

# And So It Happened and Not by Chance

by

Sister Pulcheria Sparkman, SSMO

Book One

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First convents at Sublimity, Oregon (left) and Beaverton, Oregon (right) of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, who became the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon

This is Book One, starting in Europe and following the progress of some young ladies seeking a religious order of their own through Ohio, Minnesota, and Jordan, Sublimity, and Beaverton, Oregon.

Book One will be especially interesting to readers in the Sublimity, Oregon area, many of whom are related by blood as well as place.

(Book Two continues the history from about 1899 to 1965 in Beaverton.)

Sister Pulcheria, Director of Studies and Historian, joined the order in 1910 and died in 1980.

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AND SO IT HAPPENED AND NOT BY CHANCE

Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon - as Oregonian as the rain or the  
Misty fingers of the fog wraiths caressing  
The hazel thickets on the  
Huddling hills -

Or the snowy heights of Hood, blushing, rosy with the kiss of dawn,  
Smiling a benediction across the Oregon valleys  
And the everlasting Oregon hills, Royal, forestclad.

Their services, their inspiration to our youth, for three quarters of  
A century have blazed a shining trail down the vista of the years

So in this their year of Diamond Jubilee, we see them a shining  
Retinue marching serenely down the trail of time,  
Bearing a Diamond-studded chaplet, a fitting gift  
To offer at their Royal Bridegroom's Throne.

We, who knew the old St. Mary's often have occasion to remember  
The gilt framed motto hanging on the Convent parlor  
wall: "*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.*" How they have made  
This rule of life live, and grow,  
And fructify, these Sisters of  
St. Mary of our own beloved  
Oregon!

by Margaret Musa Leach February 2, 1961

## AND SO IT HAPPENED AND NOT BY CHANCE

### Chapter I

#### A Historical Background (1820-1890)

This violently conflicting political, social, and religious problems which disturbed the peace of the mainland of Europe between the Congress of Vienna and the downfall of Prince Otto Edward Leopold von Bismarck sent many a Catholic settler to seek a new home in the fertile valleys of the Mississippi Basin. These Germans came to the New World to find a home which was not weighed down by the despotism of avaricious princes who had made them fine promises during the brilliant days of the Congress of Vienna. Before their immigration, these simple people had, in a spirit of loyal patriotism, received back from exile and reinstated their lawful sovereigns and had expected in recompense to receive some real social reforms and a meed of political liberty. Their brief joy soon gave way to bitter disappointment and a growing discontent. They began to realize that in the German states no political justice or religious freedom was to be won by peaceful means. The royal families of Europe had not learned in the hard school of exile and defeat, which had been forced on them by Napoleon, that every human being was given by God inalienable rights which would not be relinquished without a bloody struggle.

The Catholic Church in most of the German states had lost its property; and the governments, which had enriched themselves at the expense of the Church, had agreed in return to maintain buildings for divine worship and to pay the salaries of the ecclesiastics, the appointments of whom were to be subject to the approval of the princes, many of whom were Protestant. These arrangements did not forecast a peaceful future. The Church was to be the humble handmaid of the state whose chief purpose was to teach the people a blind obedience to their princes in all matters - religious as well as political and social. This left the Church with little freedom in the internal administration of its government or in the exercise of its spiritual ministry.

The spirit of revolution flared again in western Europe in 1830 and spread eastward. It gave rise to numerous savage uprisings in the loosely united German Confederation; but these riots achieved little or nothing towards a lasting betterment for the Church and the social life of her children. Although the revolts were put down by armed force, the seeds of discontent were destined to germinate and develop once more within two decades of time.

Sanguinary rebellions again disturbed the German states in 1848, and the peoples' righteous demands for social justice forced a recognition which might have resulted in a united Germany with reasonable liberty for her subjects. Manhood suffrage was granted and a representative parliament of the people was elected. It was commissioned to draw up an acceptable constitution but a reaction set in while these altruistic representatives frittered away a valuable year

debating on theories to the neglect of the bill for rights of the people. Thus time was given to the conservative party to regain its hold and strongly entrench itself politically once more, leaving the social and religious problems quieted by promises but as unsolved as before. The hopes of the patriots were shattered, and the people submissively settled down to ten years more of social and religious injustice for the profit of their selfish princes. Rebellion rumbled ominously from time to time.

#### Blood and Iron

In 1862 the Iron Chancellor, Prince Otto von Bismarck, came into power, and he set out to unite the German Confederation into an empire. He saw that it could be done only by "blood and iron". His first care was to reorganise the Prussian army into the most perfect military body in Europe. His second step was taken when he, by three master strokes of unscrupulous diplomacy, involved Prussia in three successful wars, which in 1870 united Germany politically and assigned to his Protestant state of Prussia the lion's share of political power.

To the German ruling classes, religious and social toleration was not a feasible course of action. They believed that the people should accept the dictates of their princes who were responsible to no one but God. To Bismarck a unification of Germany meant more than a political union; to be permanent there must be also a close cultural oneness. Such a union should include language, science, and philosophy; this necessitated that the state control education. The Church has for time immemorial maintained that it is her inalienable right to educate her children, not for the good of the state, but for an eternal life with God.

#### Infallibility of the Pope

Simultaneously with the military victories of Germany, Pope Pius IX published the decision of the Ecumenical Council, held in the Vatican Palace, 1868-1870, of the Infallibility Of the Pope. This doctrine stirred a great outcry among the German Protestants. They saw in it papal aggression. This gave Bismarck an opportunity and he seized it. He pretended to believe that the Catholic Church was to be his most astute enemy in the unification of Germany and that it should be shorn of its power and slowly destroyed.

The Iron Chancellor, who now wielded the greatest power in the Empire, started a systematic persecution of the Church. The methods that he made use of against Catholics recommend themselves only to those who, like himself, believed that their actions were not restrained by the moral law. He determined that the German Empire should throw off the fetters of positive religious teaching and, with the help of state schools, secure complete control of the intellectual life of the people.

#### The May Laws

The Church first felt his grip when the Catholic section of the Ministry of Worship was suppressed, and the preaching of the clergy was placed under the surveillance of the police; then the religious orders of men were expelled, and the clergy was deprived of all influence in the schools. These unlawful decrees brought forth a determined protest from Catholic statesmen, and Bismarck replied with the notorious "May Laws". These acts suppressed the exercise of papal Jurisdiction in Germany, interfered with the education of the clergy by closing the seminaries, and deprived the bishops of a free appointment of clergy to ecclesiastical offices and the right to excommunicate the unfaithful members of their flocks. They disbanded the teaching Sisterhoods and confiscated their convents and academics, and then banished those congregations who did not cheerfully yield. They withdrew the salaries of the clergy which was due them in compensation for Church property taken by the state in the past, and lastly imposed fines, imprisonment, and exile on bishops and priests who refused to comply with these brutal laws. At this time the jubilant Liberal Party boasted that this would prove to be the last battle of the glorious Protestant Reformation which the enlightened Martin Luther had launched in Wittenberg in October, 1517. Bismarck's avowed purpose became the extermination of the Catholic faith and a replacement of it by a state controlled religion.

#### Off to America

It was the enforcement of, these iniquitous "May Laws" that sent tens of thousands of Catholics to the United States. Many of them took up land in Ohio and Wisconsin. Soon scores of rude log churches were built by the determined hands of these voluntary exiles. They loved the Faith better than the Fatherland. America was kind and gave them a chance to secure new homes, better than the old ones. After a few years of arduous labor, comfortable houses surrounded by wide acres of productive land repaid their patient toil with rich returns. In due time, graceful cross-crowned spires of churches rose, whose shadows sheltered little parochial schools, and loudly proclaimed the active faith of the immigrants. Here no autocratic prince or unprincipled Bismarck would disturb the free practice their religion - preventing a rightly ordained priest from offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass or administering the Sacraments. Their children could be taught undiluted Catholic doctrine in the schools.

#### Into the Ohio Valley

A great trek from Germany to America began in 1830. First the immigrants came into the diocese of Cincinnati, which was under Right Reverend John Baptist Purcell, later into the new diocese of Cleveland, governed by Most Reverend Amandus Rappe. Each year brought a new quota of harassed Catholics fleeing persecution in the homeland. Often a priest would accompany his flock on the great adventure to assist in the laying of a foundation for a free Catholic life in the Ohio Valley. Many a young man or a family with several growing boys would come seeking to avoid long years of forced

military service in the harsh Prussian Army.

Bishop Purcell, looking for help in his frontier diocese, asked Reverend Francis de Sales Brunner, Provincial of the Missionary Congregation of the Precious Blood, to come to Ohio and help care for the spiritual needs of the German Catholic population rapidly taking up the government land in his diocese. Father Brunner with seven priests answered the call and reached Cincinnati for New Year's day, 1844. Seven months later, three Sisters of the Precious Blood joined them in the mission field - to assist the priests, to do catechetical work among the children, and, eventually, to open schools. The work that lay before these missionaries was the hardest. The priests took up their position on the Ohio front with courage, on the feast of the Epiphany of that year. Out in the backwoods they found many a humble congregation in little log churches awaiting their priestly ministrations. Within a few years these German Catholics were organized into thriving parishes by these unselfish, devoted missionaries.

## Chapter II

### St. Joseph's Parish, Himmelgarten, Ohio

St. Joseph's Parish was one of the early missions of the Precious Blood Fathers in western Ohio. It was less than fifteen miles from the Indiana border and holds a particular interest for the Sisters of Saint Mary of Oregon because of the influence that some of its parishioners had upon the history of their foundation in the far west. The facts here related are based upon the well authenticated history of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, Ohio, entitled *Not With Silver Or Gold*, published in 1945; and upon the Memoirs of Mother Mary Wilhelmina Bleily. Mother recounted the incidents which make up her memoirs to the novices and Junior Sisters again and again over the many years that she was an active member of the Sisters of Saint Mary of Oregon. Much of this oral tradition was put into writing by Sister Mary Aquinas Reverman, S.S.M.O., in 1930, as Mother Wilhelmina retold for a last time the happenings, many of which had taken place seventy years before.

### Ghosts of Himmelgarten

There is an unauthenticated but unusual story connected with the acquisition of the property upon which Mary, Mother of Mercy Convent was built in Himmelgarten in 1852. At that time Father Brunner was looking for a suitable site upon which to open a convent and school between two parishes in western Ohio. There lay within the borders of the flourishing parish of St. Joseph a cleared tract of 525 acres, owned by a man named Himmelgarn, It was all under cultivation with gardens and orchards planted, and upon it stood a comfortable little log house and barn. It was a fine farm. But in spite of the many blessings that the family might have enjoyed, there was no peace upon the land after darkness. The Himmelgarns were disturbed night after night by "ghosts" that performed all the weird tricks that superstitious persons attribute to those restless things. At last the nocturnal gyrations of these unquiet

spirits became unbearable, and the man of the family with frayed nerves, determined to sell out everything connected with the phantoms. Father Brunner happened upon the scene at this time and, having no fear of ghosts, bought the farm at a ridiculously low price. The bargain proved a blessing. It was very satisfactory to the Sisters, who took possession of the log house the following spring, and also to the Himmelgarn family and the spirits, who promptly departed. A great peace descended upon the place when nocturnal adoration of the Blessed Sacrament began. Such is considered to be the cause for the departure of the spirits, according to those who passed the tale down to the next generation in the community.

#### Education versus Missionary Work

At the time of the Protestant Revolution, a well educated clergy was the most needed defense that the Church lacked in its struggle to save the faith of the laity of Europe. When the Congregation of the Precious Blood came to Ohio, Father Brunner believed that the greatest need of the Church was a devoted priesthood to seek souls in the confessional, in the pulpit, and in all human relationships among the people. Vocations for the Congregation had come to him from the families of the immigrants, most of whom had crossed the ocean from Europe to work in the missions. But he was lacking a well-staffed clerical seminary in which to educate the young Precious Blood seminarians. In addition, Father Brunner was not always a wise judge of character in evaluating the fitness of vocations to the priesthood or religious life. In the beginnings of the Ohio Mission, he had too hastily arranged for the ordination of young men who had received only a minimum of priestly training. It was not that he deliberately put aside the ruling of the Council of Trent for a carefully educated priesthood, but the enforcement of these regulations would have required a trained staff of teachers as well as buildings and books and years of time. In his enthusiasm, he saw only an immediate need - that of unwearied missionaries for the frontier. His mistake was that he believed that sanctity would replace academic degrees, as it had in the case of the Cure d'Arns; but his men were not all of John Vianney's caliber. That saint's singular success was an exception that God willed for His own glory, not to be the rule for Precious Blood missionaries in America. Events proved that piety, zeal, and charity could not take the place of solid formal education in the exercise of the spiritual powers of the priesthood. Father Brunner's most glaring error was made when, in 1849, he presented Joseph Albrecht to Bishop Rappe of the diocese of Cleveland for ordination.

#### Joseph Albrecht

Joseph Albrecht was born in Kirchengarten, Germany, and later became mayor of the town. He married Anna Marie Albrecht; and in 1835. She separated from him, with his consent, and entered Loewenberg Convent and became Sister Mary Ann. In 1844 she left for America and was one of the first three Sisters to join the Ohio mission band and was later appointed the first superior of the American community of Precious Blood Sisters. With her had come to Ohio their

seventeen-year-old daughter, Rosalie, who was to die of tuberculosis three years later. In 1847 Mother Mary Ann had returned to Europe to secure recruits for the Congregation in America. At this time, Joseph Albrecht, having made up his mind to Join his old friend Father Brunner in the missions on the American frontier, returned with her to Ohio. Two years later he was ordained to the priesthood at the house of training for the young members of the Precious Blood Congregation at Wolfcreek, when he was forty-nine years of age. For several years he worked in the ministry as assistant to the mission pastors. During these years he presented a problem to his immediate superiors and his fellow priests in the community. In 1854 Father Brunner appointed him pastor of the new parish of St. Joseph, and the superior of Mary, Mother of Mercy Convent, Himmelgarten. This convent had been destroyed by fire on March 29, 1854, and Father Joseph, from his own private wealth, had helped to replace the small log building with a substantial brick convent. From the first he exercised a strong psychological influence over his parishioners of St. Joseph and the religious in the convent. Many of them came to venerate him as a saint. He was a persuasive preacher and knew how to appeal to the religious mind of the laity, both secular and religious. Father Brunner had a great regard for Father Joseph and, as his highest superior, placed implicit confidence in him. He believed Father Joseph to be a model of the poverty, meekness, patience, and humility of Jesus Christ. Father Brunner was unable to understand why the other priests could not work peacefully with his model missionary. However, records show that there is no doubt but that it was very difficult to work with Father Joseph.

It was while Father Brunner was absent from Ohio and Father John Wittmar, his representative, was left to act as an intermediary between Father Brunner in Europe and the members of the Congregation in America that the cleavage between Father Joseph and certain members of the Precious Blood foundation began to take a definite form. Father Brunner died in Schellenberg, Liechtenstein, at the close of 1859; and, in the following year, Father Andrew Kunkler was appointed provincial of the American province. In 1866 it became the new superior's most serious duty to counteract the schism brought about by Father Joseph Albrecht, a schism which had far-reaching results in human souls, both in time and in place.

#### Hoop Skirts

After many instances of disagreement and much friction, the final break came in this way. Father Albrecht was affected by a severity which might have stemmed from John Calvin's heresy. He publicly denounced the vanity of hoop skirts - which fashion had reached the frontier of Ohio - and forbade any woman to wear one in St. Joseph's Church. Some determined young women appeared in hoops, and their enraged pastor, seizing a hickory stick and waving it threateningly, actually pushed the girls out the door. The matter was taken to Archbishop Purcell, whose decision was that the wearing of hoop skirts was not in itself immodest, nor

was it an indecent dress for church wear. The pastor stood corrected before the parish for an impulsive public act.

### Westward Ho!

Since Father Joseph refused to accept the decision, his Archbishop suspended him. As local Superior, Father Joseph gathered his followers, among whom were fifteen Sisters and eight Brothers of the Precious Blood Congregation, and left St. Joseph's parish in indignation. The party stopped at the Boedigheimer farm several miles away. Father Joseph dispatched some of the Brothers to Minnesota to locate suitable government homesteads in that new state for the formation of a Catholic colony. His wrath cooled somewhat while he waited, and he realized that he, as a priest, needed episcopal permission to transfer from the jurisdiction of one bishop to that of another. He then wrote a letter of apology to Archbishop Purcell asking for a transfer and the necessary papers for leaving the diocese. But before clearing the matter with his superiors, he left with his followers (the religious as well as the parishioners), who did not fully understand the seriousness of their action. They boarded the train in Ohio and headed for the west. On the shore of Lake Michigan the party stopped at St. Nazianz, Wisconsin. Here was a Catholic colony of immigrants from Baden with their pastor Father Ambrose Oswald, whom Father Joseph had known in Germany. The women stayed in St. Nazianz for the winter months, and most of the men went forward to build homes for their families, who were to follow the next spring.

### Emma is Kidnapped

Among the travelers to St. Nazianz were five little girls who, twenty years later, would be counted among the ten foundresses of the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon. The eldest of the five was eight-year-old Emmerentiana Bleily who traveled with the Sisters. Three years earlier, her grandfather had placed her in Mary, Mother of Mercy Convent to be educated. Her uncle, Father Andrew Bleily, C.P.P.S., was a member of the Precious Blood Monastery at Himmelparten, Ohio. Emma, as she was called, was deeply devoted to her young teacher, Novice Rose Wahl, and to her bosom friend and classmate, Julia Boedigheimer. At the time of her Superior, Father Joseph's, defection, Rose Wahl joined the fugitive Sisters at the Boedigheimer farm, and Emma accompanied her teacher and joined her friend Julia there. For some strange reason the child was permitted to remain at the Ohio farm. It might have been because the superior of the convent, Sister Lucretia, was there also. Father Andrew, hearing of the move, had stormed down to take his niece back, but Julia's brothers, the Boedigheimer boys, had hidden her under a tall stand of wheat in a wide field; and her uncle, who received no aid from the older members of the party, returned to Himmelparten empty handed. Emma, with Julia close beside her, had lain quietly under the grain until the boys called them out. At that time, it had been a thrilling experience for the little girl to lie securely on the soft warm earth, and the seekers in the game not to be able to find her. There is no

doubt but that it was a clear case of kidnapping which was hushed up as a community quarrel that would right itself in due time with no lasting evil consequences. But the Congregation of the Precious Blood had not reckoned with the strength of Father Joseph Albrecht's stubbornness nor the blindness of his self-deception. The other four girls in the company were traveling with their families. There was six-year-old Aurelia Boedigheimer; with Anton Bender and his wife Matilda was little two-year-old Anna; and Catherine, seven, and baby Martha, not yet one, accompanied their parents, Victor and Matilda Eifert, westward.

### Stop at St. Nazianz, Wisconsin

According to their rules in 1866, the Sisters of the Precious Blood did not take three religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but just one vow of fidelity which was intended to include the ideals of all three. Of the fifteen Precious Blood Sisters who left Mary, Mother of Mercy Convent to follow Father Joseph to Minnesota only six had taken that vow; the others were but novices and were free to leave the congregation if they wished. When the time for departure from St. Nazianz came, three of these Sisters, Rose Wahl, Mary Graff, and Josephine Thoeing, decided to remain in St. Nazianz. Under the direction of Father Joseph Fessler, pastor of a neighboring parish in Clark Mills, these three young teachers eventually became the nucleus of the Franciscan Sisters of Alverno, a teaching congregation which opened its first schools in Father Fessler's missions in Green Bay Diocese. However, Mary Graff, Sister Mary Mansuetta, was later reinstated in her congregation in Ohio, and for three terms (1903-1911) served as treasurer general. She died in 1913, well thought of in the Community.

### On to Rush Lake

Father Joseph had carefully planned the trip for the women and children of his party for the following spring. Not that it was to be a luxurious journey, but he knew the best way to Rush Lake. Sturdy farm wagons, belonging to the farmers of St. Nazianz, took them to Manitowac, on Lake Michigan, and then by train and boat to St. Cloud. Here the men met then with oxen and covered wagons, and they followed the Crow Wing Indian trail into the pioneer country of Otter Tail County in the "land of ten thousand lakes."

As the travelers boarded the farm wagons at St. Nazianz for the eighteen miles to Manitowac, little Emma missed her teacher Rose Wahl. The child jumped to the ground and raced toward the convent to seek her. Father Joseph called to her to come back but she raced on. He ran, caught her, and carried her back, putting her none too gently into the wagon box; he emphatically ordered her to stay there. Emma obeyed with a breaking heart. It had been to be with her teacher that she had left Mary, Mother of Mercy Convent, and now she realized that her teacher was remaining behind. As the little girl sank down upon the rough boards of the wagon floor, she saw through her tears the sun rising brightly. All the other children in the wagons were safe within touch of their mothers' hands.

She felt that she alone was left desolate. Then the impressionable child believed that Our Lady vouchsafed to her a wonderful experience which she quite simply retold many times with the following details.

#### Our Blessed Mother

Suddenly in the rays of the golden sun, she saw her heavenly Mother robed in white with a flowing blue mantle about her shoulders. In a burst of golden glory Our Lady smiled upon her and stretched out her hands to the lonely child. In that moment Emma was given to understand that her Mother Mary wished her to go forward, and that there lay in the future years some task which would be for the honor of the Queen of heaven and earth. The little girl thrilled with love, and she felt a strong certainty of her heavenly Mother's protecting care. Her naturally joyous spirits rose, and she prepared to enjoy the trip which lay before her in the company of her heavenly Mother and her beloved friend, Julia.

Whether Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, appeared to little eight-year-old Emmerentiana Bleily or not has never been authenticated by competent authority. It may have been a mental illumination that the sensitive child saw in the riding sun, but the impression was so vivid that the joy, the inspiration, and the conviction that it brought to her mind were strong enough, twenty years later in the face of great obstacles, to assist her to make firm decisions and the strength to carry them out with lasting effects.

The healthy young children thoroughly enjoyed the boat trip upon the waters of the Mississippi, and the ride in the train was a pleasant experience, but the overland journey in the mild spring weather in the covered wagon was filled with more interest. There were many new things to see and hear that quite fascinated the curious little children. Emma and Julia ran about as the oxen plodded slowly forward on the rough, uneven trails, through dark woods and over swampy land. The women and young children suffered great weariness in the jerking, jolting wagons, and the nights spent in the wagon beds or on the earth beneath them on pallets contributed little to restful sleep.

