Celebrating 100 Years
in the United States

A Collection of Moments, Memories and Well Wishes
Marking a Century of Religious Service

The School Sisters of St. Francis | 1913-2013
The passenger manifest of The Pretoria, the ship upon which our Pioneer Sisters traveled from Europe to America, in August 1913.
Our Pioneer Sisters

Some had barely reached adulthood when, in 1913, they left behind all they knew in Europe and bravely set off for a whole new world, to bring faith and education to the children of Eastern European immigrants in America. They were our courageous and visionary Pioneer Sisters (photographed with Mother Xavier Furgott upon her 1914 visit to Pittsburgh): Sister Methodia Bradac, Sister Louise Kilb, Sister Constance Linhart, Sister Gerard Lampl, Mother Xavier Furgott, Sister Isidora David and Sister Aloysia Drdla.

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Dear Sister Bernadine Marie,

The Holy Father was pleased to be informed that the School Sisters of Saint Francis will soon celebrate the centenary of their presence in the United States of America. He has asked me to convey his cordial good wishes and the assurance of his prayers for the happy occasion.

His Holiness prays that as you and your Sisters give thanks to Almighty God for the many blessings received during the past hundred years you will bear ever more joyful witness to your religious consecration and dedicate yourselves with renewed vigor to the works of the apostolate, confident in the sustaining grace of Christ the Savior.

Commending all the members of your Province to the protection and prayers of Our Lady, Mother of the Church, and Saint Francis your patron, the Holy Father cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of abundant heavenly favors.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

[Signature]

* Angelo Becciu
Substitute

Sister Bernadine Marie Stemnock, OSF
Provincial Minister
School Sisters of Saint Francis
Mount Assisi Convent
934 Forest Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15202
August 15, 2013

Dear Sister Bernadine and School Sisters of Saint Francis:

On behalf of the clergy, those in consecrated life and all the faithful of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, I offer my heartfelt congratulations to each of you as we celebrate your 125th jubilee of the School Sisters of Saint Francis as an international congregation and the 100th jubilee of your presence in the United States. This is a most glorious day for our local Church!

We honor you, and the Sisters before you, for your steadfast love of God and compassion for God's people. We thank you for the many sacrifices that you have made. Such a milestone marks not only the passage of time, but the enduring commitment of consecrated women to continually bear Christ.

How blessed this Diocese is to be the place where your North American foundation took root. In 1913, six Sisters from your foundation in Bohemia came to Pittsburgh. In less than ten years, the Sisters were staffing schools in Slovak parishes in Pennsylvania, and welcoming American Sisters. In 1928, Mount Assisi Convent in Bellevue was completed, and Mount Assisi Academy, a high school for girls, was established there in 1938.

In elementary education, the Sisters continued to add more parish schools in eastern Pennsylvania, West Virginia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. Vocations also continued to flourish and, in 1947, Monocacy Manor was established in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The Bethlehem Province also experienced growth in schools and catechetical programs. A high school for girls, Saint Francis Academy, was built in 1957. The grounds of Monocacy Manor also house a spacious and beautiful Retreat Center.

On a very personal note, I am indirectly a recipient of your dedication in the teaching ministry of the Church. The School Sisters taught my late and dear mom in the 1930's in the former Divine Redeemer School in Ambridge. Since my mother was my first teacher in the ways of faith, she passed on much of what you taught her. Thank you.

For these and many more reasons, I give praise and thanks to God for the profound gift of the School Sisters of Saint Francis as you respond to the signs of the times and to the needs of the Church as faithful servants of the Church, joyfully ministering to the poor and otherwise needy.

The School Sisters of Saint Francis in the United States have faced many challenges in the past, with courageous faith, resilient hope and patient love. Following in the footsteps of Saint Francis and Mother Hyacinth Zahalka, you continue to embrace the journey that was begun long ago. Be assured of my prayers as you give thanks for the past and remain steadfast in joyful hope for the future.

Grateful for our belief that “Nothing is Impossible with God,” I am

Your brother in Christ,

Most Reverend David A. Zubik
Bishop of Pittsburgh

DAZ:lw
March 18, 2013

School Sisters of Saint Francis
Mount Assisi Convent
934 Forest Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15201

Dear Sisters,

Blessings on this wonderful occasion.

I wish to convey to you my heartfelt congratulations and prayerful best wishes as you celebrate the 125th year jubilee as an international Congregation and the 100th year jubilee of your presence in the United States.

Because of your religious profession, you have joined yourself to Christ by the gift of your whole life. Acting under the impulse of love, which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts, you have dedicated yourselves to follow Christ, who virginal and poor, redeemed and sanctified His people by obedience unto death on the cross.

By virtue of your years of faithful service, you have witnessed to the love of God in the world and contributed significantly to the Church’s mission of evangelization. It is my most fervent prayer that God in his goodness will bless each of you with lasting good health, happiness and continued joy in His service.

