside contemporary sources mentioning the sister’s family. Given Community names were usually different from the baptismal name, and they were sometimes changed when a sister was missioned. In this history sisters are called by the names they bore at the time and in the place where they are mentioned.

A Word about Words

The corporate title of the 1809 American foundation was Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s; that of the international community of which it became a province is Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. Then as now the terms Sisters of Charity and Daughters of Charity were used almost synonymously of the Community, and they are so used in this book. In general, Sisters of Charity is the generic term for women dedicated to works of charity; Daughters of Charity is the more specific description of the daughters of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Since the sisters take annual vows, they are not nuns. They live in houses, not convents, and belong to a community or
company, not a congregation or order. What religious orders call the novitiate (composed of novices and a mistress of novices) is known as the seminary (made up of seminary sisters and a directress of the seminary). The superior of a local house is called the sister servant. The house is often referred to as a local mission, where sisters live who are missioned or sent for a particular apostolate. In Mother Seton’s lifetime the terms novitiate and novices were in use; but for the rest the vocabulary was the same as that used among the Daughters of Charity.

The word visitatrix as used in this history has two meanings. In the early 19th century it still designated what it had meant in Saint Louise’s time: a sister authorized by superiors to visit an institution (or all those within a city or region) to see how the rule was observed and to represent to superiors the particular needs and difficulties of the sisters there. Since the Community became a province of the Daughters of Charity in 1850, the term has been used to denote a provincial superior.

The vocabulary of the apostolates has changed considerably over the 180 years covered in this history. Early hospitals were called infirmaries; today most have expanded into health centers. The term asylum was used for any type of refuge or shelter, whether for orphans, the blind or disabled, the “insane” or mentally handicapped, or social outcasts such as wayward girls and single mothers. Later the gentler term House of Refuge was used for a place sheltering the socially or physically handicapped, and Retreat or Institution became part of the corporate name for the psychiatric hospital or alcoholic treatment center. Children’s homes might be called Home, Hall, Haven, or Manor in the 20th century to reduce the stigma of institutional living. House of Charity was a term borrowed from Europe for a place where all the works of mercy were sheltered. This later became non-residential and evolved into the modern social center. For the sake of simplicity, the above terms are used only when giving formal titles of institutions; generic terms such as hospital, orphanage, infant home, or mental hospital are preferred. In the educational field a similar evolution took place. Various types of schools are adequately defined in the text.
Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the visitatrixes of the United States, those who originally commissioned the work and their successors who have continued to give it both moral and financial support. Thanks particularly to Sister Mary John Lindner of the West Central Province, who entrusted me with this commission, and Sister Bernice Coreil, her successor, who provided the place and time to work on the project and facilitated it in every way she could.

I wish to pay tribute to the members of the Popular History Committee who rendered such generous assistance over the past years:

Sister Elaine Wheeler, archivist of the Northeast Province, who put her archives at my disposal by mail, supplied a copy of Mother Mariana Flynn's life, worked with unflagging energy and a genius for organizing data into charts, and undertook the tedious task of indexing the history;

Sister Grace Dorr, representative of the Southeast Province, who spent countless hours of research in the Emmitsburg archives and supplied copies or resumés of pertinent theses, articles and histories;

Sister Catherine Madigan, councillor of the East Central Province, who provided information on the past and present of each mission in the province in a succinct and organized form, and showed a special knack for simplifying complexities;

Sister Mary William Vinet, archivist of the Province of the West, who was a councillor when the provinces were divided in 1969 and supplied the documentation concerning the division. In addition to information about the West past and present, she contributed humor and unfailing support.

All four members of the committee read the manuscript at all stages and made suggestions for revision. Other readers who made useful suggestions were Sisters Rose Collins, Adelaide Kulhanek, and Beatrice Brown.

Members of the Vincentian Studies Institute offered valuable guidance and assistance. Father John Rybolt read the manuscript and made helpful recommendations; he also shared the fruits of his research abroad. Father Frederick Easterly offered hospitality in Philadelphia and an entrée into the archdiocesan
archives. Father Douglas Slawson read the manuscript from an historical point of view and made valuable observations.

Particular services were rendered by the staff of the following libraries: Saint Louis Medical Society, Catholic Health Association, DePaul Hospital and Kenrick Seminary, all in Saint Louis, Missouri, and the University of Maryland Medical Library in Baltimore.

Sisters of several provinces shared remembrances and personal experiences by letter, tape, and personal interviews. I am grateful to all of these, especially Sister Mary Rose McGeady, who in a two-hour interview gave me an overview of child care in the 20th century and reasons for program changes—all enlivened with particular details and anecdotes.

I would like to express special thanks to the archivists who assisted with photocopies and other services: Father John W. Bowen, S.S., of the Sulpician Archives, Baltimore; Sister Mary Felicitas Powers of the Cathedral Archives, Baltimore; Sister Aloysia Dugan of the Saint Joseph Provincial House Archives, Emmitsburg; and particularly Sister Henrietta Guyot and her staff of the Marillac Provincialate Archives, Saint Louis, who found books, looked up information, discussed ideas and events, and gave ongoing encouragement and support. Provincial secretaries have also afforded invaluable assistance. Sister Adele Francis of Emmitsburg made available the original Rule and Constitutions and the yet unpublished life of Sister Isabel Toohey. Sisters Geraldine Shanahan and Frances Cumberland of Emmitsburg and Mary Ann Hartman of Saint Louis have answered many telephoned requests. Others who merit special note are Sister Mary Louise Lyons who shared her copy of the rare Birmingham Diary; Sister Marie Sheehy who assisted with typing and proofreading; and Sister Emma Myers, who gave a summer doing many secretarial services.

No work so long in the process could have been completed without the special support of family, friends, and the sisters with whom I live, who encouraged and nurtured me through problems, frustrations and successive illnesses.

Marillac Provincial House
1989
When her last hour came 4 January 1821, Elizabeth left this message with her Daughters: “Be children of the Church.”

New Yorkers saw Sister Rose as a lady even when she was helping orphan boys move the wheelbarrow through the streets from market.

Father John Dubois lent his own cabin to the first group of Setons and sisters who arrived in Emmitsburg in June 1809.

Religion class on the mountain included all the girls of the parish, black and white, slave and free.

The Setons were not permitted to land at Livorno, but were quarantined in a cold stone lazaretto near the city. A week after their release into the care of the Filicchi family, Will died 27 December 1803.