#### Robbers on the Trail

One evening in an isolated valley, they came upon a lonely cabin with a light within. Behind it under the trees were dark barns. The tired women in the wagons were pleased at the prospect of plenty of warm water to wash in and some food more carefully prepared than it was possible to cook over a camp fire. A sweet-faced, timid little woman received them kindly. She seemed glad to have an opportunity to talk with other women and they chatted as she assisted them in making ready the evening meal. After the fall of dusk, several rough men returned to the cabin. They were very reserved in their speech and watched the strangers narrowly. At first they seemed somewhat surprised to find the company camped in their clearing, but they soon satisfied themselves that they were harmless settlers going west. The next day being

Sunday, the immigrants, at the invitation of their host, decided to rest for the day; and, after a warm supper, were soon sound asleep. One of the women who slept in the wagon near the door of the cabin was awakened in the darkness by a light touch and a soft whisper. The woman from the cabin was close beside her. In great distress she begged her guest to warn her leader to be on the move in the early dawn. The cabin was a thieves' hideout and the men there were professional robbers of immigrants along the trails. The bandits had planned to lure the men away in the morning and to take the teams and wagons and all their valuable belongings. Murder might be the result if the travelers would offer any resistance. The little cabin woman whispered the secret and then slipped noiselessly back into the darkness. As soon as the trail could be seen, the oxen were yoked and the disappointed children were roused and, much against their wills, were hurried away without breakfast. Every man in the company stood prepared and watchful. The thieves were unprepared, and did not venture an attack at that time, as they were greatly outnumbered by the vigilant pioneers. The wagon train fled away before a new plan for action could be formed. The pious Germans were, ever after, very grateful to the sad little woman who had courageously warned them of their danger. They never learned whether or not she had been suspected of having been the cause of their sudden change of plans and hasty flight into more settled districts.

#### Rush Lake at Last

After a week of travel they began to meet Indians who were very shy and watched from the safe horizon the movements of the white man's wagon train. The Indians belonged to the Crow Wing Reservation and they had learned in the hard school of war to let the white man alone. On the eighth day they reached the shores of Rush Lake. Across its shining waters lay the end of their journey. Bruno Boedigheimer and his grown sons were waiting for them with canoes. The delighted children with the women in the party were rowed safely across, while the men forced the oxen to swim to the opposite shore, drawing behind them the boat-like wagons with their cargoes of precious things - things that could not be replaced in the wilderness. A few miles farther on they reached their temporary homes, which the men had put up during the winter. The Sisters' convent and the houses for the five families were of logs, plastered with mud and roofed with bundles of straw. The floors were the bare earth which in cold weather would be lightly strewn with straw for warmth.

This site, where the Otter Tail River flows into Rush Lake, has a recognised historical significance in the development of northern Minnesota. The state later erected a monument here on which is a bronze plaque commemorating the arrival in 1866 of a rude oxcart bringing Father Joseph Albrecht and three Brothers. These four were soon followed by the five families. Thus was laid the foundation of a permanent settlement which became the center of a flourishing agricultural district. Six centuries before, thirty Christian Vikings had also passed this way down the river and across the lake in search for a lost colony of Catholic Greenlanders.

They found them and left a stone in Kensington dated 1364 which, six-hundred years later, proved that Scandinavian saga to have been part of the history of Rush Lake, Minnesota.

### Maria Prodigior is Founded

The Sisters took possession of their pioneer convent which was dedicated to Our Mother of Miracles, Maria Prodigior. Unflinching they resumed the regular duties of their religious life. It was to follow the ideals which Father Brunner had laid down for the Sisters of the Precious Blood, as they had lived them in Himmelpfad. The rule was patterned on that of St. Benedict - a life of prayer and labor. Yet, it was a harder life at this time because they were making a new foundation on an untamed western frontier. The land had to be cleared and worked up for cultivation. They must produce their own food, so they prayerfully wielded the ax and the hoe as they recited the rosary. They planted the fields with grain for the flour which would be needed for the coming year. They cared for the barn and the two cows which Father Joseph had purchased as the beginning of the herd to supply their future needs. Within doors the Sisters washed and scrubbed and baked, and cooked the fish which were abundant in the streams. They fed Father Joseph and the Brothers, who through the summer were chopping wood and clearing and building for the coming of a severe northern winter. The future years would be easier when there would be an abundant supply of flour, vegetables, especially potatoes, sides of bacon, barrels of salt pork and sauerkraut, and cords of hard firewood prepared and stored away with great care, each in its proper season.

### A Life of Prayer and Sacrifice

The life of prayer was to go on unceasingly. The spiritual devotions, which furnished the strength and inspiration for these Sisters, centered about the praise and honor of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. The devotions were, for the most part, public prayers and ceremonies, some in which the people of the parish would participate on Sundays and Holy Days. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Communion that the Sisters were permitted to receive almost daily in spite of some Jansenistic influence, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament followed by nocturnal adoration, the chaplet of the Precious Blood which formed the morning meditation on the Passion of Our Lord, the Stations of the Cross, the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary, and the seven offerings of the Precious Blood—all these devotions were to be made with faith and love and a great zeal for the souls whom Christ had redeemed with His Most Precious Blood.

The Sisters lived a semi-cloistered life in which the virtue of silence held an important place. There was to be no talking in the cloister excepting that which was required by strict necessity. However, when out in the field, garden, barn, or wash house, the Sisters might talk to one another. There were no community recreation hours such as most religious congregations have. The hour after the noon meal was devoted to the making of the Stations of the Cross in common. The rule required a perfect detachment from family and friends.

Visiting in the parlor was discouraged. Any visits, whatever, were permitted only on very rare occasions. An unquestioning obedience to the director—in Rush Lake it was Father Joseph Albrecht - and to the superior, Sister Lucretia Hauck, was required. It was a life of self sacrifice and humility which these women had generously undertaken and were bravely carrying out, with their eyes fixed on the joys of heaven. These people came of the sturdy stock of German peasants who had been accustomed from childhood to hard labor in the fields and heavy work in the barns for long hours, day after day.

### Chapter III

#### Life in Rush Lake

The German settlement which Father Joseph Albrecht made in Rush Lake, Minnesota, was patterned on that which Father Ambrose Oschwald had made twelve years earlier, in Manitowac County, Wisconsin. The settlers took up land close about the church and welded themselves into a compact social unit which intended to keep itself German in language and social customs, as well as Catholic in faith. These people were sincere in their Catholic belief and did not see religious disaster ahead. They had a firm conviction (in the rightness of Father Joseph's course of action; and as we shall see later, he made use of their simple faith in himself as a priest of God to deceive and mislead them. It was a sad misuse of spiritual power.

The industrious farmers prospered materially, and soon the cabins were replaced by substantial houses and barns which would protect them and their stock during the long months of zero weather. The land produced good crops; and the herds of cattle, flocks of sheep, and droves of swine increased and multiplied. Four miles north was the growing center of Perham which within five years made railway connections with St. Cloud, Minneapolis, and St. Paul to the south. It was here that a ready market for their produce was found.

#### The Convent Maria Prodigior

The men erected a church on the banks of the Otter Tail River, and joined to the rear of the structure a large square convent for the sisters. A chapel was attached to the Blessed Virgin's side of the sanctuary and was separated from it by a long, sliding window of three glass panes which faced directly upon the altar. The tabernacle could be pivoted upon its base to face the chapel. It was here that the Sisters assisted at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, made their hours of nocturnal adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and performed their daily spiritual exercises required by the rule of the Precious Blood Congregation.

Father Joseph was gifted with a fine speaking and singing voice. He gave much time and effort to organizing and training a choir for public worship. The quality of the church music in Rush Lake was unusually fine. Brother Joseph

Boedigheimer, who had come west from Ohio with them, was the official organist as well as the German schoolmaster for the children of the settlement. He began the training in singing among his pupils when they were very young, and it was from this group that recruits for the choir were selected by Father Joseph.

#### The Convent Kitchen

The large convent kitchen was an interesting place, where nourishing food was prepared for Father Joseph and the Brothers and Sisters who did the heavy work. To the convent cook belonged the serious duty of applying the trustworthy old German recipes to the mixing of ingredients, frying in deep fats, baking, steaming, and boiling the meats and vegetables which the farm produced. It was a matter of serious thought performed for the love of God and neighbor. These recipes and the skill which they called for was a precious bequest to the Sister from her devoted German mother, who had taken great care to train her daughter thoroughly in this house-wifely art. No girl, rich or poor, was believed to be completely educated who could not prepare and serve a wholesome meal for her household. These skillful cooks could in times of scarcity set out food which was palatable with the meagerest of ingredients.

There remain memories of golden *strebele* - a rare delicacy concocted from the fine white flour of Minnesota's hard wheat, and eggs, beaten into a light batter and poured slowly through a funnel into a pot of sizzling; deep fat. It was a dessert for feast days. The *schmier kaese* was made from clabber milk which had been heated for several hours at a low temperature, carefully strained, salted, mildly flavored with chives, and served with cream. This tasty dish often supplemented the daily fare. The breakfast, which followed early morning rising and long spiritual exercises, was frequently crisp *pfan kuchen*. The batter had been set to rise the previous evening; at serving time it was fried in hot bacon grease and eaten with rich maple syrup and slices of bacon. It would furnish energy for hours of labor in cold weather. For special feast days *pfan kuchen* was made from buckwheat flour. The mid-afternoon *Kaffeeklatch* was always a restful breathing spell. On ordinary occasions, the refreshments were coffee and thick slices of fine homemade bread - *Kaffeekuchen* was for special feasts. These German Sisters knew how to cook and bake to the honor and glory of God.

The large oven for baking was separate from the kitchen stove. Its thick walls were made of bricks and closed by a heavy iron door. In order to have the oven thoroughly heated, it was filled with a hard wood, and fire was lighted in both the oven space and in the fire box below. When it had reached the right temperature for baking, the embers were raked out from the oven, which was then meticulously swept and cleaned. The carefully molded loaves were placed on a broad long-handled wooden paddle and deposited neatly side by side on the hot floor of the oven. The door once closed was not opened until it was time to remove the bread. The loaves were taken out on the bread paddle by which they had been put in.

The result was always a light, fine-grained bread.

#### God is Just and Merciful

There is an instructive admonition given by a soul in Purgatory to her Sisters in a Convent of the Precious Blood. Many years ago there was a convent cook who took an undue pride in her work and in her kitchen. She was there early preparing for the day's meals, and late into the evening on her hands and knees she stayed on scrubbing with sand. The floors and table tops were white as snow. The pots and pans were shining and spotless. This was as it should be. Then she gradually came to hand, a high opinion of her own importance and to believe that no one in the community could replace her, because no one cooked as well as she. At last she felt that she was absolutely necessary. Then the Sister-cook became careless in her spiritual life. Her prayers, instead of giving life and love to her labor, became a burden. Her devotions were made carelessly with little attention, or were omitted on the slightest pretext. At last this indispensable cook became ill and from her bed she worried lest the Sisters were not receiving the right foods. She sent innumerable orders and many instructions to the Sister who was in the kitchen. At last she died, and another Sister took her place, and carried on successfully. One morning shortly after her burial, strange noises were heard coming from the kitchen while all the Sisters were in chapel at their morning meditation. There were sounds of rattling of pots and pans, clattering of dishes, knocking of wooden spoons and rolling pins on hard surfaces, and rasping of store lids and metal grates. The Sisters looked about. The new cook was in her place in the chapel. Some intruder must be in the kitchen! Several Sisters went to investigate. The bravest turned the knob on the kitchen door and pushed it open. It flew back and slammed in their faces. After several futile attempts, they gained an entrance. All was quiet and in order - nobody was in the kitchen! This strange phenomenon they reported to the reverend chaplain who came at this juncture to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the Chapel. "It seems that our Sister is in Purgatory, and God has permitted her to use these means to beg us for prayers, he said., "Let us offer this Holy Mass for her peace and rest." Then he continued after a little thought, "Sister was a good, unselfish soul and she may be suffering now for having served us too well. Let us offer many Holy Masses and pray much for her eternal rest!" After that there was quiet among the kitchen utensils. This pious story was told to all the Sisters who lived in Our Mother of Miracles Convent, and each one took it sincerely to heart.

#### The Convent Laundry

A laundry - *wasch haus* as the Germans called it - stood close to the river. It was a two-room log building where all the fine church linens, and Father Joseph's, the Brothers', and the Sisters' laundry was washed regularly. There was no modern equipment in it. Old-fashioned, grooved washboard, hand roller wringer, and heavy flat irons were used. The water was pumped up from the river by a hand pump and heated in wash-boilers on wood stoves in the wash house, The rinsing

was done in the river itself. The frost and the freezing air of the long Minnesota winters were splendid bleaches for white linens. Making the laundry soap was a fine art performed by the Sisters. It should be ivory white and firm to the knife when sliced from the cooling vessels for use. Its ingredients were the simplest - cracklings left after the lard had been rendered, drippings of fat, and plenty of tallow were boiled in an alkaline liquid obtained from water which had seeped through hard wood ashes. It was thus that the finest laundry soap was made.

Life about the wash house at Rush Lake was not all hard work - there was some play too. A little rowboat was moored to the dock at the door which faced the river. The Sisters often took short trips in it to retrieve a garment which had escaped their hands in rinsing and got out into the current of the river. At other times they went just for fun.

#### A Boat Ride

One day after a long dry summer, when the water along the bank was only three or four feet deep, three Sisters boarded the boat and paddled out. Because of the dry weather, the wooden seams of the boat had opened in many places above the water line. When the Sisters took their places, the boat naturally lowered, and soon water was trickling down the sides into its bottom. The Sisters were quite unafraid and were enjoying themselves when the boat began to fill much more rapidly. They started for the dock, but, before they could make a landing, the boat began to sink. They stepped out into the shallow water (up to their waists) and waded to shore - none the worse for their ducking but to the great merriment of those who had viewed the scene from land.

#### The Convent Farm

Each Precious Blood Institution was supposed to be self-supporting, and such was Father Joseph's intention when, in 1866, he made the Rush Lake Foundation. On the seven-hundred acres, besides the pasture land for cows and horses, sheep and swine, were fields of grain and potatoes and large gardens. From the fields the Sisters picked up the potatoes and stored them away in the thick-walled *root haus*. There were also carrots, rutabagas, large red beets, and white turnips, and piles of onions for seasoning the foods, and all the produce of their well cultivated gardens which could be preserved for the long, cold winter. They put away sacks of dried beans and salted down barrels of green beans and sauerkraut and made crocks of pickles.

On the convent farm - the legal title to which was in Father Joseph's name - was a village of buildings, large and small. There was a huge barn with its high haymows; near to it stood the chicken house where eggs were produced for daily use, the granary, and a large blacksmith shop above which was a large classroom that was used as a German school for the young children of the settlement. Farther back was the pigsty, *schweinstall*, and closer to the convent was the smoke house, *rauch haus*, where the hams and bacon were smoked and

preserved till needed for the table.

#### Indians and Wolves on the Eifert Farm

However, life at Rush Lake was a real frontier existence where Indians prowled about and packs of hungry wolves howled around the barns on winter nights. In spite of its careful monastic organisation, which was designed on the wise old Benedictine plan of Europe, Indians and wolves disturbed the convent hours of peace at prayer time!

Victor Eifert's farm stood lonely on the west bank of the Otter Tail River, and when the men were out in the fields, Matilda Eifert always feared an unexpected visit of her red neighbors. One spring day when she was in her kitchen with several young children playing about, an Indian woman suddenly walked in and made an emphatic demand for something. Matilda was unable to understand what was wanted and became frightened and showed it. The squaw saw her advantage and drew out a knife from under her shawl to emphasize her demand. Matilda fled in terror into the narrow space behind the hot kitchen stove. The squaw sprang forward and thrust the knife at her. Matilda dodged, and it struck bloodlessly into the stove pipe almost severing it. This interruption gave Matilda a minute to slip out and onto the back steps where a horn hung, which she blew to call the men from their work at mealtime. A blast loud and long rang over the fields. Soon several men came running toward the house. The Indian woman was gone in a flash, and Matilda stumbled back to the children in the kitchen. Her husband found her leaning against the wall with the crying children clinging to her skirts.

In winter, the farm animals stayed in the barn under shelter while the frozen snow lay deep over the fields. In mid-morning and again in late afternoon, the animals were driven down to the river bank and holes were broken in the ice that they might drink. Martha Eifert often accompanied her brothers when they performed this task each day. She was an active little girl and loved the snow-covered world. One morning, while low-hanging snow clouds darkened the countryside, Martha and her brothers were skating about on the wind-swept ice, and the cows stood in a long line drinking. Suddenly several wolves that had been lurking among the shadows of the woods, crept stealthily into view, but the sharp-eyed boys saw them. They knew that the cows had not finished drinking and would be unwilling to return so soon, but the distance between the river bank and the safety of the barn had to be covered without loss of time. The boys shouted and ran about the herd to force them to turn and hurry, but the cows began to frisk about playfully. Martha, trying to help her brothers to get the cows moving barn ward, was too frightened to see where she was going, fell dizzily over a big log and lay prone upon the snow-covered ground. Trembling uncontrollably, she rolled against the opposite side of the log and lay still. The snarling pack sprang forward after the cows which had finally scented the old enemy and fled up the bank. The wolves leaped over the log, behind which terrified Martha lay. She covered her face in her muffler and waited for the

wolves to find her. The next thing that she knew, her brother was beside her helping her to her feet. The cows had reached the place of safety in the nick of time. The wolves had skulked dinner less back into the shadows of the woods.

#### Father Joseph Albrecht

Father Joseph Albrecht was the motive power behind this prospering pioneer settlement at Rush Lake. He still had not submitted to his lawful bishop, yet continued to exercise all the duties of the priesthood in the settlement. By these acts, Father Joseph knowingly put himself beyond the pale of the Church, and brought the same censure on the religious who had taken the vow of fidelity and left Himmelgarten against the wishes of Father Kunkler, the lawfully elected provincial of the Congregation. Six of the fifteen Sisters and three of the eight brothers who had followed Father Joseph west had taken the vow of fidelity.

#### Father Francis Pierz

The priests of the Church, as true pastors of souls, tried to bring reason to bear on Father Joseph's mental attitude and to influence him to reinstate himself in the Church by a humble submission to ecclesiastical authority. The first who tried to untangle the snarl was Father Francis Pierz, a zealous Indian missionary from the Crow Wing Indian Reservation. Father Pierz, a few weeks after the pioneers had come to their new settlement appeared at the Church to make the acquaintance of his new Catholic neighbors. The missionary learned of the censure under which the priest had fallen and made an attempt to right matters. He felt that Father Joseph's problem would be adjusted, and recommended that he seek reconciliation with Bishop Thomas L. Grace. Father Joseph complied and covered the two-hundred miles to St. Paul on foot. But when the suspended priest reached the episcopal residence in the autumn of 1866, Bishop Grace was not at home. Father Joseph believed that the Bishop had purposely avoided meeting him, and refusing to await his return, he went back to Rush Lake more obstinate than before. In the meanwhile Father Pierz had written to Father Kunkler asking pardon for Father Albrecht and for his legal dismissal from the Congregation of the Precious Blood. In December, the conditions for his dismissal laid down by his provincial were received. They were: Father Albrecht was to write a personal letter to be read in St. Joseph's Church and the neighboring parishes to retract the scandal that his words and actions had caused; he was to claim no recompense from the Congregation; he was to send back the Sisters whom he had drawn away from the obedience they had vowed; he was never to found a convent in the name of the Congregation of the Precious Blood. Father Joseph refused to comply with these conditions.

In the meantime Bishop Grace had refused to grant him faculties to perform the functions of a priest in the diocese of St. Paul. Nothing daunted, Father Joseph set out to work up a religious revival in the new settlements springing up about Bush Lake. He met with some success among the people; but the priests who worked in that area armed against him because

the people left their churches and attended Father Joseph's without regard to parish boundaries. He had a way of convincing them that he was always in the right and those who opposed him were always in the wrong. Many came to believe him to be a saint to whom God had given the power of working miracles.

#### A So-called Miracle

Little eight-year old Matilda Silbernagel had an ugly ulcerous sore on her forehead. Her mother had made use of the home remedies that had usually healed such infections, but with no success. There were no doctors within a radius of many miles. Matilda's mother asked Father Joseph to come and bless her little daughter and pray that the festering sore would heal. Father Joseph came to the Silbernagel home and read a long prayer over the child and blessed her for nine successive days. Soon the sore ceased to drain and healed up leaving a long scar as a reminder of Father's power with God. Such were the incidents called miracles remembered and repeated about "Holy Father Joseph."

Father Pierz did not, however, cease to visit the settlement. On several occasions he brought with him the zealous missionary, Father John Ireland, who later succeeded to the See of St. Paul. Father Ireland showed a great personal interest in the settlers themselves. In later years, little Emma Bleily, grown to womanhood, told that Father Ireland had gathered the children together for an instruction in religion and had shown himself to be very well pleased with their knowledge. He called little Emma "a good philosopher" because of her ready answers. He promised that the next time he would come to visit Rush that they might make their First Holy Communion. However, they must continue to study their catechism regularly.

#### Father Francis Xavier Weniger, S. J

In 1871, Bishop Grace deputed Father Francis Xavier Weniger, S.J. to preach a mission in Rush Lake. This the Jesuit did with the result that most of the families from neighboring parishes who had been blindly loyal to Father Joseph, saw the errors of their ways and withdrew from the Rush Lake parish and returned to their own. Father Joseph was thoroughly enraged and bitterly denounced Bishop Grace from the pulpit. Then major excommunication was pronounced and he and his church were placed under an interdict on November 23, 1871. This awful catastrophe was the result of blind human pride. By this decree he was excluded from the Church and all its rights and advantages - and not only he but all who knowingly followed him. It was prohibited under pain of sacrilege to offer divine worship publicly in that little church, to receive the sacraments in it, or to conduct Christian burial from it. A fearful punishment!

#### The Parishioners of Rush Lake

The people of this district of Rush Lake, most of whom were unaware of the interdict, gradually became a little world of

their own - a people separated from others by a wall of ignorance. They had formed unreasonable prejudices against their neighbors. Father Joseph could keep them under his influence only by keeping them away from the rest of the world. There was a good public school located conveniently for these children. It was taught by a Catholic teacher from Perham, but Father Joseph forbade parents to permit their children to attend it. When this group of settlers had left Ohio in 1866, they had in their company several good religious teachers; but Father Joseph Fessler had persuaded them to withdraw from the group that they might work in his Catholic schools of Green Bay Diocese. There was not a teacher left for Father Joseph Albrecht's settlement. German school was carried on in the parish by a Brother who was not qualified to instruct children. Consequently, the youth were growing up with little formal education. They were well trained by their parents, however, for practical life.

Although Father Weniger's mission in 1871 had lessened Father Joseph's influence, there were still a devoted few who blindly believed that Father Joseph was an innocent victim of the injustice of the hierarchy. They believed that he was suffering persecution because he had tried to correct the sins and follies which existed within the Church. The rules of moral conduct which he taught were rigorous in the extreme. He laid down strict regulations regarding dress, diet, amusement. He condemned the theater, dancing, card playing, and all gay merriment and pleasures. His adherents came to believe that anyone who rejected the principles of Christianity as taught in Rush Lake rejected the Christianity as taught by Peter and Paul in the early Church. They were affected by a form of Calvin's doctrine of predestination and believed that the group who lived and prospered in Rush Lake were a charmed few - sure of eternal salvation; and those who lived outside the parish were in grave danger of never enjoying the bliss of heaven.