May the ideals your Congregation espoused one hundred and twenty five years ago always remain strong in your hearts. May God strengthen you with His love and graces.

Invoking God’s blessing upon you, the School Sisters of Saint Francis, I am

Sincerely in Christ,

[Signature]

Most Reverend John O. Barres
Bishop of Allentown
14 February 2013

Feast of Saints Cyril & Methodius

Prot. N. 044/13

School Sisters of St. Francis, United States Province
934 Forest Ave.
Pittsburgh PA 15202
USA

My dear Sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

With great joy and humility I congratulate you on this centenary of our presence as School Sisters of St. Francis in ministry to the people of the United States of America; I have an added personal reason to rejoice with you because those first sisters came from my homeland to yours and transplanted the charism that had been carried from Austria to Bohemia 25 years earlier.

Having celebrated a Year of Reconciliation to strengthen your unity, you now set out to celebrate what has been done for the Kingdom of God in the “Mission of America”, in the Pittsburgh and Bethlehem Provinces, and last of all, in the United States Province. We look back in wonder at what these women—you yourselves included—have accomplished in these 100 years, ever mindful that it is God’s faithful love and presence that has made it all possible.

This is not only a time to look back in awe, but also to look around us and see what good is still being done, how our sisters are living the charism, and even how the charism develops differently in the rich soil of various cultures. The movement of our sisters to the United States marked the “baby steps” of what would become the challenge of internationality today, a challenge but a blessing as well.

Most importantly, however, it is also a time to look towards the future – with the same faith and hope in God, of course, but also with the same courage and determination with which those first sisters faced the ocean voyage, separation from family, and all the unknown sacrifices that lay ahead of them. My hope and prayer is that this same spirit of courage, determination and sacrifice may continue to overflow in your hearts and lives.

With confidence and hope,

S. M. Kvetta Vinclarkova, OSF
General Minister
Dear Sisters:

Congratulations, once again, as you celebrate your great centennial of community life and service to the church. May God pour out many, many blessings upon you. I hope to be with you for this great celebration. God’s peace.

Sincerely in Christ and Mary,

Most Reverend Michael D. Pfeifer, OMI
Bishop of San Angelo

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

June 28, 2013

I am pleased to congratulate you on your anniversary.

Throughout our Nation’s history, places of worship have been a cornerstone of our communities. On this occasion, we are reminded of the abiding truth that each of us has the power to create a better world for ourselves and our children when we do God’s work here on earth. As you celebrate this important milestone, I hope you will look back on your achievements and contributions with joy and pride.

I wish your congregation continued success and blessings in the years to come.
GREETINGS:

It is my pleasure to congratulate the School Sisters of Saint Francis in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as it celebrates its 125th year jubilee as an international congregation as well as its 100th year jubilee in the United States.

Since its inception, the School Sisters of Saint Francis have remained committed to upholding its Franciscan heritage, values and traditions. It is my hope that the Pittsburgh community will continue to benefit from all that School Sisters of Saint Francis have to offer for years to come.

As Governor, and on behalf of all Pennsylvanians, I am pleased to congratulate School Sisters of Saint Francis on this special anniversary. Please accept my best wishes for a memorable and enjoyable celebration.

TOM CORBETT
Governor
2013
School Sisters of Saint Francis  
Mount Assisi Convent  
934 Forest Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15202  

Dear Sisters:  

On behalf of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, it is my pleasure to congratulate you upon your 125th anniversary as an international congregation and 100th anniversary marking your presence in the United States. I am pleased to provide you with the enclosed legislative citation from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in commemoration of these events.  

This occasion is a wondrous testament to your continued tradition of devotion to God, faith, stewardship and generosity to the community by spiritual leaders, both past and present. In this era of societal and cultural animosity, families, and most especially young people, need spiritual guidance in order to live enriched lives and be productive members of our community. The School Sisters of Saint Francis have been at the forefront of addressing those needs.  

Once again, congratulations!  

Sincerely,  

[Signature]  

Adam Ravenstahl, Member  
PA House of Representatives  
20th Legislative District  

AR/dw
The Beginning | Antonia Lampel’s Vision

The story of the School Sisters of St. Francis in the United States began in 1843 in Graz, Austria when a devout young woman, Antonia Lampel, a member of the Secular Franciscan Order, became aware of the need in the local area for educating and training young girls both spiritually and academically. Antonia, her sister Amalia, and a few young women of the Secular Franciscans agreed to live together as a small community while they devoted themselves to the education and formation of girls, particularly of the lower social class. They lived together, and since, in their opinion, their lifestyle did not essentially differ from a “regular” religious community, they considered themselves as such.

However, they desired to obtain the necessary approval to be designated as a new religious community. Therefore, Antonia and her associates drafted their religious life statutes, and through Bishop Roman Sabastian Zengerle, presented them for approval to the Holy See. Pope Gregory XVI granted the approval of the Church on July 15, 1843. Antonia became the first general superior of the new order and was given the name Sister Frances Lampel.