During the last twelve years of his life, he withdrew more and more from contact with his people except within the Church precincts. The children watched him walking slowly up and down the churchyard saying his breviary, but none of them dared to speak to him. He went regularly to give religious instruction to the young people; but, while following the subject matter as presented in the catechism, when the chapter on the Sacrament of Confirmation would come up, he would skip it, telling the class that it was of no interest to them. Also, the Sacrament of Matrimony was never explained, or studied, because marrying and giving in marriage was not the best manner of life. They were all encouraged to become religious, because the end of time was fast approaching and than all the things of this world would pass away. One young girl, following his line of computation, figured out that she would be only twenty years of age when Christ would come in His glory to judge the living and the dead. Consequently, she applied for entrance into Our Mother of Miracles Convent.

#### Within the Convent

Father Joseph's encouragement and acceptance of young

women into that convent was one of the greatest injustices that he committed against human beings who had trusted him as a priest of God. These young women were not religious, they had not been canonically received and professed in accordance with the Church law from which there is no dispensation. The house into which they entered was not a convent, because no convent can be established except by the sanction of a prelate of the Church.

One of the young women was the beloved Julia Boedigheimer, the loyal friend of Emma Bleily. The two had followed the pioneer movement for more than ten years when Julia, who had never been too robust but had always generously shared the hardships of frontier life, gradually weakened and was no longer able to live the ordinary routine of prayer and labor. One summer she contracted a severe cold which refused to yield to the ordinary remedies, although Theresa Arnold, the infirmarian, was most dutiful. The long, harsh Minnesota winters gave her no opportunity for exercise in the fresh air and sunshine. By the time spring came around she was a victim of tuberculosis. That autumn she succumbed to the dread disease and was laid on the beautiful hillside of the Rush Lake cemetery overlooking Otter Tail River. Emma Bleily mourned long for her friend.

#### The Fire of May, 1879

A fire, which occurred in May of 1879, started in the barn and soon the haymows were a raging furnace. It spread across the driveway to the wooden structures of the church and convent, and in a few hours all lay in desolate ruin. The parishioners ran to help, but very little was salvaged from the devouring flames. It resulted in a complete loss, as there was no insurance on the buildings. The common belief was that the fire had been deliberately set by a malicious enemy from the outside; and this opinion tended to isolate the people yet further from those about them. In the tower of the first church was a bell which had been cast in Germany and imported to Rush Lake at the time of settlement. It had survived the fire but was damaged too badly for further use. It now stands near the monument to the founders as a priceless relic of the past.

#### Father Godfrey Schlachter, C.P.P.S.

Later in May of that year a priest of the Congregation of the Precious Blood again officially attempted to assist Father Joseph to make his peace with the Bishops of the Church. Father Godfrey Schlachter, C.P.P.S. came to Rush Lake when Father Joseph was ill and believed to be about to die, and pointed out to him that he was traveling a dangerous way which led directly to eternal ruin. Father Joseph seemed to be about to surrender and to commission Father Schlachter to take action for his reconciliation with ecclesiastical authority. Suddenly he changed his mind and with his old obstinacy refused the grace offered to him. This, however, was not the end. He regained his health and took up again his daily routine of work and prayer. He managed with efficiency the rebuilding of the church, convent, barns, and other buildings which had been destroyed by the disastrous fire.

## The Death and Burial of Father Joseph

Five years later towards the close of Lent in 1884, death came to Father Joseph's door. As he lay dying Anton Bender asked him if he wished a priest to be called. He nodded his assent. The call was answered by a priest from Perham, but who, doubting that he had the faculties to absolve the recalcitrant priest, rushed off posthaste to Bishop Grace in St. Paul. In two weeks time he returned, but Father Joseph Albrecht had finished his life, and his devoted trustees, who had been true to the end, had buried his body under the altar of the Blessed Virgin in Our Mother of Miracles Church in Rush Lake.

Between the years of 1866 and 1884, Father Joseph had been performing the duties of a pariah priest in a church which stood upon land, the title to which was in his own name.

There is a strange parallel in the beginnings and developments of the defection of Father Joseph Albrecht and that of Martin Luther three-hundred-fifty years earlier. Human pride seemed to be the motive power in both downfalls. Both of these leaders were religious who were inclined to scrupulosity; both were headstrong and self-willed by nature; both were vigorous and popular preachers, both, in a crisis, refused to listen to the advice of superiors, obstinately withstanding all who disagreed with them; both rebelled and became bolder and bolder as time went on; and at last both came to believe that he was all right and the hierarchy all wrong, and became victims of blind deception. Martin Luther rejected the authority of the pope, and Father Joseph, that of the bishops. And both became leaders of schism.

The bishop of Cincinnati had deprived Father Joseph of his powers of jurisdiction and of orders by a censure, and the bishop of St. Paul had refused to grant him the faculties to exercise these powers in his diocese. Nonetheless, Father Albrecht used these powers in defiance of the authority of the bishops. Bishop Grace imposed the punishment of excommunication and interdict upon him and his people who had knowingly adhered to him notwithstanding the prohibitions of the chief pastors of the Church. But who am I to pass judgment on these two priests; I who am always seeking for mercy and forgiveness myself? God alone reads the hearts and minds of men and will be their judge. Both of these leaders held the devotion of their followers until the end of their lives. God will make right all in time.

## Chapter IV

### The Trustees Take Over

Shortly before Father Joseph's death when he had begun to feel the weight of many years pressing more and more heavily, he called to him three men - Anton Bender, Victor Eifert, and Christopher Silbernagel, whom he named trustees of the parish and of the Convent of Our Mother of Miracles. Father Joseph had exercised sole control of these institutions and of the seven-hundred acre farm connected with them, unhampered by the interference of episcopal authority. After

his death these three trustees assumed the internal government as well as the financial management of everything. It was a dangerous step for these people to take, a step towards Protestantism and heresy.

### Bishop Seidenbusch of St. Cloud Sends the Vicar General

In the meanwhile, within the convent the Sisters were waiting in seclusion. No Holy Mass had been offered on the altar since Fr. Joseph's illness and death, and they were growing restless. They knew that there had been trouble in the past between Father Joseph and the Fathers of the Precious Blood, then that he had flouted episcopal authority, and lastly that he had quarreled with the priests in Perham. After each rumor that had disturbed their peace, they had been assured that everything had been adjusted - that obstacles had been cleared away, that impediments had been removed, and that Father Joseph had been right.

One strange story that has come down, used as a justification of Father Joseph's retaining his position, was the following: At the time of the death of His Holiness, Pope Pius IX and the election of Pope Leo XIII in 1878, it was said that a Jubilee had been declared in the Catholic world and that the power of absolution in reserved cases had been given to all confessors. It was said that father Joseph had availed himself of this privilege and rectified his position in the Church. There is no foundation for this story of the Jubilee. It had been invented to hold the confidence of the Sisters in Father Joseph's authority.

The Sisters had trusted Father Joseph and the fathers of the families to which each belonged. These were German girls who were accustomed to obey without a question the priest and their fathers. At this time there were in the convent three Sisters who had taken the vow of fidelity in Himmelparthen and fourteen young women who had grown up in Rush Lake. All were simple, uneducated women. They had known Father Joseph from their childhood; it had been he who had administered the Sacraments for them - and they believed that they were religious in the Catholic Church. Sister Lucretia, the superior, was the eldest - sixty-five years old. Matilda Silbernagel was the youngest - fifteen years of age.

The Vicar General of the new diocese of St. Cloud had received orders from his bishop, Right Reverend Rupert Seidenbusch, to take charge of the Sisters and their convent, to rectify their position in the Church, and to arrange for Mass and the Sacraments for them. Bishop Seidenbusch believed that they were not guilty of formal sin in the unfortunate quarrel. The Vicar General came to Rush Lake, but he never interviewed the sisters. The indignant trustees felt certain that theirs was the complete control of the entire community and did not permit the Vicar General to enter to speak to the Sisters.

### The Three Trustees

These men held complete control of all the community funds;

there was no property in the name of the Sisters; the convent and its furnishings were in the hands of the trustees. This order of the episcopal authorities of the Church was the last straw for Father Joseph's trustees and they decided to move their families, bag and baggage - Sisters, convent, and everything that it was possible to move - to the far West where no bishop would know them. The men chartered three railroad cars for a trip westward during the last week of July. In one car the people were to travel; in the second would be placed the live stock; and the third was to be filled with the household furniture and the personal belongings of the travelers. The trustees had no difficulty in persuading Sister Lucretia to move the convent once again father west. She understood little or nothing of this quarrel. What would be the wisest solution for it was far beyond her intelligence. The superior was completely under the guardianship of the representatives of Father Joseph - the trustees.

#### Scouts to Jordan Valley

Three men, Victor Eifert, Anton Bender, and his son, John Bender, went West to Oregon to choose a new location. The valley of the Jordan River in Linn County was decided upon. These men were Catholic at heart. They did not want to leave the Church. They wanted to find a bishop who would agree with them that Father Joseph had been in the right, and would permit them to choose their own pastor, and manage their church and funds as they saw fit. They wanted a convent and a farm connected with the church. The farm work would be done by the Sisters and the sale of the produce would support the institution. These men were accustomed to collecting and managing the money that the labor of the women brought in. Father Joseph had done this for the Sisters in the convent, and they would do the same.

Before Victor Eifert and the Benders reported to the waiting trustees in Minnesota, they thought it well to interview the Most Reverend John Charles Seghers, but they found that he had resigned the archepiscopal See of Oregon City and returned to missionary work in the Diocese of Vancouver Island. Father Francis Fierens, the administrator of the archdiocese during the interregnum, met the men and encouraged them to make a Catholic settlement and found a convent in Oregon. He told them that there was ample room and acres of good land, and a wide field of work for a congregation of Sisters. They were delighted at the prospects. All things seemed to be propitious to them in Oregon. They also reported to the inhabitants of the convent in Rush Lake that there was a Benedictine Monastery not too far distant from Jordan and that the services of a priest could be secured there.

#### The Spirit of Father Joseph Comes Forth Again

Back in Rush Lake preparations went forward steadily. An auction was held and many things were disposed of as being too difficult to move. At last the date of departure for Oregon was set, and the final task in the arrangements was

made in secret. Father Joseph Albrecht's body had been buried four months previously under the sanctuary before the Blessed Virgin's altar. The trustees were determined to take it with them to Oregon. The Sisters' refectory in the convent joined directly to the rear wall of the sanctuary. The men removed the bricks from this inside convent wall and burrowed through under the church until they reached the coffin which they drew back into the Sisters' refectory. The cavity was filled in and the bricks were replaced. The wall looked quite undisturbed when they were finished. The group moving westward did not want those who remained to know that they were taking the body

The coffin was opened and there lay the tall, thin body of Father Joseph, incorrupt, excepting for the right ear which was gone. A thin coating of mildew covered the face and black cassock in which he was clothed. The skin was slightly shrunken and somewhat yellowed but with no signs of corruption, although it had lain in the damp earth for four months. The body was washed and redressed in a fresh cassock and biretta and placed in a new coffin. The expression, about the closed eyes and mouth was calm and natural. The whole figure rested serenely. The favored few, who gathered to view him, were delighted. They were rendered speechless with wonder. They interpreted it to be an incontestable sign from heaven that Father Joseph was a saint. It is true that the coffin had been placed directly in the low damp soil close to the Otter Tail River, and that there had been no embalming done to preserve the body from decay, yet there was no unpleasant odor except that of damp moldy woolen cloth and wood.

Incorruptibility is not in itself a sign that God has set aside natural laws to show the sanctity of an individual life. There are natural chemical actions that may prevent a human body from decaying and returning to dust after death. In the Book of Moses there is related the fact that, as the brothers Moses and Aaron stood before Pharaoh to demand that he permit the Israelites to go out of Egypt, God ordered Moses to show the wonderful signs which He had given to them as a proof that the command came from Himself. It was then by the power of God that Aaron's shepherd crook lay wiggling and twisting as a live serpent upon the floor, but it was by the power of evil spirits that Pharaoh's magicians were able to perform the same prodigy. Whether the preservation of Father Joseph's body was due to a natural or supernatural cause - good or evil - is not within the providence of ordinary human beings to decide, but it is of paramount importance that Catholics await, in dutiful obedience to God's representatives, for a pronouncement upon the sanctity of individual persons.

That night under the cover of darkness, the coffin, which had been surreptitiously placed in a large packing case, was piously stowed away in the car of furniture. Not a parishioner who was remaining in Rush Lake ; received the least hint of that strange theft. To remove any possible suspicion, the departing trustees placed a beautiful wreath of roses and lilies on the white marble floor slab which lay in the sanctuary

before the altar of the Blessed Virgin and bore an elaborate inscription in Father Joseph's memory.

### Cowboys in the Dakotas

An immigrant train headed west in July of 1884 across the Dakotas and Montana. It was one of the first to move over that route and was as yet quite a novelty on the prairies. Three of the cars on the train had been rented by the trustees.

A company of venturesome cowboys in wide sombreros and leather chaparajos sighted the comet-like tail of black smoke and came galloping full tilt, uttering fearful war whoops which were clearly heard above the heavy rumbling of the wheels. They raced along beside the train, throwing their lassos at the heads in the windows and the projections on the tops of the cars. One cowboy did catch the smokestack of the engine in the running noose of his lasso, but he found that it was more difficult to throw an engine than a horned steer in a roundup. The train men ignored their uproar as the cars calmly pushed forward over the glistening rails; and, after a few miles, they outdistanced the noisy horde. Emma Bleily, then a young woman of twenty-six, enjoyed the picturesque reception until a window in the coach was sharply broken by a flying missile, and an imaginative girl started a hysterical story that these were lawless bandits and were going to wreck the train. However, confidence was restored when the cowboys disappeared as they had appeared in a cloud of dust over the horizon.

### Portland, Oregon - Father Dominic Faber

The immigrant train arrived in Portland on July 31, 1884. The Union Station stood, then as now, at the foot of Sixth Street, and the pro-Cathedral was then located on Third Street between Stark and Oak Streets. The three Sisters with their fourteen sister-aspirants stepped out upon the depot platform; they were glad to breathe the fresh, clean air as they walked up and down, relaxing their tired limbs. They were accustomed to activity, and sitting quietly in the coach was more wearisome than work to them. There was a wait of over an hour and a half before the narrow-gage train would go out for Salem, then Scio. Some one suggested that surely in this thriving town there would be a Catholic Church within walking distance - why not locate it and pay the Eucharistic Lord a visit before train time; It would be a relief after the long months during which they had been deprived of Holy Mass, as they had not received our Sacramental Lord since Father Joseph had become bedridden in late winter. The decision made, they requested one of the trustees to get the information for them. It was then that they received their first lesson in submission to a harsh secular authority which seemed devoid of any understanding sympathy for their spiritual needs. They were forbidden to go out upon the city street to seek for a Catholic Church! They were to wait in the depot! These German girls were accustomed to Obedience; but they were unable to see the justice of this prohibition from one who had no right to command. As they waited, a priest

came through the station. He saw the religious habit of the Sisters and made their acquaintance. It was Father Dominic Faber who was stationed at the Cathedral on Third Street. The young women then learned how near they were to a Catholic Church, but they held their peace. Father Faber was interested in the Catholic settlement about to be made and promised to visit them in a short time. His visit to Jordan proved to be an interesting sequel to this chance meeting in the depot.

### A Strange Guest in Jordan Convent

The Sisters reached Scio and were taken by slow farm wagons to their new home in Jordan. Again it was a beginning in an unfinished log cabin of two rooms. Bare joists stretched across from wall to wall beneath the rafters. The upper attic floor had not been laid. They were to have a strange guest in their convent for the following weeks. The coffin with the earthly remains of Father Joseph was taken from the car of furniture and placed upon the beams in plain view above the Sisters' heads. It was with mingled feelings of awe and fear that they moved about beneath the dark casket with its strange sleeper. The trustees had arrogated to themselves a prerogative which belongs alone to the See of St. Peter in Rome. They were determined not to hide the body out of sight in the earth, but to build an outdoor shrine and expose his relics to the veneration of the faithful. They had canonized Father Joseph Albrecht a saint!

The men set about erecting the combination church and convent, modeled on that which stood on Otter Tail River. It was to be large enough to accommodate the three Sisters and the fourteen young aspirants as they lived their chosen life of prayer and work, apart from the world. Haste was required if it were to be under cover before the winter rains fell in Oregon. The next task was the chapel in which to enshrine the dead priest. When completed it was an apartment about twelve by fifteen feet with a raised table against the left wall; and on this was placed the glass-covered casket containing the incorrupt body of Father Joseph Albrecht. Before this a prie-dieu was set for prayer. The shrine stood close to the right of the church, and, after assisting at Holy Mass or attending a public service, the parishioners would stop for a visit and a prayer to Father Joseph, or to light a vigil lamp to him.

### Father Dominic Faber Is Banished

Father Dominic Faber kept his promise and arrived at the Catholic settlement on the Jordan River within a week. Everyone was busy in the throes of moving into a new land and preparing for winter. The priest was surprised to find that in spite of all the activity no move had been made to secure a priest who would offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and dispense the sacraments for the Sisters shut away in the convent. He showed greater surprise to find that the powers of the superior rested in the hands of three trustees named by the dead priest and that these laymen were in control of all the monies. The religious superior in the convent was a mere figurehead. Father Faber protested against such an

arrangement and brought the quick wrath of the trustees upon his head. They put him in a farm wagon, took him to the railway station in Scio, and advised him never to return. This action brought grief to the young women in the convent. They had trusted Father Faber, and now he was gone. The three older Sisters, the last of those who had taken the vow of fidelity in Ohio, were too timid to assert their rights to receive the ministrations of a priest - to assist at Holy Mass and to receive the Sacraments of the Church. They were afraid to thwart the authority of these imposters who were now ruling everyone in the colony in religious as well as in civil affairs.

## Chapter V

### Emma Bleily's Task Takes Shape

Eighteen years earlier in 1866, when the Sisters were leaving St. Nazianz for Rush Lake, a little girl believed that the Blessed Virgin, smiling in the rising sun, had committed to her a mission which was to be carried out in the far West. It was at the time of this new crisis in 1884 that Emma Bleily saw clearly what must be done to strike the serpent of heresy which was raising its ugly head beside her. She and the other young women in the convent sincerely wished to lead dedicated lives according to the laws of the Church, but they had received no instruction to this end. The youth who had grown to maturity in the settlement at Rush Lake had been instructed in their faith by Father Joseph. They had learned by rote the formal practice of a doctrine which had little influence on their hearts and minds. They believed that God's blessings was to be had in successful living and the amassing of material goods. They had not received the Sacrament of Confirmation and had been taught that all episcopal authority was to be distrusted. This spirit had surely slipped far from the ideals with which Father Brunner had inspired the Priests of the Precious Blood, in their work in the mission fields of Ohio!

Emma Bleily now fearlessly approached the trustees and explained to them that the Sacraments of the Church were necessary to a complete convent life and furthermore, that all Catholics were obliged by the laws of the Church to assist at Holy Mass. Anton Bender, one of the three trustees, informed her that obedience was her most necessary virtue. There was no priest nearer than the monastery of Mount Angel; consequently the law did not bind her because of the great distance. Then twisting the doctrine of St. Paul to suit the purpose, the leading trustee quoted, out of its context, from the Second Letter to the Corinthians - "You are not to live by the letter, but by the spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life." Emma was not to be so easily defeated. She prayed and formed another plan to deliver herself and her young companions from the morass into which they had fallen.

### Brother Joseph Boedigheimer

One of the settlers was Brother Joseph Boedigheimer, a

Brother of the Precious Blood who had left Ohio in 1866 with Father Albrecht. He too saw that the religious life of the people was apt to be wrecked on the rocks of heresy. Emma Bleily called Brother Joseph and found that he would undertake a mission to the prior of Mount Angel to find how the ministrations of a priest could be secured for Jordan. She wrote a letter presenting the needs of the Sisters, which Brother Joseph took in support of his own request. He departed on foot for thirty-five-mile tramp to Fillmore. He did not start out following the public road, but headed across the less frequented fields since he wished to attract no attention.

### Father Werner Ruettimann O.S.B.

A week later Brother Joseph returned a joyful bearer of good news. Very Reverend Adelhelm Odermatt O.S.B. had received him and had listened to his petition with fatherly sympathy. He had promised that he would instruct Reverend Werner Ruettimann O.S.B., the duly appointed pastor of the missions in Marion County, to visit Jordan. Father Werner came and won all hearts, even the trustees. He offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in Jordan and made the acquaintance of the Sisters and the people. He soon discovered, to his surprise, that only the older parishioners had received the Sacrament of Strength; that all of the younger people who had grown up during the eighteen years in Rush Lake were in need of the grace of Confirmation. He rearranged his schedule and prepared to spend every other week in Jordan. He organized a class for daily catechetical instruction in preparation for the reception of that sacrament. This proved to be a happy period of spiritual growth for everyone.

In the summer of 1884, when Father Faber had been banished from Jordan by the powers that were, there was no archbishop in the See of Oregon City. Archbishop Seghers had resigned, and His Holiness Leo XIII did not promote an Archbishop to that See until February 1, 1885. Archbishop Gross entered upon his duties in May of that year. Prior Adelhelm reported to him the condition of spiritual affairs in Jordan and the course of action that he had followed. His Excellency approved. Father Werner was to continue his instructions of preparation for the reception of the Sacrament; and later in the summer, the Archbishop promised to administer Confirmation to those who were prepared for the grace. The date for his coming was set for July 31, 1885.

### Confirmation in Jordan

Spiritual joy reached a high peak in Jordan as preparations were made for the reception of His Excellency, Most Reverend William Hickley Gross. He came by the local train to Scio, was welcomed by the men of the colony, and conveyed with every honor to Jordan, when about a mile from the Church, the Archbishop and his attendants were met by a gay procession of marching boys, carrying banners led by an eight-piece brass band. The church and the grounds surrounding it were decorated with garlands. No labor had

been spared to give the new Archbishop a royal welcome. The next morning, His Excellency offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and administered the sacrament of Confirmation. Archbishop Gross was well pleased by his reception and with the responses to his questions by the members of the class, as he stressed their duty to God and His Church. At this time he also stated that the deed to church, property was to be made out to the Archdiocese and held in the Chancery Office. The trustees did not conform with this request and had no intention of doing so, as future events proved. The land was the private property of Anton Bender. During the visit, His Excellency saw the shrine of Father Joseph beside the church. He gently instructed the people that not until the Holy See, after mature investigation and deliberation, had pronounced a man to be a saint might Catholics offer public veneration to his relics. He advised them that the body should be removed and buried in the earth. The men conformed to this request in part. They tore down the shrine, but they did not bury the body. Another smaller shrine was built in the newly laid out cemetery and there a light was kept burning before the exposed remains of Father Joseph.

Father Joseph Bucholzer was pastor in Jordan between the years of 1897 and 1905. It was near the close of that period that a fire of unknown, origin flared up in the shrine of Father Joseph Albrecht. It might well have started from the kerosene vigil light kept burning there; but, whatever the cause, the shrine was quickly enveloped in flames which spread to the grass dried in the hot summer sun. That evening after Father Bucholzer had rung the angelus, he saw the flames leaping high in the cemetery and sent a quick warning to the countryside by means of the church bell. The men ran in but could do nothing to save the shrine. It was after this that the charred bones of Father Joseph were at last returned to mother earth.

#### Archbishop Gross Visits the Convent

Shortly after the Confirmation ceremonies, when Archbishop Gross visited the Sisters in the convent, he explained to them that they were not religious in the eyes of the Church even though they wore the religious habit of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. Three of them were fugitive religious and had never been reinstated in their congregation. He pointed out that the fourteen younger women: First - had not entered a canonically erected novitiate; Second - had not been received by a legitimate superior; Third—had not been canonically examined and invested by ecclesiastical authority, Therefore, they were not - and never had been religious. He explained to them the great need there was of a Catholic education for the children in his diocese, and of his plan to found an Oregon congregation to assist him in his work. As he talked to them, he was impressed by their faith, sincerity, and evident good will. At last he asked the group if they would like to join him in his apostolic work, and, received a spontaneous pledge to do everything in their power to assist him. They grieved that they had so little to offer. He promised to send a teacher to train them in the religious life which was,

of necessity,, the first step toward this end. Then Sister Lucretia rose and kneeling at the feet of His Excellency assured him that they would do whatever was necessary to correct their position in the Church, It was a very satisfactory beginning and Archbishop Gross was well satisfied. "You will be my Sisters and help me in my work," he told them. The Archbishop commissioned Father Werner to start a course of instruction to prepare the young women for religious profession of vows. There was great joy in the convent.

#### Father Werner Versus the Trustees

After the Archbishop's departure, all went well in Jordan until the trustees became aware that Father Werner was preparing the young women to take the vows of religion. Thoroughly angry, they demanded that the instructions be stopped at once, as they were already religious. "Father Joseph had made them Sisters!" Father Werner's reply that the young women wished to receive religious instruction and that he was fulfilling the Archbishop's orders in giving it, had no weight with the angry men. The trustees attitude was that those ignorant women did not know what they wanted, and Archbishop Gross was a bishop and therefore not to be trusted! Father Joseph Albrecht had made them the guardians of the Sisters and they had no intention to abdicate their right nor to neglect their duty to their daughters. Twelve of the young women were the daughters of the men of the parish. Gentle, humble Father Werner was ordered to leave the settlement and never to enter that church again. There was grief with many tears in the convent.

#### The Braver Ones Assist at Holy Mass

Brother Joseph Boedigheimer soon quietly brought word to his sister Aurelia in the convent that Father Werner was to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the house of their father, Bruno Boedigheimer, which stood across the stream in the opposite direction from the church. In the same manner as the days of the penal laws in England, Aurelia and Emma Bleily and the more courageous of the young women would slip out in the dawn to attend Holy Mass and receive Holy Communion. There was a stream of water and a stretch of low marshy land between the convent and the house; but they took off their shoes and stockings, crawled on hands and knees over a log across the stream, and waded through the mud and the water to dry land, Triumphantly they received our Lord in the Eucharist with great joy.

#### Prior Adelhelm of the Benedictine Monastery Visits Jordan The Young Aspirants Choose

It soon became evident that the men of Jordan would not relent. The deed to the land on which the convent stood was not in the name of the Sisters. The Archbishop, as yet, hoped that the group of young women could carry on in the building in which they lived under the guidance of the Benedictine Fathers who were well able to direct the young Community to

a useful maturity of service for the Archdiocese. But affairs were rapidly becoming unbearable for the group. "There was no Mass nor Sacraments for them except on rare occasions and that only by stealth in the neighboring farmhouse, while the watchful trustees were closing in like the pursuivants of Elizabeth of England.

Archbishop Gross commissioned the Prior of Mount Angel to go to Jordan and, if possible, reestablish peace, but the trustees refused to make any compromise. Then Prior Adelhelm accompanied by Father Werner went to the convent and interviewed each Sister individually. It was at this time that these young women acted with full knowledge of what they were doing. Between 1866 and 1885, they had been deceived with half truths and fair promises by those whom they had trusted. NOW they understood what was at stake - the price to be paid in exchange for their Catholic faith and a religious vocation was their earthly heritage with their homes and parents. The two older Sisters and these valiant young women, whose ages varied from sixteen to twenty-eight, all willingly signed the paper in which they pledged their allegiance to the Holy Roman Catholic Church and promised to form a religious congregation which was to be subject to the Metropolitan of Oregon City, Most Reverend William Hickley Gross. The trustees were called then, and a meeting was held. They came smiling and sure of their authority in the face of the two Benedictine priests. Prior Adelhelm rose and read an official letter from Archbishop Gross, requiring that those who desired to form a religious congregation within the fold of the Catholic Church were to break all connections with the trustees and place themselves under the authority of the Archbishop. After the reading, the Prior asked each Sister and aspirant who sincerely desired to cooperate with His Excellency to rise. They rose as a single body and stood tall and straight!

#### Fathers and Daughters

Anton Bender was appalled. He ordered sternly, "*Setzen sie sich, Anna!*" But his daughter stood bravely on her feet although she was in tears. She was certain of her choice. Anna was twenty-three years of age. Prior Adelhelm confirmed her in her position. "She is of age and may make her own choice," he said very quietly. Christopher Silbernagel stepped quickly to his daughters, Mary, twenty-two, and Matilda, sixteen, standing close beside one another, and he said with determination, "Mary, you are of age and may do as you please now; but Tillie, you are to come home!" The young women stood weeping, but did not move an inch from Mary's side. "You gave her to God and you may not take her back now," said the Prior gently to the bewildered father. Victor Eifert looked at his three daughters standing close together. Catherine and Martha were of legal age, twenty-six and twenty-one respectively, but Elizabeth was not yet eighteen. Her father motioned for the younger girl to come with him, and she followed him out quietly and returned to her home. The scene was over and "the die was cast!" They had, in fact, crossed a barrier more awful than the Rubicon.

This decision was of particular moment for Matilda Silbernagel. She wished to become a Sister, yet she felt very sure that her father would come the following day and take her away. She doubted her strength to withstand him if she were separated from her companions. Prior Adelhelm judged that the permission to enter the convent that her father had given her three years earlier was still in force. Therefore, when he and Father Werner left Jordan that evening, they took her with them in their buggy to an isolated farm in the hills, not far from Sublimity, and asked the devoted Catholic family of William Smith to give her sanctuary until other plans could be made for her.

#### Modern Saint Barbaras

Saint Barbara, defying the authority of her father while imprisoned in a solitary tower, was indeed brave, but so were the inexperienced young women in the convent in Jordan in 1856. They, like the martyrs of old, were forced to receive the sacraments by stealth, because of the jealousy of their fathers. They, in the day of persecution, were dutiful in their obligations to God and faithful in their love of Christ as the youthful Barbara had been fifteen centuries earlier. Dioscorus beheaded his daughter with his own hands, because she became a child of the Church of the Christians. The heads of the families in Jordan knowingly drove their daughters into a penniless exile, because the young women persisted in their belief in the authority of the Church to teach and to govern.

#### Off to Fillmore

Life in the Jordan convent soon became intolerable for those who had prayed and labored there for almost two years. There was no Holy Mass nor Communion as no priest could come there. The Blessed Sacrament had been removed, and the church was desolate and empty. Nocturnal adoration had to be abandoned. It had been due to the efforts of these women that that church had become a place of prayer, secluded from the noise of the money-making world. The young women were being subjected to a systematic series of petty persecutions. Father Werner informed His Excellency of their unhappy lot. The gentle heart of Archbishop Gross was sad as he realized that his plan to leave the Sisters in the convent setting of Jordan could not be carried out. He would be forced to find another retreat for those who had pledged their fidelity to God to labor in the Archdiocese of Oregon City. He requested the Prior to remove them to Mount Angel until other arrangements could be made. Then, on the eve of Pentecost in 1886, two farm wagons from Mount Angel Monastery came to the convent, and Sister Lucretia, with eight of the young women, taking not a thing with them but the clothes that they were wearing, climbed aboard and were taken to the village of Fillmore at the foot of Mount Angel. It would be years before many of these young women were to see their earthly fathers again. But each day they prayed most earnestly for their return to the Church.

The year before, Sister Lydia Mahl, one of the three older

Sisters, died late in 1885 and was buried in the Jordan cemetery; Anna Mohr returned to her parents in Rush Lake. The elderly Sister Afra Ruhl, who had gone out from Ohio with Father Albrecht, was too ill to travel to Mount Angel by farm wagon and was left temporarily in the Jordan convent. Emma Bleily promised her that she would return as soon as they were settled, and take the dear old religious to their next home. Sister Afra wept sadly to see her young companions, particularly Theresa Arnold, her nurse leaving her behind. (Theresa had a special gift of caring gently for the sick and had been infirmarian both before and after the episode in Jordan.) But a few weeks later Sister Afra died and was buried beside Sister Lydia in the lonely Jordan cemetery. Five of the young women remained in the Jordan convent with Sister Afra. They lived on hoping for a return of peace and a readjustment of their problems. They had retained their faith in the uprightness of the trustees, and they sincerely wished to become Sisters of the Precious Blood according to the ideals of Father Brunner in the Ohio foundation in which they had been educated. However, one of them, Catherine Foltz, left Jordan and after a short time, became Sister Mary Barbara of the Benedictine Order where she lived out a long and happy life. Sister Barbara was a fine cook, and for many years she managed with satisfaction the big monastery kitchen on the hill, where food was prepared for the Fathers and the students in the college. The archives of the Convent, Queen of Angels, say, "Sister Barbara was of a pious, simple, unassuming, and peaceable disposition."

The remaining four aspirants soon quit residing at the Jordan Convent and went to their respective homes. They nevertheless continued to think of themselves as religious.

It is told that Sister Afra thought of priests with the greatest esteem throughout her long life. It might be that she had been impressed by a story of a catechist who had taught that should he meet a priest and an angel upon the highway, he would in veneration kiss the hand of the priest before he would perform his act of reverence to the angel. Sister Afra held the gentle Father Werner in the highest esteem. She, being a very simple soul and wishing to do something to show her respect for her pastor, on one occasion, limped out on her cane to the church entrance where the priest would pass that morning when he came to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. After kissing his consecrated hand, she curtsied and presented him with a large red apple. Father Werner thanked her most graciously and putting the fruit into his pocket assured her that he appreciated her kindness. The trifling incident had given the old Sister great happiness and she often repeated it. The mid-western born Sister considered the luscious fruit a choice gift.

#### Death Bed Repentance

In 1898, twelve years after the scene in the Jordan convent in 1886, Anton Bender lay down upon his bed to die. During these years, he had had nothing to do with the priests who had been appointed to the Jordan parish by Archbishop Gross. His

sons and daughters were much concerned at his refusal to make his peace with God. At last grace touched his soul, and Archbishop Gross was called to his bedside, and this leading trustee at last signed his submission to the authority of the Church of God. At this same time the holy prelate called upon the ailing wife of Christopher Silbernagel. She wished to sign her submission, but, dutiful wife that she was, believed her husband's permission was necessary. On being asked he replied that she should follow her own conscience. His Excellency assisted her to make ready to meet God. She died a holy death of February 8, 1899. Not long after the death of his wife, Christopher Silbernagel submitted and lived for eighteen years a faithful son of the Church. Thus it was that the prayers and sacrifices of worthy daughters brought the light of grace to their parents who had blundered through ignorance. The censure of ecclesiastical authority was removed and all were made whole once again.

#### Months of Waiting at Fillmore

When the brave group of women left the Jordan Convent, they were taken to the Benedictine Sisters' house in Fillmore. Matilda Silbernagel joined them there, making their number nine. In the house were the three Benedictine Sisters also. Sister Mary Johanna, O.S.B. was the superior. These Sisters did the laundry work and mending for the monks in the monastery. The nine refugees assisted the Sisters in every way possible while they waited for a message from the Archbishop. But their greatest consolation at this time was the morning Holy Mass and Communion in the monastery church, and the many hours that they spent before the Blessed Sacrament. June and July slipped by, and they were still waiting. Prior Adelhelm had been closely observing the young women, and he came to believe that they would be a worthwhile addition to the Benedictine Sisterhood, who were at that time making a foundation in Gervais. He called the nine together and suggested that they apply for admission into that Benedictine order. He pointed out that it would be a perfect solution to their many problems. He assured them that it would not be too difficult for them and to think the matter over and pray for light but to make no hasty decision. The nine were greatly taken aback at this proposal of Prior Adelhelm. They were under the greatest obligations to the Prior for all that he had done for them, and they were still living at the expense of the Benedictine Order. Two months had passed and no word had come from the Archbishop. They had no house, no means of support. Poor homeless beggars in truth! They had given their promise to His Excellency to assist him in the apostolic work of the Archdiocese of Oregon City, and he had promised in turn to form a diocesan congregation - and that in it they would be his Sisters.

But there was another motive that had a great weight with the nine young women. They all looked at one another in utter dismay. Were they to lose the beautiful devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ in which they had been steeped from childhood? They had known no priest or teacher

but those of the Congregation of the Precious Blood. Their motto was "Praise and honor to the Blood of Jesus!" Their ideal was to be Sisters of the Precious Blood who were "gentle and patient, hard-working, humble and obedient, charitable, and above all simple and joyous!" Would they be able to recapture this ideal in a Benedictine Convent under monastic rule where the Opus Dei should absorb their lives? They had hoped to cooperate with the priesthood by instructing youth to know and love God who had sent His Son to shed the last drop of His Blood for all men and to prepare the little children that they might receive Everlasting Life at the communion rails in humble mission churches. In the worldwide apostolate of the Redeeming Blood of Christ, they longed by prayer and penance to assist the parish priest in bring sinners to repentance, and to lighten the burdens of the missionaries who were laboring in far distant lands for the souls of pagans. The nine could not believe that the two ways of life could be harmonized.

#### Father Werner Comes Again

Father Werner came to visit the young women in Fillmore and found them in a very unsettled state of mind. As they crowded about him, Emma Bleily explained their trouble, and the group expressed their fears. Maybe the Archbishop had abandoned his plan to found an archdiocesan congregation? Maybe His Excellency had found that the scheme was not feasible. Maybe it could not be carried out with such raw material as these young women had to offer. If this were true it would be wiser to follow the Prior's plan than to disband and return to their homes. Several of these young women knew that their fathers were waiting for that move on their part. Would it be necessary for them to give up all the loved devotions to the Precious Blood of Jesus? Father Werner listened and then promised quietly, "I will see His Excellency for you." Again they prayed and waited.

#### Chapter VI

##### A Start is Made

Archbishop Gross was most explicit when Father Werner explained to him the doubts and worries of the group waiting at Fillmore. They were not to become part of the great Order of St. Benedict. It was his definite plan to form an archdiocesan congregation to work among the children. The young women were to be the nucleus of a foundation that would teach in the mission schools of Oregon. Not long after that the Archbishop visited them and suggested that they choose one of two sites on which to make the foundation. The first was in St. John, Milwaukie - the second, in Sublimity. They were unanimous in their choice of the second, because there was a building upon it; but another reason, and one of greater importance, was the fact that Father Werner was pastor of that parish. He understood them and they in turn trusted him. On the Sublimity tract of twenty acres stood the old Sublimity College of the United Brethren. It had been opened in January, 1858, by Milton Wright as its

first president, and became in reality a grade school with a primary department and classes in Latin, algebra, and geometry in the upper grades. However, it had made history in Oregon when it beat the Willamette University's baseball nine on their home field. In 1871, one hundred twenty-five pupils had enrolled in its classes, with that, when at the height of its career, it closed its doors as a United Brethren seat of learning.

#### The Start is Made

For fifteen years the building had stood empty and unused. Then in 1882, Father Peter Stampfl, who was the first priest to be officially appointed to offer the Holy Mass in Sublimity, had purchased the twenty acres with the old building for the Archdiocese; and the first floor had been arranged for the parish church. It was the upper floor that the Archbishop transferred to the young women to become the Bethlehem of the Sisters of Saint Mary of Oregon

On August 14th, 1886, Emma Bleily and Catherine Eifert left Fillmore. Prior Adelhelm blessed them and gave them a generous supply of provisions; and sent a hack and team to take the happy pair to Sublimity. For the first week, the two lived with a Catholic family while they were putting the apartment in order for the seven who were longing to join them. Brother Joseph Boedigheimer and his brother, Cornelius, both fine carpenters, again came to their aid. They laid floors, put in partitions, replaced windows, and made bed frames from the little fir trees near at hand, while the young women, with great joy in their hearts, scrubbed and cleaned and made straw mattresses for the beds. Straw mattresses! How very appropriate it was for them to sleep on straw in their Blessed Bethlehem!

An immediate need was a cook stove. They found a discarded one that was complete except for its four legs. The stove was moved to the convent and placed on bricks to raise it a safe distance above the wooden floor. For the first long while, the tables and chairs were packing boxes from the local grocery store. On the whole, it was a very neat and clean arrangement - and entirely satisfactory.

On the feast of Our Lady's Assumption, Father Werner sang a High Mass. It was Emma and Catherine's first Holy Mass in their new home and their hearts were full of joy. Father Werner named the convent Mariazell. It was the name of a shrine dedicated to Our Lady in Switzerland, and dear to him. A week later, the young women took up their abode in Mariazell, and slept very well on the straw, which as yet was not made into mattresses. The windows had not all been placed, and the swallows darted back and forth above them. Emma and Catherine both were tired; but they were at last in their own convent and were under the protection of Archbishop Gross - a wise and understanding prelate.

The convent was in need of many things. There were no dishes or kitchen utensils; bedding was scarce. The August

nights were warm, but provisions had to be made for the damp chill of the coming Oregon winter. There would be need of a better stove for baking and cooking. 'The women of the parish had been more than thoughtful in keeping the Sisters supplied with well prepared food, and Father Werner had brought back to Mariazell supplies of bread, wine, cheese, meat, fruit, and vegetables after every visit he made to Mount Angel; but the time would come when they must provide for their daily wants. No garden could be planted until the following spring. Money was the immediate want at that time.

### Hop Picking

Sublimity was surrounded by hop fields where the women and children earned money each autumn. The aspirants, like Ruth, the gleaner of old, realized that it would be prudent to go out and do likewise in order to supply their needs. Emma and Catherine located a field close at hand and arranged to pick. Father Werner brought three more of their companions to Mariazell from Fillmore, and, as they did well at hop picking, soon all nine were daily picking together. That season they cleared three hundred dollars, and the sum was adequate for equipping the convent with necessities - a new cook stove, blankets, dishes and cooking utensils in particular.

### Religious Instructions: Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Father Werner began again the interrupted course of instructions on the religious life, especially the vows and their obligations. He also gave a course in Latin pronunciation and the rubrics prescribed for the recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This group mastered the art of giving to God the service of the Little Office in a beautiful manner. To the end of their lives they performed that duty before the whole court of heaven as graciously as any courtier pays his respects to a temporal sovereign in an earthly court. A Benedictine would be well qualified to give the finest training in that art, as the Order is particularly devoted to singing the praises of God. Father Werner, after many hours of painstaking labor, reached success.

Among his accomplishments, Father Werner might well have noted that of the technique of the cuisine. He understood the art of preparing meats for the most fastidious and he imparted many of its secrets to Catherine Eifert, who was particularly gifted in the execution of Swiss recipes. The first step in the preparation of a rabbit for the table was frying it in butter till nicely brown, than a bottle of wine was poured over it, and the container was tightly closed and it was allowed to simmer for two hours before serving. The result was a triumph of skill and most delicious. The rarebit, a Swiss dainty, was made by dipping two thin slices of bread with cheese between them in eggs beaten till stiff, and then carefully browned in butter. Father Werner frequently provided this choice morsel for a Sunday afternoon lunch served with beer for the young women in Mariazell. He could be a gracious host as well as a

strict novice master.

### A Date Is Set

Life in Mariazell Convent sped on serenely as the period noviceship was lived with deep seriousness by the nine novices who were there at that time. They were: Sister Lucretia (Barbara Hauch), Theresa Arnold, Emma Bleily, Catherine Eifert, Aurelia Boedigheimer, Mary Silbernagel, Anna Bender, Martha Eifert, Matilda Silbernagel, and, at Christmas of that year, Mary Giebler joined them from the town of Sublimity, making the number ten. Their spiritual director was well pleased with their rapid advancement which, added to the years of discipline and longing for a total consecration to God, gave promise of the formation of solidly religious persons. Father Werner informed Archbishop Gross of their progress in the understanding of religious principles as well as their ardent desire to pronounce the vows. His Excellency was pleased and set January 6, 1887, the feast of Epiphany, as the day for the religious ceremonies. A decision was made at this time that the five elder of the young women were sufficiently prepared to pronounce perpetual vows; and a longer period of study was advisable for the training of the five younger ones. They would on the same date be officially received as novices and given religious names. Martha Eifert was somewhat immature for her twenty-one years, and Matilda Silbernagel and Mary Giebler had not as yet reached their eighteenth birthday.