Three sisters from the Zahalka family in Bohemia entered this young congregation in Graz in 1860 — Sister Jacoba, Sister Hyacinth and Sister Adalberta. In 1886, the Zahalka sisters returned to their native land in Bohemia for a visit on the occasion of the first solemn Mass of their brother Joseph. There they met Bishop Hais of Hradec Kralove who expressed a desire to have sisters in his diocese to educate and train the young.

After obtaining the necessary ecclesiastical and congregational permission and with the financial support of the Zahalka Family and Countess Louise von Stadion, a great benefactor of the young community, the sisters became autonomous and self-supporting. They immediately began teaching the poor children in Slatinany. Thus was born a new branch of Mother Frances Antonia Lampel’s original Graz foundation with Mother Hyacinth Zahalka as its foundress and first general superior. This is the congregation to which the United States Province of the School Sisters of St. Francis owes its beginnings.

I thank God for you and for the wonderful education you provided at St. Clement Elementary School in Ellsworth, Pa., and some of you at Mon Valley Catholic High School. May God reward you immensely for all you have accomplished in 100 years of service in the United States. I wish you many more happy, blessed, fulfilling years.

Sister Wanda Blotic, OCD | Latrobe, Pa
The young community in Bohemia began accepting women of Czech, Slovak and German backgrounds into the novitiate and flourished with new apostolates. Meanwhile, requests from bishops and pastors came for sisters to serve among the Slovak people in America. Increased immigration of people from Europe to North America gave the American church a new concern, that of providing spiritual guidance and religious education for the many Slovak immigrants. Pastors begged for help from the Church in Europe, especially to open and staff schools for religious and academic education. Having completed her term as general superior, Mother M. Hyacinth could not ignore the pleas from America.

With the permission and blessing of Bishop Joseph Doubrava of Hradec Kralove and General Superior Mother Xavier Furgott, Mother Hyacinth and her companion, Sister M. Georgia Cerny, sailed for America on October 3, 1911. After visiting various locations in Wisconsin, they came to Pittsburgh, Pa. Here they received lodging and hospitality from the Benedictine Sisters at St. Mary Convent on Canal Street, North Side. Not long afterward, Mother Hyacinth became ill with pneumonia and died on March 10, 1912, far away from her homeland, leaving Sister Georgia alone in a strange land. She was buried among the sisters in the Benedictine cemetery. In 1939 her remains were exhumed and transferred to the cemetery at Mount Assisi Convent. Sister Georgia continued to live with the Benedictine Sisters, assisting them in laundry and other domestic tasks, until more sisters came from Europe at the invitation of Slovak priests.

Mother Hyacinth’s vision of establishing the congregation in America did not die with her. On May 4, 1913, Mother Xavier left Prague for Pittsburgh with Sister Mechtilde Siederer to investigate the requests of Father Ferdinand Prikazky of St. Gabriel Church. She returned in July, leaving Sister Mechtilde with Sister Georgia and, in August, she sent six sisters to America.

For 14 days they were at sea on board the Pretoria. Although the chronicles record a fairly good voyage, most of the sisters suffered from seasickness. These pioneer sisters set foot on American soil at Ellis Island, New York.

Every day of my life I am somehow reminded of my life back at the Mount. I loved those years and learned many of life’s lessons, which I carry until today. I carry much love for all the sisters who touched my life back in those early days and will be forever grateful. I pray that I meet them all in eternity again.

Louise Bjalobok Sheelhen | Clearwater, Fla. | Class of 1961
Sister Mark (Sister Patricia Marie Buranosky) was my typing teacher and oversaw the cheerleaders. I remember her energy and joy. We had the feeling of being loved and cared for. I remember Sister Roseleen (Sister Anna Mae Kuzma) sitting me down in the stairwell to talk to me about being a nun. I was already dating my present husband, so I told her I wanted a family. But that conversation was very special to me. I also remember Sister Felicitas Konecny teaching us Latin. Loved it!

Marilyn Hogan Leap | Raleigh, N.C. | Class of 1968

Room to Grow | A Place to Call Home

York on Friday, August 15, 1913, where they were met by Rev. Joseph Vrana, who had been instrumental in bringing the sisters to America.

On Monday morning, August 18, they took the train to Pittsburgh and arrived in the evening of that day. Like Mother Hyacinth, they also stayed with the Benedictine sisters. The following day they settled in a double house located at 1309 Juniata Street in the Manchester area — a house not furnished, not cleaned, without food and utensils — in other words, not ready.

"On the first day our only table was an ironing board, our only cup a soup dipper from which we drank our coffee in turns. On the second day we obtained the necessary dishes and utensils. We wished to cook at home, but there was nothing to cook. After some searching and inquiring, we found out that a certain lady had a grocery store nearby. This lady was very good, a Catholic from Germany, whose three children were attending St. Joseph School. Noticing our predicament, she promised to get for us everything that was necessary. Daily she sent her children to bring what we needed.