### Ten Wise Virgins

At the opening of the New Year, the young women, with the highest hopes, entered upon a three-day retreat of immediate preparation. Father Werner was the preacher of this, their first withdrawal from all active employment to be alone with God. To these souls it was a wonderful experience that was to be a vital influence for the remainder of their lives. Father Werner's instructions were not only inspirational but they were also very practical. He intended that they should be guides to those who were to become Marthas in the active service of God as well as Marys in their prayer life. He knew that Archbishop Gross planned to make these young women the foundation stones of a religious congregation. They were to assist the parish priests in the formation of an active Catholic laity by working in the parochial schools of Oregon Archdioceses. So the ten wise virgins filled their lamps with the oil of love for God and for neighbor before the Blessed Sacrament in the Convent. The novice master said that there were no foolish virgins among those in Mariazell

### A Great Disappointment

Then God permitted another disappointment to fall upon them. Archbishop Gross in his mission field had an imperative call to Pendleton in eastern Oregon which could not be postponed, and he was forced to defer the date that he had set for profession in Mariazell. He wrote to the Sisters telling them of his pressing duty and expressing his sorrow at

the disappointment that it was necessary for him to impose upon them. He set the feast of the Annunciation as the future date for the ceremony. He informed them that day I was doubly dear to him, as it was upon the twenty-fifth of March that he had consecrated his life to God as a Redemptorist in 1857, and it was on the same day in 1863 that he had offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the first time. "Therefore it is fitting that on that feast, my Sisters should make "their VOWS of poverty, chastity, and obedience," he wrote. The letter lightened the delay and they set about selecting their names. It was a task to which much time and thought was given. The final results were: Barbara Hauch decided to change her religious name from Sister Lucretia to Sister Mary Clara; Theresa Arnold took Sister Mary Benedict; Emmerentiana Bleily, wishing to have the same heavenly patron as His Excellency, became Sister Mary Wilhelmina; Catherine Eifert assumed Sister Mary Josephine; Aurelia Boedigheimer chose Sister Mary Cecilia; Mary Silbernagel chose the name of the beautiful mystic, St. Gertrude; Anna Bender loved St. Aloysius who had dared the anger of his father to follow his vocation, and she wished for the name of Sister Mary Aloysius; Martha Eifert assumed Sister Mary Rose in honor of the humble little virgin of Lima; Matilda Silbernagel took the saint of her birthday, December 27, and became Sister Mary Johanna; Mary Giebler wanted a great penitent for her patron and became Sister Mary Magdelene. Then the ten settled down for another three months of prayerful preparation for the occasion.

#### Reception and Profession, Plans for the Bright Future

On the afternoon of the 24th of March, 1887, Archbishop Gross arrived at Mariazell Convent; and, calling the young women together, spoke to them of his plans for their future in the Archdiocese. He explained to them what he considered to be one of his gravest obligations—the establishing and staffing of an orphanage for the Archdiocese. The destitute children were being placed in non-Catholic institutions where they were growing up with no Catholic instructions. His Excellency was at that time preparing for the erection of a building, and he planned to place these children under the care of this new congregation. Also many new parochial schools were soon to be erected in the parishes. These Sisters were to begin immediately to prepare themselves to direct Catholic education in them. To start with, they were to organize classes in Christian Doctrine in the Sublimity parish. There was a great need for the training of the children close at home. The Church had been much neglected in this district, and a strong Catholic laity would be its hope for the future. The parish had been without a resident priest until the Benedictines had come, and the people had become by that time too busy about things of time.

One other matter he settled. Nocturnal Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament had been practiced regularly by this group for many years, and it was a very sacred privilege that they loved. Archbishop Gross, at this time, explained to them that it was not compatible with the active life which he was

planning for them in the future; consequently he would sanction one night of Adoration a week and that on Friday.

After this instruction, the gracious, understanding prelate interviewed the individual Sisters who had special problems to be settled. Then all retired to rest with light hearts to gather strength for the happy day ahead.

#### Reception and Profession

When the feast of the Annunciation in 1887 dawned in Sublimity, the young women found that the Benedictine Fathers, under the direction of their Prior, had, with, the care of an earthly father, made arrangements for the details of the ceremonies. Prior Adelhelm and priests from the monastery came to assist the Most Reverend Archbishop in the sanctuary bringing with them furnishings for the altar of the poor church. A choir of Fraters with their director Frater Placidus came to sing the Mass of the day. All ceremonies were to be carried out with liturgical beauty. Brother Theodore Wuersch O.S.B., the monastery cook, arrived with an ample supply of provisions to prepare a feast for all after the ceremonies. It was a feast complete in Church and convent.

The reception and profession ceremonies were conducted according to the ritual of St. Benedict, and the habit which the young women took was that of the Benedictine Sisters, with the difference that the front of the black scapulars had the words "Ancilla Domini" lettered in red in the form of a cross on them. However, the members of the new Congregation clung to their central devotion and became Sisters of the Precious Blood. After the ceremony, they were five perpetually professed Sisters and five white-veiled novices. In the afternoon the young Fraters entertained the priests and Sisters with old German songs and amusing recitations. It was a day of great joy.

#### First Election Day

Then His Excellency told the five professed Sisters that it was expedient that one of them should be elected superior by a democratic vote of the group. He enjoined a period of silence and prayer to the Holy Spirit to obtain light and guidance, after which His Excellency convened them in the first chapter of the Congregation, now firmly established on the Rock of the Church. Sister Mary Wilhelmina Bleily, who then was thirty years and nine months old, was elected by an absolute majority and was confirmed in her office by the Ordinary of the Archdiocese. Sister Wilhelmina greatly feared the responsibility, as she had no preparation for its duties. The Archbishop consoled her by telling her that Father Werner would be at hand to give her advice; and that she could in all matters of greater importance appeal to himself. She accepted, though her heart was for a moment filled with an anxious concern for the future. It was necessary that some means of raising money be found. His Excellency believed that a begging tour was the only method. Sister Wilhelmina shrank from this method, and the problem was not for the day

discussed further. The clouds on the horizon at that time were so distant and small that they could not overshadow the joy in Mariazell. Then the Most Reverend Archbishop blessed them all and took his leave.

## Part II

### Chapter I

#### The Community's Founder

The founder of the Sisters of Saint Mary of Oregon, Most Reverend William Hickley Gross C.Ss.R. was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on June 10, 1837, and received the Sacrament of Baptism in St. James the Less Church on July 2 of that year. He was given as a patron St. William to which Hickley was added out of respect for his paternal aunt, Susanna Margaret Hickley, who at this time assumed the responsibility of Godmother to the future Archbishop of Oregon City. His father, Jacob White Gross, was a hardware merchant of the "Old Town" of Baltimore, The Gross family had come to Maryland from Alsace during the Napoleonic Wars in western Europe. Jacob Gross' son, John, assisted the American cause in the defense of that city during our second war with England. Rachel Parkinson Haslett Gross, the Archbishop's mother, was the daughter of a political exile from Ireland who had been forced to seek a new home in America. After the bloody uprising of the United Irishmen in 1798 had been put down by a bitter defeat, those who were known to have participated in it realized that it was better that they should leave Ireland and found a new home beyond the sea if they would live.

#### Jacob and Rachel Gross

The parents of the future Archbishop were practical in the profession of their religious, and they bent towards action rather than towards speculation on the truths of their faith. In order to make her faith practical, the Catholic mother looking at her six boys prayed that several of them might have a vocation to the priesthood. Rachel Gross did not live long enough to see any of her sons offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, but she did have the joy of knowing that two of them were preparing for the priesthood. The Archbishop of Oregon verified the fact of his mother's influence when he said in later years that his vocation under God was due to his mother's prayers and encouragement.

#### A Spark Touched to Tinder

His early school days were spent in the parochial school connected with the Church of St. Vincent de Paul on the waterfront in Baltimore. Here he made his first holy communion when he was twelve years old; and in September of 1849 he entered St. Charles' Seminary in Ellicott City. The following eight years he spent in carefully preparing himself for the work of the priesthood. Early in 1857 he became convinced that the best way for him to serve God was in the

Order of the Holy Redeemer. Accordingly he was invested in the Redemptorist habit on March 25, 1857. For the next year the young novice practiced the virtues of religion in the cloister, and on April 4th, 1858, he pronounced his religious vows. The love of God and of neighbor flamed ever brighter during the following six years as the young Redemptorist pursued his studies. His fine mental acumen had been noted by his teachers, and his advancement in things of the spirit kept pace with his mental development.

The motto of his Order, *Deo Soli it studiis* (To God Alone He Goes With Zeal), was a vital force in his endeavors to become a true Redemptorist. On March 21, 1863, Most Reverend Francis Patrick Kenrick of Baltimore raised him to the holy priesthood; and four days later, on March 25, again it was the feast of the Annunciation, he had the great happiness of offering his first Holy Mass.

#### The Zealous Priest and Prelate

After six months of special training for the apostolic work of his Order, the young priest received his first appointment - it was to be an army Chaplain at Annapolis. For two of the most tragic years in American history, Father Gross experienced the horrors of a civil conflict in which brother was armed against brother. At this time his duties took him to the military hospitals and out upon the battlefields. It was in the states of Virginia and Maryland that the major part of the fighting took place between the North and the South. In the battle lines the young priest lived through days of death and danger which he often recounted in later years.

For ten years after the Civil War, Father Gross zealously worked among the people in New England, with the last two years spent in a Boston house which was a mission center. In the work of preaching missions, Father Gross was most successful. From New York to Savannah he became a much sought after mission preacher. While he was giving himself wholeheartedly to this zealous labor, which he felt to be his life's work, Most Reverend Ignatius Persico, Bishop of Savannah, resigned from his diocese. In 1872, unofficial reports were received saying that Father William Gross was named to succeed him. The humble Redemptorist brushed it aside as being without foundation, saying that it must be his brother, Father Mark Gross instead. But when the official Bulls arrived, he was indeed named Bishop of Georgia. On April 27, 1873, Most Reverend James R. Bayley of Baltimore consecrated William Gross in his thirty-sixth year, Bishop of one of the most underdeveloped mission dioceses on the Atlantic seaboard. It counted a scattered Catholic population of less than twenty-five thousand. Bishop Gross, the youngest bishop in the United States, was filled with apostolic zeal and had the decided advantage of being already known in the larger cities of his diocese by his previous mission activities. With prudence and wisdom, he set to work and for twelve years labored with most satisfactory results for the spiritual and material development of his diocese. God blessed his work, and the Church in Georgia grew strong.

## The Archbishop of Oregon City

Most Reverend John Charles Seghers resigned the Archbishopric of Oregon City and returned to the Indian missions of Vancouver Island in 1884; the Holy See promoted the Bishop of Savannah to the vacancy in Oregon City on February 1, 1885. The great love which bound Bishop Gross to the faithful in the deep South made the move a sacrifice for him; but he willingly turned his face westward to assume a much larger apostolate on the new mission front. Here he would find not the humble, smiling Negro in his poor cabin, but the proud stoic Indian riding the plains on fleet horses. The great heart of Archbishop Gross loved both.

### His Excellency Arrives in The Dalles

On May 23, 1885, Most Reverend William Hickley Gross first set foot on Oregon soil in The Dalles on the Columbia River. His reputation as a vigorous and fearless Churchman, an inspiring speaker, a farseeing financier, and a zealous spiritual leader had crossed the wide prairie land and reached the Pacific coast before him. Here he was awaited by a committee of fifteen with Judge Levi Anderson as chairman. These Catholics were proud and happy to be commissioned to welcome their new prelate and to form his vanguard over the last miles of the journey to Portland. Oregon Catholics were prepared to give this Prince of the Church a royal welcome to his new archdiocese.

The train from the East bringing His Excellency to The Dalles came in at 5:30 A.M.; and after being welcomed by the committee, he was taken to St. Peter's Church where he offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the first time in his new See. At 8:00 A.M. this company boarded the river steamer for the trip up the beautiful Columbia. All Oregon was at her best that May morning

### His Excellency in Portland

At the wharf of Portland, Right Reverend James Francis Fierens, administrator of the Archdiocese, with an enthusiastic crowd, was waiting to receive the Archbishop and to conduct him in triumph to the Cathedral. After landing, His Excellency was escorted through the principal streets of the prosperous young city to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception where he was officially instated. After the singing of the Te Deum, Right Reverend Fierens pledged to him this united obedience of the clergy and laity. The eloquence of the scholarly response that His Excellency made was listened to by his delighted people. He brought the "joyful occasion to a close by bestowing on all present his pontifical blessing. It was for him a most happy introduction to the broad Archdiocese of Oregon.

Archbishop Gross assumed the task which lay before him, and fixing his eyes upon the Holy Will of God, moved into action; there was much work to be done and all too few workers to do it. In the years that followed he faithfully

exercised all the duties of his episcopal office; and, in addition to the heavy task of administration of his archdiocese, he frequently found time to perform the duties of a simple missionary priest by preaching a mission or giving a retreat to the humblest of his flock.

### James Cardinal Gibbons

The beloved James Cardinal Gibbons, who had won the title of First of All Americans when he secured the patronage of His Holiness Leo XIII and the Holy Office for the support of the labor movement recently formed in America, held the Gross family in the highest esteem. The Archbishop's younger brother, Father Mark Gross, had worked in North Carolina as pastor of St. Thomas' parish in Wilmington during the Cardinal's episcopate in that state. In 1886, His Eminence came to Portland to bestow the sacred pallium on Archbishop Gross as a mark of his personal esteem for him.

### Archbishop Gross and his People

Like St. Paul, Archbishop Gross replied to an address of appreciation and gratitude made to him by his flock in 1889 by saying:

"Four years have passed, years of labor and toil! I have traveled many weary miles on horseback and by buckboard, and at night camped out going to sleep to the music of the coyote's howl under the broad canopy of the sky. I have lectured to non-Catholics frequently, and have often spoken to audiences where there were but few if any Catholics, and always have been cordially and hospitably treated."

The new prelate won the love and respect of his people, and as the years passed, this love grew stronger and stronger.

### Problems of the Archdiocese

There were many hardships to be met with in this new country, not the least of which was the problem of transportation across the wide stretches of eastern and southern Oregon. Railroad systems were not as yet developed in the state, and the centers of population where churches had been erected were miles apart. In the Roman Empire in the missionary days of St. Paul, the greater cities stood on smooth waterways and passage between them was comparatively easy when viewed beside the buckboard wagon over rough prairie roads in the dust of summer or the mud and snow of winter.

### A Priestly Blessing (of the Indians)

There is a mission story that His Excellency once told. One time while Father Joseph Cataldo, S.J., was working in the Umatilla Mission, His Excellency made a trip to eastern Oregon to join that courageous missionary and make a visit to the distant mission center. The two sat out alone in a buckboard wagon, although the Indians were in a disturbed state and the trip would take them across the Indian lands.

Father Cataldo thought it wise to advertise the fact that they were blackrobes out on the business of the Great Spirit, not settlers looking for a piece of land to enclose within a barbed wire fence. So the prudent Jesuit fixed a large crucifix to the dashboard of the wagon, and the two churchmen, putting on their priestly cassocks, mounted the seat and cheerfully sallied forth. After a few miles they saw before them a cloud of dust and under its drifting shadow a line of Indian warriors galloping swiftly toward them. Father Cataldo held the lines firmly without permitting the horses to abate their speed or to change their course. Then as the war party drew near, Archbishop Gross' voice rang out clearly: "*Benedictio Dei Ornnipotentis, et Pater, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti descendat super vos et maneat semper. Amen.*" As he said this, he made a large sign of the cross in the air before the approaching Indians. The chief in the lead answered with a gesture of salute and the party opening in the center swept by like a whirlwind on either side of the buckboard wagon and team. His Excellency always recognized such blessings as coming from the gracious hands of Our Lady for whom he had a great love under the title of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

The Indians became objects of the Archbishop's special concern. He entrusted to the care of the Jesuit Fathers the vast Umatilla reservation with its large Catholic population. These missionaries of the Rocky Mountain Province understood the Indian mind with regard to ownership. The Indians never intended to give the White Man the right of personal ownership of a piece of land about which he could stretch a barbed fence preventing hunting parties from passing freely, nor to give away the land for cultivation and so prevent a red man from erecting his tepee where he would. The Indians believed that the land, water, and forest were free as the air and open to all. He abhorred barbed wire fences and believed the cattle guarded by cowboys on the open range were as much his property as that of the white man who had branded them. They were the gift of the Great Spirit like the buffalo herds on the plains - for the food of all men both red and white.

#### Christian Education for Rural Districts and the Underprivileged

His Excellency soon found that one of the greatest needs in his Archdiocese was a Catholic school system for the children. He himself had been given a careful training in a parochial school on the waterfront in the "Old Town" of Baltimore. This was the type of training that he hoped to secure for the youth that God had placed under his care. He also found that dependent Catholic children in his Archdiocese were being placed in non-Catholic institutions where the practice of their religion was impossible. He became convinced that the best solution to the problem was the course followed by many ecclesiastical leaders at that time - to found a diocesan congregation for the particular needs of his own diocese. In this he had already taken the initial steps by organizing the group at Sublimity to be a nucleus for this work, but it would be some time before they would be of use

in the parochial schools of the archdiocese.

## Chapter II

### The year 1888

A steam train puffed out of Salem, Oregon, for Portland; aboard it were two frightened Religious in shabby habits. They were going eastward on a great venture. The gracious Archbishop Gross had secured for them a railway pass and bestowed on them his priestly blessing; then with understanding sympathy, he bade them Godspeed. He knew well that it was a distasteful task that they had willingly undertaken at his suggestion, but he could see no other way of raising funds to finance the venture. His diocese was much too poor to assume another financial obligation at this particular time. And, yet, there was a more formidable obstacle. His Excellency's new foundation of sisters did not meet with the approval of some of his priests. They sincerely believed that their Archbishop was attempting to make a diamond setting out of worthless grains of sand. However, it made small difference to him in that day what some thought, for he firmly believed that time would prove that his confidence in these women was not misplaced. He knew that they were inspired by the right ideals. He could trust them to do something worthwhile for the glory of God and the good of Holy Mother the Church in Oregon in the future.

Developments of 1885 had proved to him that these women had clung firmly, unwaveringly to the authority of the Church. At a time that the men about them were refusing to submit to her bishops, these women, understanding the mind of the Church, had been humble and obedient.

It was the strength of the Sacraments, particularly Confirmation, that had wrought this change in these weak souls. The action of the Holy Spirit had enlightened their minds and strengthened them to leave the surroundings into which they had been born to go out penniless and homeless, believing in the authority of the Church and the power of the bishops to govern the Church.

So it was that Mother Mary Wilhelmina Bleily and Sister Mary Cecilia Boedigheimer were going to the East to beg in wealthy Catholic centers for funds to build and equip a new convent for the first ten recruits of the new Congregation. These two Sisters were frightened at the prospect. They knew little about the world they were entering because of the years they spent in semi-cloistered life. The English language was not familiar to them although they were American born, because they had been reared in a German settlement where education was limited to the elementary requisites for frontier life. Mother Wilhelmina, the leader, however, possessed poise and was capable of clear thinking. She would learn quickly as she knew what was at stake in this venture. Her very forthrightness would make people trust her. On the train going to St. Paul, Minnesota, they prayed for light, but did not dare to plan. God would lead them right and put the correct

English words into their mouths.

Father Joseph Cataldo, S.J.

Early on the second day on the train a priest greeted them. He introduced himself as Father Joseph Cataldo, a Jesuit on his way to Spokane. They were happy to find someone interested in their problems, and he listened kindly to their hopes and fears that lay before them in the unknown world ahead. This was their first meeting with a Jesuit. At a later time these Sisters would learn who this great Indian Missionary was, and of his heroic labors and sufferings for the conversion of the Indians of the Northwest, as well as his splendid foresight for the future of Christian education in the Rocky Mountain Province of his Order. It was he who obtained the property for Gonzaga University. Father Cataldo suggested that they stop at Spokane and hear Holy Mass as the following day was Sunday. Mother Wilhelmina explained that their pass called for no stops this side of St. Paul, and as much as they longed to assist at Holy Mass, they could not. Father Cataldo, with the wisdom of a world-traveler who knew all about railway passes, asked to see theirs. He took it and went to the conductor. When he brought it back to them there was a stopover arranged for in Spokane.

That night Father Cataldo took them to Sacred Heart Hospital conducted by the Sisters of Providence, whom he asked to be good to the travelers. The next morning a young Jesuit came with a carriage driven by a student of Gonzaga and took the Sisters to see the interesting sights of the young frontier city of Spokane. Sunday evening Father gave them \$20 as the first donation toward the new convent. That \$20 looked to be a fortune to the poor beggars. Mother Wilhelmina sent the money back to the eight Sisters in Mariazell Convent in Sublimity. She well knew that they were in immediate need of it for the necessities of life. Such was the first contact that the Sisters of Saint Mary had with the Society of Jesus; and the kindness of Father Cataldo made a lasting impression on them. The years ahead were to bring a development of that appreciation into one of admiration for and devotion to the Jesuits.

Bishop John Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota

The travelers pressed on to St. Paul and presented themselves at the archepiscopal residence of Most Reverend Thomas L. Grace. Here they had the great happiness of meeting the Coadjutor, Bishop John Ireland, a friend of the old days in Rush Lake, Minnesota, where he had visited them several times. When he recognized these Sisters he rejoiced that they had received the courage to go out from their former surroundings and shake its dust from their feet. Bishop Ireland made a generous gift to the new foundation.

Mother Mary Wilhelmina and Sister Mary Cecilia passed on to Wisconsin, where they again met friends whom they had made twenty-two years before in St. Nazianz when they had been on their way to Rush Lake in 1866. Even though they

had been just children at that time, they still remembered the details of that winter. In Fond-du-Lac they met Father Joseph Fessler as pastor of St. Boniface Church, and his young housekeeper, Anna Theisen, who was planning to enter the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Agnes. Father Fessler's health was failing; he had been advised to leave Wisconsin for a milder climate. The priest was most happy to see them and assisted them in planning their trip to the Atlantic seaboard. Anna Theisen showed great interest in the Oregon foundation and expressed a desire to return to the Pacific Coast with them.

James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore

The larger centers in the dioceses of Milwaukee and of Philadelphia were liberal in their gifts. In Baltimore the Sisters were graciously received by James Cardinal Gibbons who, as a personal friend of Archbishop Gross, was generous to them. Catherine Drexel entertained them royally in her wealthy home and contributed \$300 toward their cause. The pattern of understanding help was repeated again and again during the five months of the tour. The Sisters came to realize that their efforts were understood and appreciated by bishops and archbishops, heads of religious orders and congregations of both men and women, and by Catholic lay people with a nationwide reputation for charity and wealth.

Many Generous Friends

On their return trip they stopped again at St. Nazianz, Wisconsin, where the pastor encouraged the people from the pulpit to give not only financial aid but also religious vocations to the Oregon Congregation. Two young women returned to Oregon with them that autumn - Mary Patton, later Sister Mary Margaret, and Christine Landher, later Sister Mary Walburga. In Chicago Mother Mary Theresa, O.S.B., encouraged a talented young musician, Josephine Kneedle, to try novitiate life in Mariazell. She became the first music teacher in the Congregation. However, Miss Kneedle did not believe that she had found her vocation and after a year returned to secular life. The Sisters who had worked with her valued the training in church music that she gave to them during the time that she had been with them. Mother Alexia of the Franciscan Motherhouse on Layton Boulevard, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, assigned Sister Mary DeSales, a temporarily professed Sister, to a year in the new parochial school that Father Werner was opening in Sublimity. Her work there left a definite mark on the teaching activity of the Congregation. However, after a year in the West, she returned to her Franciscan Congregation.

The trip had been a success. Mother Wilhelmina and Sister Cecilia had sent a substantial sum westward to Father Werner; with the money the convent had been greatly improved, and a little one-room schoolhouse had been completed. By way of encouragement, Archbishop Gross had contributed \$100 toward the fund for this building.

The Sisters' confidence in the loving and effective power of Divine Providence became stronger as the success of the venture increased. Mother Wilhelmina's naturally joyous disposition expanded and grew strong. By the time that she was back in Mariazell Convent in Oregon, she was prepared to meet cheerfully the petty persecutions of lesser individuals in the Archdiocese. The strong support of Most Reverend William Gross never failed the Congregation, and his confidence in the new Sisterhood was shared by many of the finest members of the clergy.

#### The Habit of the New Congregation

The Sisters while in the eastern states were frequently mistaken for Benedictines, because they wore the habit of that Order. On their return to Oregon they petitioned His Excellency that they might design a new pattern that would make their dress distinctive. It was then that they plaited the skirt and sewed it to the waist and fastened the veil to a white starched strip and pinned it to the coif. The Benedictine scapular, the red cincture, and the red monogram, "Ancilli Domini" were retained.

#### Other Religious Communities Come and Go

A splendid tribute was paid to Archbishop Gross at the time of his death by a brother Redemptorist who had lived intimately with him during the year of preparation for the priesthood. He said that a love for his neighbor motivated by an active desire to imitate his self-effacing Redeemer, had inspired that prelate to resolve to never resent an injury or to refuse to another that which was in his power to give—no matter at what cost to himself. Looking backward over his episcopate in Oregon, it would seem that that resolution had prompted his actions during those years on more than one occasion.

When the teaching congregation of Saint Thomas Aquinas, a group of women religious of the Third Order of St. Dominic offered to open schools in the Archdiocese, he quickly wrote to Mother Mary Thomasina accepting the offer and assuring her of a welcome and an opportunity to share in the apostolic labor. Then Bishop Aegidius Junger of the Nesqually Diocese in Washington begged his Metropolitan of Oregon City to assist him to secure religious teachers for his diocese. Without a word His Excellency referred the group of teachers to the northern diocese and continued his search for assistance elsewhere.

#### The Redemptorists Come to Portland

Another fact illustrates this noble quality of character quite as well, and it had an immediate effect upon the future of the Congregation which he had started in Sublimity in 1886. Archbishop Gross was a devoted Redemptorist, and, at the time of his Ad limina visit in Rome in 1889, he applied to Most Reverend Nicholas Mauron, Rector Major of that order, for the assistance of the Redemptorists in his Archdiocese.

Father General granted the request and advised the provincial of the Baltimore Province to make the foundation. In 1890, Reverend Charles Sigl was named superior for a Portland community and, accompanied by three priests and two brothers, was welcomed by His Excellency in Portland. The southwest section of the city was assigned to them to develop.

Father Sigl rented a two-story frame building in that district and took a census of the Catholic population of the parish. A very small number of indifferent Catholics were found, and few requests for retreats and missions were received. There was little spiritual work for the priests and an all too meager income for the community to live upon. The sacrifices of a poor mission frontier fell heavily upon the Redemptorists from rich Catholic Maryland where the Church was well organized.

Once more Bishop Junger of Nesqually was hard pressed. This time it was by the failure of Sacred Heart parish in Seattle to meet its financial obligations, and again he appealed to Archbishop Gross for assistance. His Excellency met with the Redemptorist priests and Bishop Junger in the Archbishop's residence in Portland in order to reach an understanding of the problems which each of them faced. The Redemptorists wanted an opportunity to earn a living by exercising the spiritual faculties of their calling, and Bishop Junger wanted the assistance of some priests who were not only spiritual leaders but also shrewd business managers to save a parish from a crushing debt that was closing in.

#### The Problem Unsolved

Archbishop Gross had promised the new Congregation at the time of their foundation in Sublimity that when the Redemptorists came to Portland, they would draw up a set of rules for the Sisters based on the Redemptorist Constitutions. He advised the Sisters and Father Werner that the members of the Congregation should use, as far as immediate needs demanded, the religious ideals of the Benedictine Order. He assured the Sisters that the Redemptorists would return soon and then the work would be quickly and efficiently accomplished by capable authority. After the unexpected death of Father Werner at the close of 1888 the Benedictine Fathers continued to care for the parish and the community in Sublimity. Then plans to open St. Anselm's Seminary on Mount Angel were completed in 1889, and Prior Adelhelm notified the Archbishop that he would no longer be able to appoint a parish priest to administer to the parish at Sublimity and the surrounding missions. This, coupled with the brief stay of the Redemptorist Fathers in Portland in 1890, left the Congregation without the spiritual guides that its founder had planned for it. The Sisterhood, which then, numbered more than twenty members, seemed to be orphaned indeed. The Sisters, however, continued to place all their trust and confidence in God for they knew well in Whom they believed.

#### The Coming of Reverend Joseph Fessler

While Mother Wilhelmina had been in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, during the autumn in 1888, she had renewed the acquaintance of Reverend Joseph Fessler, whom she had met over twenty years earlier in the missions of Green Bay diocese. When Mother Wilhelmina learned of the withdrawal of the Benedictine Fathers from Sublimity, she informed His Excellency of Father Fessler's desire to move to a milder climate. Archbishop Gross wrote to Father Fessler, inviting him to come to Oregon and see the possibilities of the Willamette Valley.

Early in 1889 the priest visited the Archbishop and made a trip to Sublimity. He became convinced that the Oregon climate would assist him in regaining his health and bodily vigor. On May 10, 1889, he returned to Oregon, prepared to remain; and, after being appointed pastor of Sublimity and spiritual advisor to the members of the Congregation by Archbishop Gross, he immediately assumed his duties in parish and convent. Anna Theisen and her mother and sister followed to Oregon shortly after. Anna joined the eleven prospective young women who wished to enter the Novitiate of Mariazell. Of this last group, nine persevered and became useful members of the Institute and two of their number were destined to become competent Mother Generals of the Congregation.

#### Education of the Young Members

About this time, Father Fessler pointed out to Mother Wilhelmina the necessity of beginning the education of the younger members and suggested that two of them be sent to Sacred Heart Academy in Salem, conducted by the Sisters of the Holy Names. The choice fell upon Sister Mary Aloysius Bender and the postulant, Anna Theisen. Upon registering in the academy, it was found that Sister Aloysius was not qualified to enter the classes there as all of her former education had been in German, and it would be necessary for her to first acquire a mastery of the English. Therefore, Anna Theisen began her work in art, music, and literature, and Sister Aloysius assisted with the domestic work in the convent to pay their board and tuition. Sister Mary Peter of Alcantara, the superior of Sacred Heart Academy, made the young religious welcome, and their stay was happy as well as profitable. The boarders' register of Sacred Heart Convent in Salem still bears the following note:

"On this January 4, 1890, Miss Annie Theisen, aged nineteen years, from Sublimity enters the boarding school. St. Joseph pays for her."

#### Sister Benedict and Sister Johanna Go A'Begging

Reverend Joseph Fessler was a capable business manager. He quickly saw the need of funds for the education of the young members of the Congregation if it were to become of use to the Archdiocese in education. Therefore, he arranged for a second extended begging tour; this time it would be through the western states. Sister Mary Benedict (Theresa Arnold)

was to be in charge of the campaign with Sister Mary Johanna (Matilda Silbernagel) as her companion.

The two went forth valiantly. Sister Benedict was qualified to meet people and make an intelligent appeal for the pecuniary assistance needed by the young Oregon Sisterhood. Sister Johanna was to receive her first lessons in the harsh school of experience for work that she was to undertake, whenever the need arose, for a quarter of a century to come. Neither of them were prepared to endure the mistrust which came from Churchmen who believed that too many religious congregations were begging for assistance in their particular territory, nor the undisciplined manner of life in construction camps, raw mining towns, or uncouth mountain districts. They also were the recipients of great consideration and kindness.

The Sisters went south by steamer to San Francisco and from there on through California; after that they passed over to the Rocky Mountain states of Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. Whenever the bishops would give permission and the parish priest would permit, they stopped and collected funds in cities and farming centers, through busy construction camps and drab mining regions. Sister Benedict kept a little black notebook in which she meticulously noted down, each donor and the amount given, but every penny was sent back to Father Fessler in Sublimity, what became of that notebook is a mystery. No other account was made, and Father Fessler never gave any report to the superior of the Congregation as to what the receipts were that those arduous ten months of hardship netted for the education of the young members of the Congregation in Oregon. Nevertheless, the heroic adventure was, on the whole, a success, and the joys and sorrows of the two Sisters form a heroic chapter in the story of the early days of the Congregation.

#### Interesting Incidents on that Begging Tour

The untried solicitors, after leaving Sublimity, stopped in Portland at St. Joseph's School conducted by a German community of Dominican nuns. An important part of the Dominican habit is a large, black mantle with which they covered their white habits when on the streets. To the mind of these Dominicans, Sister Benedict and Sister Johanna with the red monogram on the front of their black scapulars were not properly garbed for travel—so they kindly gave them two discarded mantles of the Dominican cut to wear over their habits. The travelers realized that their hostesses were right, and on the following day they gratefully donned the long old capes and boarded the steamer on the Portland waterfront for a venture into the world. The Dominicans also directed them how to reach a community of German Dominicans in San Francisco. They also wrote to their California Sisters asking for aid and comfort for the two Sisters. Sister Benedict and Sister Johanna followed directions with care and arrived safely to find to their utter dismay that these Sisters could not accommodate them. However, they did advise the travelers to

seek the hospitality of an English-speaking community of Dominicans across the city. This attempt proved futile as this second group of nuns were in retreat, and they in turn made arrangements for the two to spend the night in a hotel and on the following day to go to the Sisters of Mercy for help and advice.

### Night in a City Hotel

Late that evening the weary travelers finally reached the hotel. There, after a long anxious wait, an indifferent clerk led them, worried and supperless, to an elevator. This was the first time that Sister Johanna had ever shot up ten floors without a stop in such a contrivance. The surprise shook all the numbness out of her tired body. This shock was but an introduction to that memorable night in San Francisco for one who, in all her twenty years, had never spent a night away from the quiet of country life and then suddenly found herself among strangers in a large, noisy city. The Sisters were conducted to a small room close under the roof. The kerosene lamp exaggerated the shadows cast by the sagging wallpaper. A single bed covered with a white spread, a washstand with a basin of clean water upon it, and a kitchen chair were the only furnishings. A lonely, depressing atmosphere pervaded the room and gave no sense of sympathy or security. Far below them could be seen the brightly lighted sidewalks, and the sound of many feet came up to their one window, from below. Their hunger was forgotten in an intangible fear of an unknown peril lurking in the dim passage beyond the door. They felt trapped and in some appalling danger and knew not how to extricate themselves. Sister Benedict pushed the stand against the door as there was no key to lock the imagined danger out. At last, after long night prayers, they lay down without removing their habits. Quite determined not to be taken off their guard, they stayed awake praying for safety and listening anxiously to the noises of the city through that long night. At the first light of dawn they rose, washed, and made themselves presentable, and devoutly offered to God all their daily devotions. Their spirits began to rise as the lights of the city went out and the sun lifted the fog and warmed the streets. By eight o'clock they had mustered sufficient courage to leave the room and push the elevator button in the hallway. As they entered, the smiling operator greeted them and the elevator slid noiselessly down. He directed them to the dining room. Well trained Chinese waiters placed a good breakfast before them, and both were quite cheerful by the time that the last bite of ham and eggs were gone. They became fully convinced that their imagination had tricked them the evening before, when, at the hotel desk, a courteous clerk told them that there were no charges and requested that they pray for him.

### Most Reverend Patrick William Riordan

They set out to see the Sisters of Mercy, who true to their name, showed a Christ-like mercy by giving to them not only shelter but also sound advice and encouragement which bore good results in the task before them. Armed with letters from

Archbishop Gross, they presented themselves before Most Reverend Patrick William Riordan for permission to collect funds in his archdiocese. Not long before this, several frauds, disguised in religious habits and collecting money under false pretense, had been unmasked in the city. His Excellency absolutely refused to even examine the letters of the Archbishop of Oregon City, and the Sisters returned to the Convent of Mercy exhausted and again discouraged. The superior, with the utmost kindness, provided them with a period of rest and encouraged them to make a second attempt the following day. The Sisters hopefully acquiesced, and Sister Benedict by a sincere act of humility won his permission. When he saw them being admitted into his presence again the next morning, he frowned with sharp vexation, but Sister Benedict went forward and humbly kneeling down begged him to inspect her credentials. The Archbishop visibly softened, read the letters slowly, and then quietly said, "I see that you are genuine Sisters. You may collect wherever the parish priests will permit you to." The Sisters were learning the hard way the manner in which a beggar is often received by good people.

### On Through California

From the Bay City they passed over to Oakland and were graciously harbored in the Convent of the Holy Names on Lake Merritt. During their stay in the city they were treated as part of the community by the Holy Names Sisters. Out on the Lake they had the use of three little rowboats in which Sister Benedict and Sister Johanna enjoyed several evening recreations. The superior of the convent believed that the Sisters should wear better mantles as they traveled about the country. Therefore, she hid two new mantles made and carefully fitted to the small frame of Sister Benedict and the tall, straight figure of Sister Johanna. The gracious gift was graciously bestowed and the story of the act was often repeated. The pattern for the mantle was very simple - a long straight cape, open the full length of the front. The style remained unchanged in the Congregation until 1926.

### The Grace of God Was Sufficient

The Sisters continued southward to Los Angeles. At times they were objects of great kindness, and again they became targets of unfavorable criticism and were rebuffed. They gradually learned to take either reception gracefully as both were a part of their day's work for God and could be of priceless value for their personal sanctification. It never became easy to turn away with a smile from a slamming door, but they received the grace to pass on quietly and raise their eyes to God.

### Mormon Hospitality

They crossed dry, sparsely populated Nevada, and, in the autumn of 1889, they reached Utah. The Catholic population was thinly scattered, but the Sisters learned that the Mormons were an understanding, helpful people. One evening they

were advised to ask for hospitality in the horns of a well-to-do Mormon. A surprised woman admitted them timidly in God's name. Later the man of the house came in and cheerfully welcomed them to his home. These people, who knew what it meant to be social outcasts, were friendly but somewhat reserved with their black-robed guests. The Sisters were shown to a comfortable room where they could relax and spend the night. A little later the worried housewife appeared at the door and hesitantly inquired if they would partake of food with the family and what they could eat. She was at a loss as to how she should entertain these Roman Catholic Sisters. The family was assembled when the Sisters were invited in and placed at the table beside their host, who, bowing his head, reverently recited a slightly altered Pater Noster while the family sat with bowed heads and clasped hands. It was a reverent act of worship of God the Giver of good gifts - well worthy of admiration. The plentiful food was passed and eaten in silence by the children, evidently awed by the black-gowned women. There was little conversation among the adults present; but, after the meal, the Sisters were given chairs in the parlor. The head of the family was already seated there, and he immediately attempted to open a religious discussion. He explained with convincing conviction just what the eschatological privileges of the "Latter Day Saints" were. He said that the Mormons who faithfully followed the tenets of their faith would occupy the "first seats" for all eternity in heaven. Then, with condescending courtesy, he granted that "some Catholics like you, who never bring any children into this world" might be allowed to enter into the peace of that celestial realm. (He seemed to have a serious doubt about the matter though) - but they would of necessity occupy the "last and lowest seats". The Sisters could offer their host no argument against the doctrine as they had no knowledge as to what places would be assigned to any human being—excepting, of course, Mary the Immaculate Mother of God. So the matter was dropped. The Sisters, weary from the day's work, were glad to retire. After a night's rest on the good beds in the Mormon's guest room, they rose early and performed their daily spiritual exercises before they went forth. The mother explained, while placing an abundant breakfast before them, that the members of the family had broken their fast and dispersed for the day's work. Then Sister Benedict, on departing, expressed, both for herself and Sister Johanna, their sincere gratitude for the hospitality that the household had extended to them - poor wayfarers in a strange land. The humble little Mormon woman flushed with pleasure as she murmured incoherently something about trying to make things pleasant for you "two lone women who are poor and have no home or family," and the Sisters knew that she was sincere.

#### Christmas in Denver

Just before Christmas, 1889, the Sisters climbed to the beautiful city of Denver, a mile above sea level, and were graciously harbored for a week by the Sisters of Charity. The time spent in that convent was a period of relaxation for body and spirit. During the day, they solicited the aid of wealthy

Denver people for some who were less fortunate on the Pacific Coast; but the evenings were enlivened by several well performed Christmas entertainments presented by groups of school children and joyous Christmas tree celebrations for the little ones of the parish. The two Sisters of German heritage enjoyed seeing how wealthy Americans celebrate Christmas with their children. The beautiful music of the Christmas Masses offered in the Denver convent were vibrant with spiritual consolations. Then there was another week across the city in a convent of the Good Shepherd. This community nursed Sister Johanna through a severe cold that had been contracted there while Sister Benedict completed the work in this city in the company of a Catholic woman.

#### Through Wyoming and Montana

The last lap of that exhausting trek was the hardest, because of the tax that it laid upon the physical endurance as the sisters worked their way through mining towns, construction camps, and widely separated wheat and cattle ranches spread over the wide stretches of Wyoming and Montana. They followed the Denver-Cheyenne Railroad northward to the Northern Pacific, which would carry the tired travelers home to Mariavell. Sister Benedict had regularly sent the receipts to Father Fessler, and His infrequent replies were merely business letters giving no convent happenings. The Sisters had lived as real itinerant beggars, dependent upon charity for their daily needs. There had been no correspondence between them and the Sisters at home. But in Mariavell a great surprise was awaiting the returning Sisters.

#### A Convent Is a Unit of God's Own Work

Not the least of the proofs that the Catholic Church is of divine origin is the fact that congregations of women approved of and blessed by the Church are not only possible but are also conducive to great spiritual growth. From a human point of view, that ten, twenty, or one hundred women can live intimately together, working successfully for a common end, united under a head chosen from their own ranks, all with a minimum of difficulty, is a miracle of God's grace.

#### Changes in Mariavell Convent

Between August, 1886, and May, 1889, there had been peace and unity of purpose in Mariavell Convent. In the beginning, Father Werner had been the source of authority for the government of this group of Sisters. Then with the election of Mother Wilhelmina as superior in March, 1887, the same understanding relations and good will had continued; and the number of members had doubled. After Father Joseph Fessler became pastor of Sublimity and chaplain to the Congregation, the unity began to perceptibly decline. The spiritual advisor was gradually absorbing all the authority, temporal as well as spiritual; and the office of the superior was becoming that of a mere figurehead. The unavoidable outcome was misunderstanding and bickering among the Sisters, early in

1890, Mother Wilhelmina explained to Archbishop Gross that the Sisters were in need of an intensive course in convent living by a trained religious. His Excellency was personally acquainted with the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, then well established and functioning in a Redemptorist parish in St. Louis. He believed that these religious would possess that spirit to which the Oregon foundation aspired, and he personally laid Mother Wilhelmina's request for aid before Right Reverend Monsignor Henry Muehlsiepen, spiritual director for the American foundation of this Congregation in O'Fallon, Missouri. The Monsignor's reply was favorable, advising that they make a request for assistance to the immediate superiors of the Institute.

The result of the request was a happy one. Mother Mary Armella, C.P.P.S. appointed Sister Mary Ludmilla Langenbach to Oregon. She arrived May 7, 1890, well prepared for the task which lay before her. She soon saw that she stood in need of a helper and again appealed to O'Fallon for one. Mother Amelia responded and Sister Mary Melania came in December of the same year to assist Mother Ludmilla. Just by good example in the observances of religious life she did much good for the young community - good example has always been a great power. By this time Mother Ludmilla had screened the vocations in Mariazell and the remaining Sisters were well on their way to the new start.

Later in the .faster season of 1891, Monsignor Henry Muehlsiepen, while in the West on business, visited Mariazell Convent. He was a man interested in the work of the Precious Blood Sisters there. He came as a friend of Mother Ludmilla and Sister Melania, but he also visited with all the Sisters in the convent. He showed a warm personal interest in each one of them. Later to the superior of O'Fallon, he sincerely commended the success that had resulted from the work of the Sisters of O'Fallon among the members of the Oregon Congregation.

### Chapter III

#### Mother Mary Ludmilla Langenbach C.P.P.S

The coming of .Sister Ludmilla to Mariazell Convent inaugurated an entirely new sequence of events in the development of the Congregation. Father Werner had succeeded in giving to the young religious an objective knowledge of the fundamental elements of the religious life; but the experimental application of these truths to everyday living was not possible for the teacher who did not have a personal contact with the Sisters in their daily experience - as a Novice Mistress has. Mother Wilhelmina understood clearly that there was something amiss in their training - not that she could have put her finger on the trouble, but she clearly saw the remedy for the healing of the disorder developing among the sisters. When Sister Ludmilla arrived, she was given the office of Mother Superior, and Mother Wilhelmina graciously stepped aside. Archbishop Gross officially appointed her ecclesiastical superior of the Congregation as she was given

the title of Mother Ludmilla.

The archives of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood in O'Fallon state graphically what Mother Ludmilla's findings were when she took up her duties in Mariazell Convent: "There was much vocal prayer and even the postulants were required to attend the daily Office. However, there was no practice of religious silence in force, nor was there a well regulated life of religious observance adhered to in the Cloister. The Superioress had been deposed, and Father Fessler governed as superior. His sister, who had left the Franciscan Order and was acting as his housekeeper, had the role of community assistant superior." The brief sentence with which Mother Ludmilla closed this paragraph was comprehensive; she wrote, "Naturally there were many difficulties." There is also an evaluation of Father Fessler's qualifications as spiritual director. Mother wrote, "Apparently he has to learn about the practices of religious life from books." - and then she offered as an example a Sister who did not know how to go about ridding herself of her faults. She asked Mother Ludmilla how to carry out her director's instructions to "take for my particular examine the hidden life of Jesus."

In August of 1890 Archbishop Gross made a visitation of Mariazell Convent. Mother Ludmilla wrote of it, "Every member of the community had free access to him. Due to his determined action, the misunderstandings were, with the grace of God, smoothed out." The account ended with the statement, "The Most Reverend Archbishop, who is a Redemptorist, sided with me."

#### The Teacher and Novice Mistress

The first duty that faced Mother Ludmilla was an evaluation of the vocations of the young novices who were then in Mariazell Convent. This task she accomplished with success and the future years proved the wisdom of her judgment. Then Mother Ludmilla set out to apply the meaning and purpose of religious life in everyday experiences in the convent for the twenty who remained after the weeding process was finished.

Mother Ludmilla became a teacher in both word and example when she set out to lay a foundation for the practice of the virtues necessary to souls living in the cloister. She taught the need of a poverty of detachment from all creatures. All things were to be "ours", not "mine". In Mariazell Convent an actual poverty was felt, but Mother portrayed the Christlike beauty of poverty of spirit in all situations of life. Humility was a lowliness of heart—a cheerful seeking for the last and lowest place and the most distasteful task to be performed. These virtues of poverty and humility were to be protected by this strong virtue of unquestioning obedience to the lawful superior. The shining crown of all was the queen of virtues, charity - love of God and of all others as children of God. These four virtues, practiced in a spirit of joy would, with the grace of God, develop a correct sense of eternal values.