Shortly after the sisters began teaching in the parish schools, several young women expressed interest in joining their community. On July 24, 1914, three women were received into the novitiate and pronounced their first vows the following year. Each year additional women were received as postulants. Space in the convent was very limited.

Realizing the tremendous need for educating the children, and despite the hardships of a new language and culture, the sisters began their apostolate of teaching and agreed to staff schools in two parishes: St. Gabriel in North Side, Pittsburgh, and St. Clement in Tarentum. In 1914 additional sisters arrived in the United States and, in less than 10 years, elementary schools were opened in Barnesboro, McKees Rocks, Erie and Ambridge.

The sisters recorded many humorous incidents of these early days. On one occasion on a very hot August day, fearing that the water was not safe for drinking, the sisters asked some
of the boys who were playing in the street to go to buy them some beer (a common drink in Europe). Knowing that the sisters did not fully understand the differences between the European and United States customs, particularly that young children could not buy beer, some of the parents showed them where they could get clean water, and later bought a filter for their kitchen faucet.

Because of limited space and the distance between the convent and the church, the sisters eventually moved to 1614 Superior Avenue. However, the house was destroyed by fire, which forced the sisters to move again.

"... Meanwhile, the family living in our future home at 2396 California Avenue emptied two rooms for us in the attic, where the men brought our beds and bedding. All the sisters slept in one room; in the other room were the candidates ... When the family living downstairs moved out, we arranged everything the best way we could in this our future home and Motherhouse.

In the novitiate with sometimes 11 novices was a small sewing room in the attic ... There was a table for four with three chairs; some had to sit on the trunk-baskets placed alongside the walls ... During the summer when all the sisters assembled, about half of us had no beds. We slept wherever there was a bit of floor space available: under the beds, in the hallways, dining room, on the table, under the table, on the trunk-baskets..."

In spite of all the difficulties and hardships, the sisters were filled with a religious and joyful spirit. The community was growing in numbers and it soon became evident that the small house on California Avenue could not adequately meet the needs of the sisters. Land was purchased in the Bellevue section of Pittsburgh in Ross Township for the purpose of erecting a large facility which would be the motherhouse of the sisters. The cost of the building was estimated to be $200,000.

The groundbreaking for the new motherhouse took place on September 21, 1927. Among

The groundbreaking for Mount Assisi Convent in September 1927.
those present were Mother M. Xavier Furgott, the Pioneer Sisters, benefactors, and Rev. Prikazky, who had been helpful to the sisters in their earliest days in America. With joyful and happy hearts, on April 29, 1928, the sisters participated in the blessing of the cornerstone of the motherhouse building, known as Mount Assisi Convent. There was great excitement and celebration as the sisters moved in on September 14 and celebrated the first Mass on September 15.

At the new motherhouse the sisters opened Mount Assisi Academy, a high school for girls and an elementary school. The school grew and, in 10 more years, another building was erected to accommodate the increasing number of students. The sisters continued to staff schools in other areas of the United States. These were primarily in Slovak parishes, but later among others who requested religious to teach in their schools. Grade schools and catechetical programs flourished in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Oregon, Ohio, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Texas and Arizona.

In the first 20 years of the American foundation, young girls who entered were mainly of Slovak descent, but later girls of all backgrounds were welcomed to enter the community and commit themselves to spreading the Gospel through education, catechetical programs, social and parish ministry, nursing and health care, retreat ministry, and other areas serving God’s people. With the expansion of the sisters’ ministries in the eastern part of Pennsylvania and in New Jersey, and with more young women from those areas entering the community of the School Sisters of St. Francis, in 1957 the general administration in Rome
Carrying On | Continuing the Journey

approved the establishment of a new and separate province with its own administration and novitiate in Bethlehem, Pa.
The sisters of the Pittsburgh Province continued to minister in western Pennsylvania, Texas and Arizona, while those in the Bethlehem Province ministered in the northeastern United States. St. Francis Academy, a high school for young women, was established in Bethlehem in 1957 and St. Francis Academy in San Antonio, Texas in 1961. Two additional corporate ministries of the community were initiated: St. Francis Retreat Center in Bethlehem in 1947, and Marian Hall Home, a personal care home for the elderly in Pittsburgh in 1970. Both continue to be vital ministries of the present U.S. Province.

The School Sisters of St. Francis are united with the Generalate in Rome and the other provinces, region, delegation and missions throughout the world. Under the leadership and guidance of the central administration at the Generalate in Rome, Italy, the sisters have extended their ministries beyond the borders of the United States. Over the past 100 years, sisters have ministered in the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Chile, South Africa, Central Asia, India and Italy. Likewise, the sisters from the other international areas have come to the United States to offer their services while learning the English language and becoming familiar with the culture and religious life in America.

Changes and adaptation in religious communities following the mandate of the Second Vatican Council, opening new ministries and closing others — all in some way have had a bearing on the present day life and ministries of the School Sisters of St. Francis. In 2006, after an in-depth study and evaluation of the personnel and ministries of the Pittsburgh and Bethlehem Provinces, the sisters chose to merge. On January 1, 2007, the new province was formed, the United States Province, with the administrative

What a wonderful event to be celebrating! God has truly blessed the Community and has shown His love for all the work you do for His people. You have dedicated a century of loving service to others. We rejoice with you and pray that your success will continue for many more years to come. May God bless each of you with a myriad of blessings daily, keep you in good health, and fill your hearts with joy in the Lord.

*Ed and Irene Weireter | Lakewood, N.J.*
A century later, our current sisters look a little different, but their passion for and commitment to doing the Lord’s work and helping others remains unchanged.

offices at Mount Assisi Convent in Pittsburgh, Pa. Presently, the sisters continue their tireless commitment to the Church and to their religious vows as a single entity.

Remaining ever grateful for the past 100 years and mindful of the courageous pioneer sisters who left their homeland and came to the United States to minister to the immigrants alive in the world today. Like Mother Frances Antonia Lampel and Mother Hyacinth Zahalka, they continue to respond to the signs of the present times and the needs of the Church in today’s world and culture. Filled with the love and the power of the Holy Spirit, they live each day with faith and trust in God, and face the future with hope, courage and joy!

I was on a speaking tour in Texas and spoke at St. Philip the Apostle Catholic Church in Lewisville, Texas (north of Dallas). During my introduction, I mentioned that I had grown up in Pittsburgh and attended Mount Assisi Academy. A woman from the back of the room yelled out, “I went there too!”

I was stunned since I have never met anyone from MAA all these years. After a few exchanges from the front to the back of the room — like “Really? Did you know Mother Mildred, Father Clarence?” etc. — I ran to her and gave her a big hug and everyone applauded at this reunion. Her name is Kathleen Burns Easter, and she graduated in 1950.

Then in a spontaneous moment I asked if she remembered the school song and started to sing, “We love Mount Assisi agleam on the hilltop ...” Well a fabulous duet ensued, and some of the men in the room jumped to their feet and placed their hands over their hearts as if they were saying the Pledge of Allegiance as we sang. The room burst into laughter and settled down until we had finished with, “... for life and forever are memories of you.” They gave us a standing ovation. What a way to begin a presentation!

God is still using me and I know He is doing the same with you. As long as we can still speak, pray and share our faith stories and lessons of life with others, we have much to contribute to those around us. God isn’t through using us until we take our last breath, and he will help us to endure and find peace and joy that passes all understanding. It’s a promise I shall cling to for the rest of my life.

Donna Authers | Charlottesville, Va. | Class of 1960
Memories and Well-Wishes

What follows is a collection of notes received from dear friends, family members, alumnae and benefactors throughout this, our 100th anniversary year. We are grateful for them and want to share them with you.

Congratulations on your centenarian anniversary! You have so much to be proud of. May our dear Lord continue to richly bless you, your congregation, and the work you do for God’s people.

Father Leonard Blostic | Hollidaysburg, Pa.

I am pleased and proud at the hundred years of service of the community in the U.S. I am especially in admiration of your work in Africa. Congratulations all!

Sally Rapé Yagi | Osaka, Japan

Best wishes to the sisters to continue their mission and grant them many more years. I wish them the very best for all that they do in the future. I have been blessed in so many ways.

David Hunkele | Pittsburgh, Pa.

I really miss being able to stick my head in the school office for a minute or two. Even when your office was humming with activity, it was always peaceful. We wish the best for you in your latest venture. We know you will leave your mark, as you always have.

Mary Emala | Woodcliff Lake, N.J.

As a young boy I remember coming to Mount Assisi Convent for a full-day summer picnic. We came to visit with my aunts — Sister Mary Louise Vrana and Sister Virginia Vrana. We would gather on the grassy area of the front lawn. After eating and visiting, the youngsters would go to West View Park, while the adults continued their visit with family members and sisters. Those were the days when young children could go places without adult supervision and be safe. I remember my aunts being dressed in the traditional habits of the time. I’m sure they were sweltering! We wish good health for those doing God’s work among His people and 100 more successful years of serving God and his people.

George and Laura Mihalik | Slippery Rock, Pa.

We as a family have very special memories of the School Sisters of St. Francis and are very grateful for their work with us. Good luck to your congregation and to all its members. Spread God’s love wherever you go. May you all be instruments of his peace.

Donald and Joanne Osowski | Westfield, Mass.

We want to honor our dear friends, the School Sisters of St. Francis, as they celebrate their 100th anniversary of being in the United States. God bless them always!


Thank you for all you do for so many and contributing so much to my life and shaping my character and faith. God Bless!