Mother's teaching met with success, and the souls of the young women waxed strong under her guidance. The first ten Sisters developed rapidly. Then four were clothed in the habit in October of 1890; three choice souls entered on March 19, 1891, and five more were prepared for August of 1892. Little Catherine O'Rourke was received and became an aspirant this same year. All were inspired to a dedicated service of their crucified Redeemer by the words and living example of Mother Ludmilla. They learned that to imitate their Savior, it was necessary to take up the cross daily and to follow Him.

#### St. Mary's Home for Boys

Archbishop Gross saw a pressing need for an institution to care for the orphans and deserted children in the diocese. He appealed to the Precious Blood Fathers of Ohio to erect a building and assume the management of such an institution. They accepted the offer and sent Father Alphonse Grussi, C.P.P.S. to carry out the project. Upon a tract of land a mile west of Beaverton donated for educational purposes to the archdiocese by Judge Levi Anderson, Father Grussi began the work in 1889. He had collected the money and carried the task towards its final stages when his Congregation dropped the undertaking, and withdrew Father Grussi. It was then that His Excellency asked Mother Ludmilla to assume the task and staff the project. She appointed Sister Cecilia, Sister Aloysius, and Sister Seraphim to open the Orphanage. They arrived at St. Mary's Home on March 18, 1890, and took up the work which the Congregation was to carry on for the next sixty-four years. Later, in March of 1891, Mrs. Mary Katherine Theisen and Miss Rose Fessler came to the Home with Father Fessler and assisted in the sewing room caring for the children's clothes.

#### Mariazell Changes Its Name

In June of 1891, Mother Ludmilla left Mariazell Convent with the sixteen remaining religious to join the trio at St. Mary's Home. Hereafter Sublimity Convent was no longer Mariazell Convent but St. Boniface Convent. The parish then had a parochial school where the Sisters lived during the school year only.

#### Big Changes Lay Before Them

After the arrival of the Sublimity Group at the orphanage up until January of 1894, the story of the Congregation was to be closely linked with that of St. Mary's Home.

A short time after the arrival of the novitiate at St. Mary's Home, three postulants were added to the community. They were Anna O'Rourke, Fridalina Eyer, and Christine Landher. This brought the number of religious up to twenty-two, and the number of children in the orphanage was growing steadily also.

#### The Coming Of The Babies

At first only children of school age were accepted into the Home, but about this time an incident occurred which completely changed this pattern. A tiny baby boy, only a week or so old, was left at the door by some unknown people. He was well supplied with a very beautiful layette, but no one ever claimed the child. The Sisters gave him the name of Lawrence Fernsworth. Larry grew to be an intelligent child who did well in his school work. Those who saw him daily said that he always had a book with him - history, most often. After leaving the orphanage he went to Mount Angel high school and then on to Santa Clara College. In 1911 he went into journalism, and by 1920, he was with the International News Service. Larry proved through the years to be one of the orphanage's most grateful children and made many visits West to see "The Sisters" for whom he had a loving respect.

After Larry's coming, the Home accepted other babies and toddlers. Their care proved to be a greater responsibility than had been expected, because there were no conveniences prepared for their particular needs, and the Sisters had no special training to care for them. It was not until 1902 that Archbishop Christie secured St. Agnes' Baby Home and the babies were entrusted to the Sisters of Mercy. At the same time the Sisters of the Holy Names at St. Paul parish assumed the care of the girls. This change did much to ease the labor in the orphanage.

#### Many Great Problems

Mother Ludmilla faced tremendous problems at St. Mary's Orphanage. There were twelve in the novitiate to be given the elementary training for living a religious life; also there were professed sisters, some of whom were still very young in years as well as in religion and stood in need of advice and direction. Then there were the children who had to be cared for as well as given an elementary school education. Two parochial schools were to be staffed and overseen. All this was to be done with a very limited personnel of trained Sisters. It meant that everyone had to do a full share, whatever their age, strength or training, either religious or professional, had been.

One of the greatest problems which seemed almost insurmountable was the fact that the building was not finished inside. There was bare earth for the ground floor; no water on the upper floors for washing and bathing the children and water had to be carried up and down in pails by hand; and the laundry was done in the hard way, by hand. On laundry day the Sisters rose at three o'clock in the morning; and after a brief prayer, began the weekly laundry work. At six-thirty they stopped for Holy Mass and breakfast, then continued rubbing the children's and Sisters' clothing clean on hand washboards.

There were no apartments set aside for the Sisters. A large unused classroom became a combination community room and office for Sister Superior. The chief means of support came from raising onions in the rich beaver dam land and

selling them in the markets of Portland.

#### Doing the Task

Mother Ludmilla faced the task bravely. She instructed and advised the young Sisters with painstaking care, and did her best to portion out the too great number of duties among them with due regard to abilities and strength. However, her freedom was greatly hampered by the superintendent who now had closer contact with the Sisters than before. He dictated where they were to be placed, and what their tasks in that place were to be. He showed small regard to the fact that she was superior by ecclesiastical appointment and much better equipped to do the task well. Mother Ludmilla submitted quietly for the sake of peace with never a word of complaint to the Sisters, though they often saw her leaving his office with tears in her eyes.

She left these brief remarks in the archives of her motherhouse in O'Fallon:

"The priest acted as Superior in all these places." (that was, the orphanage and in the parochial schools of Verboort and Sublimity) "Since the time of our activity there was rapidly coming to an end, the profession of the first four novices was pushed forward. It took place on March 19, 1392. On June 27, 1892, Mother Ludmilla and Sister Melania, wishing the community God's blessing and promising to keep united with them in spirit and prayer, bade farewell to Oregon. The following days a retreat was conducted and thereafter the election of a superior took place. It resulted in the election of Mother Mary Seraphim, who had made her temporary profession in March."

The departure of Mother Ludmilla and Sister Melania came as a shock to the Sisters. They had known nothing about it until the day before their departure.

Mother Wilhelmina wrote of it:

"During the two years they had spent with us, they had won all hearts. Their words of kindly advice, acts of kindness, and shining example of religious observance will always remain with us. They will be remembered when we pray for our benefactors." Then she added, "Some of the younger Sisters begged to be taken along with them, but Mother Ludmilla told them, "The Lord has work for you here in the West, and you must trust in Him. He will comfort and console you."

Her words prevailed. Nonetheless, there were many tears shed both publicly and in private. How many are the things with which they have kept faith.

#### Our Elder Sisters in the Congregation

After seventy-five years it is difficult to choose the most effective words and phrases to portray a proper admiration for those first sisters in the Congregation. They had been selected and trained by Mother Ludmilla and have left a shining for those who are to follow. They deserve more than a tombstone

in a cemetery.

#### Sister Mary Clara Hauck - 1886

Barbara Hauck came to America from Germany at the age of twenty-six. She entered the novitiate of the Sisters of the Precious Blood in Ohio in 1846 where she took the vow of fidelity that bound her to that Congregation. Twenty years later, while Superior at Mary, Mother of Mercy Convent in Himmelgarten, she, with a group of religious, left with their spiritual director, Father Joseph Albrecht, but without the necessary permission of their provincial superior, Father Andrew Kunkler. They went west to Minnesota to plant a Catholic colony on that frontier. Thus she became a fugitive religious. In 1884 she once again moved westward, this time to Jordan, Oregon. The following year, Most Reverend Archbishop Gross explained to the Sisters the unfortunate spiritual predicament in which they had become technically involved. Barbara Hauck expressed her sincere sorrow and begged to be reinstated in the Church to which she was sincerely devoted. The signing of the submission presented by Archbishop Gross ended an episode which might have been a tragedy but for the watchfulness of the pastors of Holy Mother Church.

She became a humble member of the Congregation in Marizell Convent in 1886 and took her vows as Sister Mary Clara with the first group the following year. Sister, with Mother Seraphim and the novices, took possession of the recently built Motherhouse, Our Lady of Perpetual Kelp, near Beaverton in May of 1894 and was one of the group of thirty-four Sisters who were photographed in the 1895 picture of the community. On May 20, 1905, Sister Mary Clara died quietly in her eighty-sixth year and rests in the Community cemetery. (1805, Nov. 5, Germany - May 20, 1905, SSMO.)

#### Mother Mary Wilhelmina Bleily

Somewhere among Mother Mary Wilhelmina's ancestors, there had been a dark-skinned progenitor, and some of those physical characteristics had reappeared in her personal appearance. She had an ivory complexion with expressive dark brown eyes and a well shaped smiling mouth and regular teeth. Mother Wilhelmina was of a deeply spiritual nature, strongly braced by a firmness of character and an intelligent mind. It was these attributes working with the gift of fortitude, that had enabled her to withstand the trials .in later years to which her youth had been subjected and to rise with a fine courage above the misunderstandings of good people. To these last, she applied the saving remedy of indifference to all honors of time. She was ever ready to take the lower place.

One of Sister's greatest gifts was her understanding, sympathetic heart, and this quality endeared her to the novices and juniors who grew up in the Congregation during the years that she was assistant novice mistress. Mother Wilhelmina had the knack of listening to others with an undivided

attention; and the Sisters, trusting her, knew that they would be wisely advised. She never seemed to have any problems of her own and was always willing to interrupt the vestment that she was embroidering with great skill or the roses that she was then tending in her garden to listen to the problems, the joys, or the sorrows of the "young ones." Mother Wilhelmina's prayer life was completely governed by the rules and customs of the Congregation. As a child she had received her early education with the Sisters of the Precious Blood from Ohio; then later she came under the strong influence of Mother Ludmilla, another devoted lover of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. As a result, Mother Wilhelmina was deeply imbued with the apostolate of the Precious Blood in the Church. For her, it was to be the source of perfection for the members of the Congregation, the salvation, of all sinners, the conversion of heathens and heretics, and the release of the souls in purgatory.

The doctrine of indulgences in the Church had a great appeal to Mother Wilhelmina's charity. Her knowledge as to the days on which indulgences could be gained and as to whether they were partial or plenary was unique and always a surprise to the "young ones". She would say, "Tomorrow is the feast of the Holy Angels and a plenary indulgence can be gained for the souls in purgatory." And Mother Wilhelmina always faithfully made a special visit to the chapel and said the six Paters, Aves, and Gloria's to win it. The indulgences of Toties Quoties was a very special occasion for Mother Wilhelmina to show her love for the departed - especially her Sisters.

It was Mother Ludmilla who had taught the elder members to love St. Francis Xavier. St. Gaspar del Bufalo, the founder of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood, had chosen the great St. Francis Xavier to be patron of his mission band because of his personal debt to that saint. When St. Gaspar was a little child of two years, he contracted a severe case of measles and, as a result, was losing his sight. His home was in Rome, close to the Church of the Gesu, where there was an altar dedicated to St. Francis Xavier. His pious Mother earnestly besought that saint's help for her little son. The child was instantaneously cured - his eyes becoming once again bright and clear; therefore, St. Francis exercised a lifelong influence over St. Gaspar and his apostolic work. Consequently, Mother Wilhelmina early developed a deep devotion for the missionary of the Indies. Love for him seemed a natural thing for one who was as mission minded as Mother Wilhelmina.

Through the last years of her life she collected stamps from the various schools of the Congregation for the Jesuit Mission Bureau at Port Townsend. She spent hours in her rocking chair industriously sorting, trimming, and packing stamps. Mother was an enemy of idleness! This characteristic was the outcropping of her German parentage and training.

The recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin was a duty that she meticulously performed with her eyes on her

office book. She reverently regulated her movements - sitting, rising, and bowing according to approved rubrics. Her pronunciation of the Latin was beautifully clear and correct. It was an inspiration to recite the Office with her, an art she had perfected under the direction of Father Werner, O.S.B. in Mariazell, and this beautiful habit remained with her to the end of her life.

Mother Wilhelmina's last years were hampered by cancer. She had undergone major surgery several times, which brought about periods of relief. During these respites she returned to her embroidery, and made many beautiful vestments. Her rose garden, which formed a graceful semicircle before the first convent, was a thing of rare beauty. She supervised the collecting of the scraps of marble, which she had begged from the monument companies of Portland, for the erection of the grotto to the Blessed Virgin in the cemetery. This became a shrine for loving prayer to Our Lady and also is a remembrance of the deep devotion Mother Mary Wilhelmina had to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Our first Mother died a peaceful death in February, 1942 (Dec. 24, 1857, Baden, Iowa - Feb. 5, 1942 SSMO)

Sister Mary Josephine (1886)  
and Sister Mary Rose Eifert (1886)

Sister Mary Josephine Eifert was the first to pass on into eternity, dying in her thirty-eighth year after an all-too-brief religious life of ten years. Sister was a successful listener and had been the trusted confidante of many of her religious Sisters, because she possessed that rare gift of knowing when to speak and when to hold her peace. During the hard foundation days, she had selflessly borne, through summer's heat and winter's freezing weather, more than her share of the heaviest and most exhausting work, even though she was of a frail physique. She had worn her body out for her great love of God and neighbor. Never had she asked for any alleviation for herself, although she was ever mindful of the needs of her companions. The last three years of her life were spent in the mother-house as a pain-racked invalid. The common opinion of those who knew her best was, "Sister Josephine lived and died a saint of God. (1858-1899)

Sister Mary Rose Eifert (1886), her younger sister, died in her seventy-fourth year after a long and edifying fifty-four years of labor to the very end for the Congregation. To Sister "Rosie", our Blessed Mother, the angels, and the saints were intimate companions with whom she discussed the perplexing problems of the day. There is a well authenticated story that illustrates this. Sister Rose was churning butter for the household at a time when feed for the cows was scarce and the cream content was low. One Saturday morning Sister Rose was found standing with clasped hands before a picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, which hung in the cellar. "I need fourteen rolls of butter!", she said and added confidently looking at the revolving churn, "Mother of Perpetual Help will get them for us."

Later the wondering Sister sat down beside Sister Rose in recreation and asked, "Did you get fourteen rolls of cutter this morning?" Her smiling reply was a brief, "Oh Yes." These incidents were not rare in that humble religious' life.

Sister Rose was loved by all, because she loved everyone without exception, not only the Sisters but also the children. She died as she had lived. The week before that quiet passing, Sister complained of a severe pain in her heart. Doctor Mason was called, and after an examination, told Sister Superior that Sister Rose's heart was worn out and that a few days more would bring the end. Father Eislie, the chaplain, was called and he gave her the mighty sacrament of Extreme Unction and assured her that all was ready for a direct trip to heaven. Sister Rose was quite delighted at the prospect. Five days later, while she lay resting in the infirmary, she awoke and moved about; and a few minutes later, while the Sisters about her were reciting the evening angelus, she took a long breath which carried her soul before her Merciful Judge. (1866-1939)

#### Sister May Benedict (1886)

Sister Mary Benedict, Theresa Arnold, was a convert, and her Catholic faith, strongly guarded by the Church's promise of its authority to teach an infallible doctrine, became a tower of strength to her weakness. She felt an urgent call to a spiritual life of prayer and contemplation, and when still in her teens she entered the semi-cloistered Congregation of the Most Precious Blood in Ohio. As a novice, twenty years of age, and bound by no religious vows, she had chosen to go west with Father Joseph Albrecht, whom she greatly admired as a priest. She, secluded in her convent, had no knowledge of his bitter disputes with his ecclesiastical superiors. It is quite possible that even had she known she would have believed that he was in the right. For eighteen years she lived with the Sisters in Rush Lake and then came west with the immigrants to Jordan in 1884. Two years later she passed on into the novitiate established by Archbishop Gross in Sublimity and joyfully took the vows of religion on the feast of the Annunciation in 1887, taking the name of Benedict. She was then forty years old.

Sister Benedict was, at heart, a contemplative. She loved the evening Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament followed by the hours of nocturnal adoration, which had been hers in Himmelparten, Rush Lake, Jordan, and Sublimity, They were the breath of life to her. The training that Father Werner had given for a correct recitation of the Office had opened a new source of spiritual joy for her. When in 1889, obedience sent her out for the long ten months' begging tour, Sister Benedict undertook it bravely as a means of purification and sanctification of soul. It had been a harsh trial and had convinced her of her need for a cloistered life. A great surprise awaited her when she returned to Mariazell Convent. Mother Ludmilla, who was destined to win all hearts, had been appointed as the superior of the new Sisterhood by His Excellency. The following two years of intensive spiritual

training gave Sister Benedict new strength and courage.

In June of 1892, Mother Ludmilla, the experienced and understanding superior, returned to her congregation. Mother Seraphim, who had not yet completed her twenty-fourth year and had made temporary profession only three months previously, became superior in the place of the strong Mother Ludmilla. The task of meeting the needs of the young Institute was very heavy for one so young and inexperienced.

Sister Benedict was appointed to assist in St. Mary's Orphanage. The active duties in the Home filled with children and their absorbing needs was a difficult adjustment for one who longed for the quiet contemplation of the cloister. At that time, the Institute bore the title "Sisters of the Most Precious Blood"; Mother Ludmilla belonged to a Congregation with the same name and spirit, and her training had fixed that devotion deeper in the hearts of all its members. In 1892, a contemplative congregation called Sister Adorers of the Precious Blood had opened a convent in Portland. Sister Benedict knew little about canon law, and there was no one to instruct her. She believed that she could pass from an active congregation of the Precious Blood into a contemplative cloister of the same devotion with little effort. She secured papers for the transfer and made application to the Portland convent and was appalled to learn that a substantial dowry was an indispensable requirement. She had no money and was out of her Congregation. The Portland foundation was poor and struggling to make a start. In order to earn a livelihood, she went to St. Vincent's Hospital to work as an assistant to the nurses. God did not leave His child for long in her distress.

An elderly couple living in Salem who were in need of efficient nursing care applied to the Sisters of Providence to secure a trustworthy woman to live with them in their home as housekeeper and nurse. Theresa Arnold was recommended, and she proved herself to be trustworthy, efficient, and dependable, she became a blessing to them for the remaining years of their lives, and they rewarded her dutiful care by leaving all their wealth to her. For thirty-five years Theresa Arnold was a faithful member of St. Joseph's parish in Salem; and, before her death, she left all that she possessed to that Church and named Father Jacob R. Buck, the pastor, as her administrator. She died on April 26, 1930, in her eighty-fourth year, and Father Buck, according to her last wishes, accompanied her body back to Sublimity, where in 1887 she had become a spouse of Christ, and laid her remains there in the Catholic cemetery. Father Buck attended her at the end of her life, and later he wrote of her in his autobiography, "Her death was one of the most edifying I have ever witnessed. She seemed to be in heaven before she stopped breathing."

It seems fitting that one whose life did not close in the Congregation, but whose best years were spent in it as a wholehearted spouse of Christ, should be remembered in these pages. She was one of the first five, and it was an error in judgment, not a want of good will, that led her out of the

Sisterhood which she sincerely honored to the end of her life.

#### Sister Mary Cecilia Boedigheimer

A blind unquestioning obedience was the outstanding virtue in Sister Mary Cecilia's life. If she clearly understood that her superior - any superior, old or young - wanted something done at a certain time and in a certain manner, Sister Cecilia was willing to make any sacrifice to accomplish it. For more than forty years she was in charge of the chapel, and during those years she trained the young Sisters in the care of the sanctuary. Sister was uncompromising in her dealings with the young novices who helped her. She believed that they should be cast in the same mold of strict German training in which she had been reared. Her brusque mannerisms and gruff way of speaking hid many golden qualities.

One Saturday in 1941 a little novice had been working in chapel, but all her untrained efforts were not satisfactory, as Sister Cecilia was in an unusually harsh and exacting temper. In the end, the young Sister left the chapel sad and depressed. After the evening meal, Sister Cecilia stopped the Sister and gently apologized for her severity. The little novice was greatly edified at the humility of the older Sister, and that evening she related to her companions the details of that sisterly conduct.

In the earlier days artificial flowers had been used to decorate the altar, and Sister had a vast supply of them - beautiful reproductions in natural colors, made of silk or velvet. They were not only lovely to the eyes, but they were clean and gave a sacristan less trouble than natural flowers. As the liturgical movement began, it was, by slow degrees, felt in the convent, and changes began to creep in. Sister Cecilia never favored change. To her, the old ways were best - in fact they were the only ways. Then the use of imitation flowers on the altar was questioned. Flowers for the chapel were produced in abundance in the convent garden during summer and autumn, and for the greater feasts in winter, they were obtained from the florist; but Sister Cecilia still kept and used the artificial ones as often as possible. At last, Mother Mary Genevieve removed a part of the imitation sprays from the chapel to prevent their use, but a greater number remained unknown to her in another cupboard. When Sister Cecilia fully realized that her superior disapproved completely of artificial flowers, she bravely gathered the remaining ones together, and carrying them to her superior with bitter tears in her old eyes, she gently laid them down to be disposed of as Mother Genevieve thought fitting. It was a heroic act for Sister Cecilia. In truth, she was a good, religious and a model of industry, careful to conserve articles given for her personal use or for her charge, meticulously clean and orderly in her work, and punctual to answer the call of duty. These virtues she impressed upon the younger Sisters with whom she daily came in contact.

Sister Cecilia never went beyond an elementary use of English. Should she need a word to express herself, she was

very apt to coin one. One evening as Father Deeney and Father Butler were relaxing on the porch of the Home, Sister Cecilia passed by and Father Butler complimented her on the well equipped chapel and sacristy. "One thing I yet need," she exclaimed; and on being questioned as to what it could be, she announced, "I need a Candle shooter."

Father Butler, who was not well acquainted with her, was quite mystified, but Father Deeney, between shouts of laughter, was able to enlighten him. "You call it a candle extinguisher!" But Sister Cecilia's coinage was to remain for many years in common usage. Sister Cecilia's earthly life extended from 1860 to 1947, a period of eighty-seven years. For sixty of these years, she had been a member of the Congregation. Her last illness and death was crowded into a span of five days. Sister received the last sacraments and fell into a coma. She died shortly after. (1860-1847)

#### Sister Mary Aloysius Bender (1886)

Sister Mary Aloysius was a cheerful, energetic, matter-of-fact person whose chief duty was to serve God as a housekeeper by an active and generous charity for the boys in the orphanage, where she worked for many years, or for the Sisters in the convent to whichever she had been appointed. Sister was a doer of deeds and had no time to waste dreaming dreams. During the last twenty-five years of her life, she was a semi-invalid unable to get about without the support of a cane, and even then it was with great pain; but her life was by no means inactive. Throughout the long summer and autumn canning season, her days were filled with the preparation of the fruit or vegetables that were then in season to be put into jars for winter use. Sister would hobble into the cannery saying cheerfully, "We must get these beans (or these apples as the case might be) under control!" And when the task was completed, she exclaimed, "We've got them all under control." During the year, Sister made many colorful quilts, first piecing the blocks, and then quilting them into a whole. She was never idle.