Elaine Juhascik Oliver | Knoxville, Tenn. Class of 1966

Sister Francesca Parana taught me in the seventh and eighth grades at St. Gabriel grade school. She took me under her wing, as I was a shy little girl and not socially accepted by my classmates. Sister Georgette Dublino gave me the foundation to be a good typist, a gift I use every day. And dear Sister Jude Dolinich patiently guided me through some tough teenage years, when boys were more important than academics. They instilled in
me the commitment to strive for excellence. As a mature woman, those values had a strong influence on me. I graduated first in my class at California University of Pennsylvania with a perfect 4.00 QPA. I retired with the rank of sergeant from the police force, then pursued a new career as an administrative assistant to a vice president at a Pittsburgh-based corporation. I’m retired now and enjoying life as I reflect back on simpler times with fond memories.

Susan Suhby | Pittsburgh, Pa. | Class of 1964

I have been here 21 years. I have worked for five administrators. I consider it an honor and privilege to work here. I love working with the elderly. This, I believe, is my calling.

Peg Hipsley | Marian Hall Home Employee

In the spring, I was outside and a ray of sunshine shone on some daffodils in the garden. I stood there and enjoyed the beauty of that spring scene. Then I remembered the same scene so many years ago by the statue of The Infant of Prague. Those moments brought on so many good memories of beautiful moments when I was in the convent. I know I sound corny, but life is just made of moments. Your lives have enriched the world and will continue to do so with each generation that has been touched by you and with their children’s children. This thought comes from your corny friend who was thinking about all the nuns who have made me a better person and have made the world a better place. Keep the course.

Janice Cabaday Stazer | Erie, Pa. | Class of 1965

I praise the Lord for all the stability that Mt. Assisi brought into my life and the Christian teaching that I learned. I just wanted to tell you how much I appreciate all that the sisters have done for thousands of women. You provided a stable place for me while my home life was very chaotic. My husband and I have gone on to found a Charismatic Christian Community. We have 10 children, 33 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. We travel all over North America trying to help other communities.

Thank you for a great education.

Roberta (Seuss) Tedesco | Coraopolis, Pa. | Class of 1960

I have been so blessed, attending Mount Assisi Academy during those wonderful 1970s days. Our electronic lifestyle these days enables us all to stay in touch easily. Recently when e-mailing Debby Giglio Mueller and my sister, Gina Cassandro Hicks, we shared how fortunate we were and are today for the wonderful environment that MAA provided — the amazing women who taught us and the amazing women we have become. Thank you so much for the work that you did and continue to do in the OSF community. You are always in my heart and in my prayers.


As usual, I keep the School Sisters of St. Francis in my prayers. I especially remember the sisters who served here at St. Joseph’s in Oradell, N.J. I have many fond memories of them.

Suzanna McMabon | Oradell, N.J.

God’s blessings upon the sisters and the work that they do. Go forward in “His name,” bringing peace and love to all. Be blessed.


I wish the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit for all present sisters and an increase of vocations so your good work may continue.

Marilyn Hogan Leap | Raleigh, N.C. | Class of 1968

My 100th anniversary wish for the sisters is that they have all they need to sustain their missions for years to come.

Sue Anne Hogan | Pittsburgh, Pa. | Class of 1972
A Century of Highlights

There have been many individual moments, times of growth and spiritual triumphs that have shaped the School Sisters of St. Francis’ presence in the United States. A precious few follow.

The 1900s

AUGUST 1913: After a journey of 14 days at sea aboard the Pretoria, the six Pioneer Sisters of Czech, Slovak and German origin arrive in New York on August 15, and in Pittsburgh by train on August 18.

DECEMBER 1913: Our Pioneer Sisters move from Juniata Street to Superior Avenue, both on Pittsburgh’s North Side.

JANUARY 1914: The first American postulant, Julia Kovanic, is received in Pittsburgh.

APRIL 1914: Fire forces the sisters from their Superior Avenue residence to a home on California Avenue on Pittsburgh’s North Side.

MAY 1914: Mother Xavier Furgott makes her first visitation to America, accompanied by Sister Boleslaus Kral.

JULY 1914: The first American postulants — Julia Kovanic, Cecilia Kristek, Margaret Sotak and Seraphine Kanzlmar — are received in Pittsburgh.

NOVEMBER 1914: Pioneer Sisters arrive in Barnesboro, Pa. A month later, St. John the Baptist School opens in Barnesboro with an enrollment of more than 200 children.

JULY 1915: The first profession of vows is held in Pittsburgh.

The 1920s

APRIL 1922: Groundbreaking is held for the new St. Gabriel School on Pittsburgh’s North Side.

JULY 1923: About 50 sisters attend the first formal Sisters’ Retreat at St. Gabriel Convent.

SEPTEMBER 1927: Ground is broken for construction of Mount Assisi Convent.

APRIL 1928: Permission is granted to move the provincial house and novitiate from St. Gabriel Convent to Mount Assisi Convent and to open an academy for girls in Pittsburgh. Msgr. W.M. Mullen blesses Mount Assisi’s cornerstone.

SEPTEMBER 1928: As the administration and novices move from St. Gabriel Convent, Mount Assisi becomes the official motherhouse of the congregation in the U.S. This same month, Mount Assisi Academy grade school and high school open.

JULY 1929: Margaret Barabas (Sister Rosalia) is accepted as the first aspirant at Mount Assisi Convent.

Some of our earliest sisters in America peer from the porch of one of their first homes.

A group of early postulants in 1928.
AUGUST 1929: For the first time, reception and profession of vows are held in the new chapel at Mount Assisi Convent.

SEPTEMBER 1929: Our sisters begin teaching at SS. Cyril and Methodius Parish Elementary School in Clifton, N.J.

The 1930s

MAY 1930: The Motherhouse at Mount Assisi is dedicated.

FEBRUARY 1932: Mount Assisi Academy receives state accreditation.

JUNE 1932: The first class of nine seniors graduates from Mount Assisi Academy.

AUGUST 1935: The first group of sisters makes perpetual profession after six years of temporary vows, rather than the former nine-year requirement.

MARCH 1936: Pittsburgh’s great flood forces sisters to be evacuated from their convent in McKees Rocks.

MAY 1938: Ground is broken for the high school building at Mount Assisi. The building is dedicated in May 1940.

SEPTEMBER 1938: The cornerstone of the new Mount Assisi Academy building is blessed.

MARCH 1939: St. Francis Cemetery at Mount Assisi is officially blessed. Mother M. Hyacinth Zahalka’s remains are transferred to Mount Assisi.

JUNE 1939: Sister Sylvester Evan becomes the first woman to receive a bachelor’s degree in pharmacy from Duquesne University with high honors.

The 1940s

JUNE 1940: A convent is established at Sacred Heart Parish in Cartaret, N.J.

FEBRUARY 1947: The Pittsburgh foundation is officially elevated to the status of a province.

JUNE 1947: The property known as Monocacy Manor is purchased for a retreat center in Bethlehem, Pa. at a cost of $75,000.

JULY 1947: Mother Methodia Bradac is appointed first provincial of the Pittsburgh Province.

AUGUST 1947: The deed for the property at Monocacy Manor is officially transferred to the congregation, and the sisters move onto the property. Just days later, the sisters hold their first eucharistic liturgy in the chapel there.

AUGUST 1947: The first two sisters leave Pittsburgh to travel to Chile to help begin a mission there. They are later joined by sisters from other provinces, offering them a real opportunity to experience missionary work.

DECEMBER 1947: The first midnight Christmas Mass is celebrated in the new chapel at Monocacy Manor in Bethlehem.

MARCH 1948: The first retreat is held at St. Francis Retreat Center in Bethlehem.

JUNE 1948: The first sisters’ retreat is held at the new St. Francis Retreat House at Monocacy Manor in Bethlehem, Pa.

NOVEMBER 1948: The congregation is solemnly consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The 1950s


AUGUST 1953: The modified habit and veil are worn in the U.S. for the first time. The congregational head-dress is modified from the original bonnet to a simple black veil.

SEPTEMBER 1954: The sisters begin teaching at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish Elementary School in Cottage Grove, Ore.

MARCH 1955: Property is purchased in San Antonio, Texas, to open a high school for girls on the Southside.

AUGUST 1955: The cornerstone of the new St. Francis Retreat Center in Bethlehem is blessed.
AUGUST 1956: The first three postulants are admitted in San Antonio, Texas.

APRIL 1957: The motherhouse of the Bethlehem Province is established at Monocacy Manor.

AUGUST 1957: The new retreat house and academy in Bethlehem are dedicated and blessed.

SEPTEMBER 1957: St. Francis Academy opens in Bethlehem with 20 students in grades 7-9.

OCTOBER 1957: The establishment of the Bethlehem Province is announced, and Sister Dorothy Pavlik is appointed the first provincial.

AUGUST 1958: The community cemetery at Monocacy Manor in Bethlehem is blessed.

AUGUST 1959: Ground is broken for the new academy building in Bethlehem.

The 1960s

JULY 1960: Ground is broken for construction of St. Francis Convent and Academy in San Antonio, Texas.

APRIL 1961: St. Francis Academy in Bethlehem receives full state accreditation.

JUNE 1961: The first graduation is held at St. Francis Academy in Bethlehem, Pa.

AUGUST 1961: Nine postulants are received in the first reception ceremony of the Bethlehem Province. Also, the new Mullen Hall school building is dedicated there.

AUGUST 1962: The Bethlehem Province celebrates its first profession ceremony.

MAY 1964: The first graduation is held at St. Francis Academy in San Antonio, Texas, and a novitiate is established at St. Francis Convent.

JULY 1964: The first profession and reception are held in San Antonio, Texas.

OCTOBER 1964: Mother Mildred Zaremba becomes the first American to be elected General Superior.

APRIL 1965: The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary is recited in English in the United States provinces for the first time.

OCTOBER 1966: Modified religious dress is approved.

DECEMBER 1967: A third building, housing a gym and science department, is added to the school campus in San Antonio, Texas.

FEBRUARY 1968: Ground is broken for the construction of Marian Hall Home on the Mount Assisi grounds in Pittsburgh.

OCTOBER 1968: The cornerstone of Marian Hall Home is blessed.

DECEMBER 1968: Sisters who wish to do so begin wearing contemporary dress on an experimental basis.

The 1970s

APRIL 1971: An election process is used for the first time for the Provincial Administration, and Sister Anselma Drab is elected to lead the Pittsburgh Province.

DECEMBER 1971: Mother Mildred Zaremba dies in Rome. At her request, her body is brought to Pittsburgh and buried at Mount Assisi.

JANUARY 1972: The first Provincial Assembly is held in the Pittsburgh Province. In addition, the first joint council meeting of the Pittsburgh and Bethlehem provinces is held in Pittsburgh.


1978: Our sisters begin working with the Franciscan Friars at the Franciscan Renewal Center is established in Scottsdale, Ariz.

JUNE 1978: Mount Assisi Academy closes after 50 years of service.

OCTOBER 1978: Antonia Hall is blessed.

OCTOBER 1979: General Administration meets in Bethlehem, Pa.

The grounds at Marian Hall Home.
The 1980s

1980: Our Lady of Solitude house of prayer is moved to Black Canyon City, Ariz.

SEPTEMBER 1980: Mount Assisi Academy Preschool opens with six students.

MARCH 1987: A joint meeting of the General Administration and the Provincial Superiors is held in Bethlehem, Pa.

JUNE 1987: The 26th and last graduation is held at St. Francis Academy in Bethlehem, Pa.

MAY 1988: The sisters in the Bethlehem Province celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the congregation with a community day event and release of 100 balloons, one for each year of growth. Later that summer, the Pittsburgh Province celebrates with a similar gathering.

APRIL 1989: Sisters from the United States begin our Congregation’s mission in Barberton, South Africa, and live in Nelspruit.

Dear Sisters

Congratulations on 100 years in the United States. What a grand occasion, and I deeply regret that I cannot join with you in this celebration. But my heart and thoughts will be with you.

I can never forget the wonderful Sisters who taught me, beginning in third grade with Sister Virginia Vrana, and then Sister Victoria Voytecky, followed by Sister Marian Sinchak, Sister Salesia Chudy, Sister Annunciata Youhas and Sister Regis Slocik (they shared the seventh grade) and then finally Sister Perpetua Kitka in eighth grade. And who could ever forget Sister Ludmilla Gelak who cooked at the convent and always slipped us some cookies. And then there was Sister Rosalia Barabas who taught me how to serve and was very strict with the Latin pronunciation. And who could forget Mother Clotilda Polacik who directed the choir and helped us with our Slovak hymns in the “Kvetky.” Oh, those were the days.

So that is just part of memory lane for me, but I want to thank you and all the community for providing me with an outstanding spiritual foundation which brought me to this point in my life.

Maybe one of these days I will drive over to Pittsburgh and celebrate Mass with the community. Until then, know that you are in my prayers. Enclosed is a small gift to help defray some of your costs and buy a few halupkies.

Love,

Father George Hazler
Troy, Mich.

Today

JANUARY 2007: The Pittsburgh and Bethlehem provinces are dissolved, and the new United States Province is established.

NOVEMBER 2011: The Franciscan Renewal Center is established in San Angelo, Texas.

JULY 2013: Several sisters from the United States Province travel to Prague to take part in the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the founding of our branch of the congregation of the School Sisters of St. Francis.

AUGUST 2013: Celebrations are held in both Pittsburgh and Bethlehem marking the 100th anniversary of the sisters’ presence in the U.S.
A Message to Our Friends

Dear Friends in Christ,

May the peace of St. Francis be yours to have and to share always.

God shows His love and goodness through the warmth and kindess of special people like all of you. Thank you and God bless you for all your prayers, love, care, concern and never-ending support. Without all of you, we could never do or accomplish all that we do today.

We number 89 living members, and we have 157 deceased sisters. We had a total of 246 sisters. This is truly a gift to the church.

Our future is in God's hands, and all of us are aware that life will change for us. In this Year of Faith, we believe: “Faith is not believing God can, it is knowing God will.” In God we trust in a future full of hope and, as our foundress Antonia Lampel once said, “We are here with God for all of you.” May God bless you and all your loved ones with peace and all good!

Love and prayers,

Sister Bernadine Marie Stemnock, O.S.F.

Sister Bernadine Marie Stemnock, OSF
Provincial Minister