At times with her lower limbs elevated to relieve the circulatory condition from which she suffered, Sister Aloysius sat day in and day out, with flying fingers and heart at the throne of God. The admonition "to pray always" was taken as literally as all other things were in her life. It was known that she prayed for the Congregation and the Sisters, for these were her first loves; for her family, from which she had suffered very much in her early life; for the children in the schools. Such were her apostolic petitions. She was a true daughter of the militant Church.

She was never heard to complain about her physical condition, even though her superiors knew that she suffered constant pain. Should a Sister stop at her room to inquire about her health, she gaily minimized her suffering and quickly turned her visitor's attention to the task that she had in hand. Looking at the quilt blocks that she would be piecing together, she might ask, "Do you think this yellow border matches these colors well?" Her punctual attendance at community exercises was admirable, and death found her

responding to the morning call to rise. She was in her eighty-seventh year, and that morning bell rang on the feast of St. John the Evangelist when a fierce pain stabbing her heart caused her to cry out. Mother Colette, Father Neuville, and the Sisters came, but Sister Aloysius was beyond recall when the last rites of Holy Church were administered. The end was as all her religious life had been - everything well "under control."

A Rat Tale  
(With Sister Mary Aloysius the Heroine)

Rats with ancestors from Hamlin Town -  
(An ancient line of great renown)  
A legion of them, sixty years ago  
Flocked to St. Mary's Home—you know.

They entered and boldly took over the house,  
They frolicked and played and romped about,  
They breakfasted and lunched and supped and dined -  
Then to the nun's bedroom the bold leader climbed.

Under the beds he raced in and out,  
Leaped onto the beds and off and about.

Brave Sister Aloise studied the score  
And made up her mind she'd permit no more.  
She got up from her bed, a broom stick she found -  
Lunged for the beast with determined bound.

The awakened nuns all shivered and shook.  
And one by one their beds forsook.  
The battle was on! There was no delay!  
They followed their leader into the fray.

The Superior alone had kept her bed.  
he had felt no fear she later said.)  
Her bed at the end had been free, you see,  
From any attack of the enemy.

She was sleepy and tired and in flustered tone  
Said, "Go back to bed. Let that rat alone."  
Then' turned on her pillow and stretched out her feet -  
Something fuzzy and warm moved under her sheet,  
That big, bold rat had a safe retreat!  
In horror she shrieked and leaped to the floor,  
Sister Aloise rushed in with her broom-stick corps  
And beat on the spread till she'd evened the score.  
That long-whiskered leader would lead no more!

Sister Mary Gertrude and Sister Mary Johanna Silbernagel

Sister Mary Gertrude Silbernagel lived sixty-one years as a humble, prayerful member of the Congregation. "Write me as one who loves his fellow men." - That line of poetry might well have been an appropriate epilogue to close her long life. Sister Gertrude had spent a great part of her working years in keeping the smaller houses of the Congregation warm and

pleasant for her Sisters who worked in the classrooms. Sister was always interested in everyone and everything - her companions in the convent one and all, and the children in the school, as well as their parents and grandparents. She had a memory for names and faces that would have been an asset to a politician seeking votes, and she could accurately trace the family trees of the children in the school.

Charity for her neighbor was an outstanding virtue in her life. This queen of all virtues was beautifully shown in her eagerness to be reconciled to anyone whom she thought that she might have offended, and often, when she would come asking for forgiveness for "gruffness," the supposedly offended person was unable to recall any unkindness to be forgiven. Sister Gertrude had always shown a special love for the younger Sisters, because they were, she humbly believed, very busy with the important works of the Congregation. She unselfishly sought to perform little helpful acts of charity for them. She would say, "Put your veil in my room; I will put in the strip for you. I have permission to sew in strips for everyone who is too busy." Later she would most graciously return the article very carefully finished. It was the same with broken rosaries. The last years of her life she passed quietly in the Motherhouse, where she assisted in the sewing room or prepared vegetables.

Her death was a surprise but was not sudden. Sister had suffered a heart spell the evening of September 1, 19<sup>88</sup>, and had been given the last sacraments of Holy Church. The following morning after a visit from Doctor Mason, who said that the end was close at hand, she died. The last act in which Sister participated was a fervent renewal, with the assistance of Mother Mary Colette Lorch., of her holy vows. Sister Gertrude had renewed them publicly the previous month at the sixtieth commemoration of their first formal pronouncement, together with Sister Mary Johanna, Sister Mary Aloysius, and Sister Mary Magdalene. Her first profession had taken place in Mariazell Convent on the Feast of the Most Precious Blood, July 4, 1888. Most Reverend Archbishop Gross had received them in the presence of Father Werner, O.S.B. on that occasion.

Sister Mary Johanna Silbernagel was the only one of the nine foundresses that officially entered Mariazell Convent in 1886 who was still alive for the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of the Congregation. Sister began her long life on the feast of St. John the Evangelist in 1869 and was still active at the time of the Jubilee in 1961.

Sister Johanna was naturally of a brusque, uncompromising disposition which often caused pain and misunderstanding among others. She overruled timid souls. However, she was quite sincere in her decisions and she truly wished to become a good religious.

Sister cherished a great admiration for Mother Ludmilla; and during the two years that she instructed the young novice in religious life, Mother spared no pains to train this arbitrary

disposition, and this was accomplished without losing the love of her subject. Mother Ludmilla was in truth a great Superior. Years later Sister Johanna said of Mother Ludmilla, "Mother was a true religious in every way. A Sister felt that she should get as low as she could when she sat on the "humility stool at her feet." (This stool was a low, backless chair that a Sister was invited to take when she came to see Mother in her room.)

During the last years of Sister Johanna's long life, she became more gentle and humble. Sister had always been a very regular, punctual religious, careful in the performance of her religious exercises and the observance of the rule - a model of obedience to her higher superiors, when the years pressed heavily upon her and she had been relieved of all exterior activity, prayer became her solace, and she formed, the beautiful habit of making a daily holy hour as an act of reparation to her Divine Spouse for the sins of the world. Mother Ludmilla's teaching had borne rich fruit.

The details of Sister Johanna's life are given elsewhere in this book as she was for years Superior of the diocesan orphanage and sat in the council of the Congregation.

#### Sister Mary Magdalene Giebler

Sister Mary Magdalene from Sublimity was the first to join the nine original members who entered Mariazell in 1886. On October 16 of that year she reached her seventeenth birthday and then entered the Congregation after the feast of Christmas. She received the habit on March 25, 1887, and pronounced her first vows on the feast of the Most Precious Blood in 1888. Sister possessed an intelligent mind, and by her personal ingenuity with only a very few months of elementary education, she acquired a skill in reading, writing, spelling, and figures that was an asset to her throughout her life. She was able to write an interesting, correct letter.

One great sorrow Sister had which kept her close to the feet of Christ was that her father had given up the practice of his faith and had induced her five brothers to follow his example. Sister Magdalene spent her long life begging for grace and mercy for those loved ones. Her days became a long series of little mortifications of the palate and of greater penances of the body for their conversion. Although she never received a sign that her prayers had been heard, none-the-less she heroically persevered to the end with confidence in the mercy and goodness of God. Her father and brothers all died before he - and no sign of returning to the fold of the Church was given to comfort her. Sister Magdalene expressed her firm belief that God had granted them the grace of repentance - that they would be saved in the end.

During Sister's earlier years, she was physically strong and capable; and, as a rule, she was given the most exhausting and laborious work. In the planting, growing, and harvesting seasons, she worked in the acres where vegetables were grown for the community. When that task was completed, she

with no respite, was placed in charge of a kitchen where food was prepared for a numerous household of children and Sisters. Those were long years of hard work.

Sister inherited a strong and independent will, which often brought about misunderstandings in the fulfillment of the duties assigned to her. She bore them cheerfully, striving to overcome her faults; and, with the grace of God, Sister Magdalene, like many another soul, reached a success that was visible even to those companions who were most intimate with her. Like St. Francis de Sales, Sister so conquered her temper that hasty words were smilingly checked before they were uttered.

In 1937 Sister Magdalene received her last appointment to the Outside houses. In the spring of that year she suffered a slight stroke, and for sometime she was unable to keep her equilibrium. She recovered, but thereafter she remained in the Motherhouse. There is a story of this time of her life that portrays her very well. Sister Magdalene was meditatively peeling some very small potatoes. (The crop had not been good that season.) She remarked, "These potatoes are a blessing of God, and I am saying "Thank God" for each one as I peel it." She added a bit of delicate whimsy. "Maybe God let them be small that He might get more gratitude from His creatures."

Sister Magdalene was like a little wild flower. She had the gift of joy and was always delighted with the little happy things that happened to her and her Sisters.

It was during these last seventeen years - the long evening of her life - that a strong evidence of a practice of the moral virtues became clear. The conformity of her strong nature to the will of God as found in circumstances about her was obvious. Throughout her life she had practiced temperance in her use of food and rest. Her fortitude, the determined self-discipline which held her steadfast to her purpose to give God all, had never been relaxed. Her sense of justice had pointed out the way for her to give to superiors, equals, and subordinates their just due. Prudence had protected the first three virtues and had taught her what was the better thing to do and what to avoid.

For the last three years Sister's sight failed to such an extent that she could perceive nothing but light and darkness, but her happy spirits did not fail her. She sat in the shadows and sang. She had been gifted with a sweet, true voice, and her memory retained the words of hymns which she had learned in her childhood. It was an inspiration to hear her sing, "Oh Thou Virgin Happy Bride." Sister Mary Magdalene was looking forward to eternity; she died on April 23, 1954, and rests among her Sisters in the cemetery.

One of the incidents of her life was the occasion of a poem composed in her honor. Sister Magdalene often used to carry in the garden vegetables in heavy pails. The men working for the convent decided to get together and buy a little wagon so

that she could bring in the vegetables more easily. On one Christmas morning, a red wagon was standing on the top of a little desk near the Christmas tree for her. Like David before the Ark, Sister Magdalene danced around the wagon from sheer delight.

#### Sister Mary Magdalene's Wagon

The little red wagon jogged over the ground  
Piled high with carrots and cabbages round,  
Large brown potatoes with sly winking eyes,  
Fine yellow pumpkins to make tasty pies.  
Long years have passed since the wagon was red,  
And the wheels twinkled bright as they followed the tread  
Of the gladsome old nun who had spent her last days  
In giving each moment to God in pure praise.  
With Childhood scarce past, her will she had bound  
A consecrate offering, and God's love she had found.  
Her service the humblest, but on earth 'tis not known  
The power of her prayers for sin to atone.  
An example of duty for sixty-eight years  
The red wagon be cane one of love's souvenirs.

#### Sister Mary Margaret Platten

Sister Margaret was one of the postulants who came to Mariazell Convent from Fond-du-Lac, Wisconsin, with Mother Wilhelmina at the time of her return late in 1888. Sister Margaret was the first member to join the ten foundresses and therefore was next in rank to Sister Magdalene. These two understood each other very well and Sister Magdalene remarked later, "Sister Margaret and I are more than Sisters; we are twin sisters." Sister Margaret generously accepted God's call to an interior life of prayer and reparation for those who had lost their way, and she became a loving victim of the Most Precious Blood. In 1893 her mind gave way, and it became necessary to place her in the mental hospital in Salem. Here she forgot the past and lived for the present moment only. Death came July 27, 1921. Her body was brought back to St. Mary's and laid in the convent cemetery.

In 1891, Sister Margaret had accompanied Mother Ludmilla to St. Mary's Orphanage and was named part of the laundry force. In those days it was the custom for the Sisters to recollect their hearts and pray aloud in unison as they worked. Sister Magdalene left an interesting word picture of her friend bending over a washboard, with her eyes on her hands splashing in the soapsuds as she rubbed a child's garment clean, her tall body moving rhythmically up and down in time with the German prayer which was a love song in verse - a literal translation of the prayer would be:

Oh, my God, I love Thee  
And what is lacking in my love,  
I beg of Thee, my God,  
To make up for me.

Sister Margaret's life did not end in tragedy, but in a joyous triumph. She had given the whole of herself for love to the will of God for the entire span of her conscious life. That spelled out a great success, for it was what God asked of her.

#### The Theisen Sisters

Peter and Mary Catherine Theisen came from the Rhineland to the Catholic atmosphere of Calvary, Wisconsin; and soon after, in 1868, there was born to them a daughter whom they named Anna and seven years later another daughter to whom they gave the name of Rose. These two children were destined to play an important role in the history of the Congregation.

#### Mother Mary Seraphim Theisen

After the death of the head of the house, the family went to Fond-du-Lac, where Anna acted as housekeeper for Father Joseph Fessler, pastor of St. Boniface parish. At the age of twenty, she was seriously planning to enter religious life when Mother Wilhelmina visited Father Fessler in 1888. Mother met Anna, who became much interested in the Oregon foundation and soon decided to enter its novitiate. Anna's mother, who was fifty-eight years of age, and her fourteen-year-old daughter, Rose, wished to accompany the elder daughter west. Mother Wilhelmina consulted the Archbishop as to this arrangement, and His Excellency believed that Mrs. Theisen would be of use in the archdiocesan orphanage that he was about to open west of Beaverton. The three came to Sublimity shortly after Father Fessler became spiritual director for the Congregation in May of 1889.

As a postulant, Anna, at the advice of Father Fessler, spent a term studying in Salem in 1890. Then in the autumn of that year, she was invested and given the name of Sister Mary Seraphim. Five months later on March 18, 1891, the novice, with Sister Cecilia and Sister Aloysius, opened St. Mary's Orphanage. Mrs. Theisen went with them to the new institution in Beaverton. A year later, Sister Seraphim pronounced her temporary vows, and three months after this profession, she was named Superior General of the little congregation then made of up twenty-four members. It had been a crowded three years for the young religious and ended in an office bearing with it great responsibilities which were to work for the weal or the woe of the Congregation. However, she had close at hand Father Joseph Fessler, a personal friend of the family, upon whose plentiful advice she acted in all matters for the four following years.

Mother Seraphim was to spend fifty-four of her seventy-five years of life as a member of the Congregation. Of these fifty-four years of membership, half of them, twenty-seven, were to be in its highest office - that of Mother General. Its joys and its sorrows, its successes and its failures, the problems of its growth and its increase were all assumed by her.

A quality of mind and heart which Mother Seraphim possessed in a marked degree and which she passed on to her religious Sisters was her constant prayerfulness. This habit of prayer showed itself in several distinct devotions. The first was a great love for the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ - the price of our redemption. The other was a sympathy for the souls in purgatory, whose time of purgation could be shortened by the good works of the faithful. Then too she loved the formal recitation of the Office of the Blessed Virgin, a duty which she faithfully adhered to throughout her life.

She subjected her life to the undeviating restraints of a regular observance of the order of the day and demanded the same of her Sisters - thus punctuality was an outstanding virtue observed in her life. Mother Seraphim was activated by a great respect for the clergy, and she was always ready to assist them in any way that lay in her power. She also was devoted to her friends - those whom she believed to be tried and true. The greatest, however, was her sense of justice. She sincerely tried to give to everyone their just dues, taking into consideration the personal needs of each Sister.

A tree is known by its fruits, and Mother Seraphim's accomplishments will be gradually unfolded in the history of the Congregation. Therefore, to avoid repetition, this sketch will be brought to a close by a quotation from an editorial in the Catholic Sentinel of October, 1943:

"Mother Mary Seraphim of the Sisters of Saint Mary of Oregon has gone to answer the final summon. When the summons came she was ready, for her whole life had been, a preparation for it. In a very true sense she lived for God. So it is meet to believe that God loved her dearly in life - generous and so unvarying was her responsiveness to His Divine calls. And it is no less meet to believe that He loves her in death and is ready to reward her as a good and faithful steward of His manifold blessings."

#### Sister Mary Engratia Theisen

Sister Mary Engratia's life was lived much in the shadow of her elder sister's achievements; and her actions clearly reflected Mother Seraphim's ideas and ideals during the comparatively brief span of life of thirty-three years.

Sister Engratia was loved and trusted by all who came under her influence in convent and classroom. She was a successful teacher, and she spent her active religious life in the schools. She answered Archbishop Gross' appeal to the Sisters to make firm, staunch Catholics out of the youth under their direction, and Sister bent every effort to this end. Her pupils in Sublimity, Verboort, and St. Patrick's all bore witness to the success of her efforts.

The last six months of her life were racked with devastating pain from an incurable cancer. Toward the last when bedridden in the infirmary, Sister began writing little maxims in a small notebook to give herself encouragement and fix holy thoughts in her mind. Her last written words were from

a hymn to the compassionate Heart of Christ - "Oh Jesus, open wide Thy Heart and let me rest therein." Death brought an end to her earthly suffering and she slipped willingly into eternity on August 18, 1909.

#### The Heuberger Sisters

In the year of 1889 John Heuberger and his family left Harper, Iowa, to found a new home in Sublimity. Ten years earlier his home had been left desolate by the death of his wife, Elizabeth Aller Heuberger; and he, to secure a mother's guidance for his five young daughters, had married Elizabeth Ritzinger, a widow with three children, the youngest of whom was three year old Anna. His choice was well made, and his second wife proved to be a devoted mother, not only to her own three, but also to the other nine. The older girls loved and trusted their stepmother and sought her advice in their problems.

The three elder daughters, Mary, Elizabeth, and Frances, had, after coming to Sublimity, been observing the sisters in the parish; and their daily round of prayer and work seemed to the girls to be a safe, sure way for a lifetime. Elizabeth was the first to join; and Mary, who was of a dependent nature, soon followed her. Archbishop Gross invested the young women in the religious habit on October 26, 1890, in the new St. Boniface Church in Sublimity. This reception was solemnized according to the ritual of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, Missouri. At the same time, Anna Theisen's younger sister, Rose, and Frances Heuberger became postulants in the Congregation.

On June 27 of the following year, Mother Ludmilla and the novitiate members moved from Mariazell in Sublimity to St. Mary's Orphanage, Beaverton. On July 6, the feast of the Precious Blood, Archbishop Gross invested these two young women and one other, Frances Sweeney, in the habit of the Congregation. There were in the novitiate then seven novices and several postulants, one of whom was Anna Ritzinger, a younger stepsister of the three Heuberger sisters. These four young women are the subject of this sketch.

#### Sister Mary Anthony Heuberger

Sister Anthony was called by God to His intimate personal service. She was to leave her home and her people and seek God in the Mystical Body of the Church as a teacher, bringing others to know and serve Him. She was given a road map to be her guide. It was not a detailed map on which every step was marked out and where she might look ahead to the end, but one that directed her day by day along a path that was often obscured by fog and mist or was made treacherous by storm and darkness. It took a strong faith in God's love and goodness to enter Mariazell's Convent and to accept its poverty and hard labor. But there she met Mother Ludmilla and, recognizing Mother's sterling worth, she joyfully took her as guide and set forth on her way. Through many years of her life, her duties called for a patient endurance of the bitter

fruits of misunderstandings in a faithful discharge of the duties of her office, and a silent endurance of the conflicts with others which were the result of our human nature having been spoiled by original sin. It is quite possible that she was too exacting with the faults of the children in the school and her fellow religious - faults and shortcomings that were the outcome of environment and weakness rather than malice. Sister Anthony was a perfectionist and was always exacting when dealing with herself. She, in her earlier years, fell into a fault to which youth is liable, that of demanding perfection of others and even to punishment for incorrect spelling and pronunciation of words in class or the non-observance of silence by members of the novitiate when she was Novice Mistress. Though strict, she was consistently fair. Sister Anthony was sweetened by time and an understanding heart was developed.

During her life she held many posts of importance in the Congregation. She was either a member of the council or treasurer for five terms; and acted as local superior of houses in Verboort, Sublimity, Gervais, Roy, St. Mary's Orphanage, Tillamook, and Holy Cross for a total of many years. Sister Anthony was a model religious though somewhat lacking in imagination and a sense of humor. Life was ever a serious problem for her, and she lived it with high seriousness.

Sister was prayerful, and her manner of reciting the vocal prayers of the Congregation was of lasting edification to the younger Sisters. In June of 1910, she was appointed to lead the devotions, and the young postulants of that year will ever remember the smooth, unhurried intonations of her fine voice as she phrased with understanding the beautiful novena to the Precious Blood. "O Jesus, Thou fairest of the children of men. I recognize Thee as my King and my Redeemer! I consecrate myself to the worship of that regenerating Blood." Thus this beautiful novena, led by the devoted Sister Anthony, laid the basis for a fruitful understanding of the powerful devotion to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus.

During the school year, 1926-27, she was the local superior in St. Alphonsus Academy, Tillamook. This was the last year of her active life. The development of the cancer, which was to end her career, brought her much misery, but she struggled on till the summer vacation without seeking alleviation. Back at St. Mary's Institute, she consulted Doctor Donald Jessop, who diagnosed it as cancer and said that surgery was necessary. Upon exploration he found that the development of the growth was so extensive it could not be removed. Then he told her superior that about six months would bring the end. Unaware of her impending death, Sister returned hopefully to the infirmary and seemed to be rallying quickly. Adhesions had been broken and the development of the cancer retarded for a brief time.

Sister was industrious, and soon she was in a chair out in the spring sun on the back of the infirmary porch crocheting busily. A few weeks later she was talking of returning to classroom work in the Academy. On the feast of the patronage

of St. Francis Xavier, March 12, she suggested this to Mother Juliana. Then Mother told her the doctor's findings and his decision. Sister Anthony became somewhat quiet for a few days as she started to prepare for heaven. These last three months of waiting were to be a priceless time of intense love. She was fearless, almost joyous, as she sat crocheting lace for a surplice. She took to her bed late in April and peacefully awaited the end which came May 31, 1928.

#### Sister Mary Lawrentia Heuberger

On the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady in 1934, a great joy awaited the eldest of these Heuberger sisters. Sister Mary Lawrentia had for over forty-six years worn the black veil of the Congregation - a symbol of humility and detachment. Sister had never wished for a different garb; she had ever been satisfied with the house to which she was appointed, and the task that obedience had assigned to her in it. But her love for God had brightened the drab experiences of her uneventful life. For many months before this feast, she had lain sick unto death with a malignant cancer. There had been long days and nights of pain. At the dawn of this day of Mary's Assumption, she must have felt that something wonderful was about to happen to her. There was to be relief from the months of bitter suffering, which had been accepted by her as the Holy Will of God. Sister had years before learned the hollowness of the things of earth, and she was on the point of realizing the momentous importance of the restraints to which she had, for the love of God, willingly subjected herself at the bright age of nineteen. At last perfect peace and joy were close at hand. Great happiness awaited her at the feet of her Blessed Lord, Who had shed the last drop of His Precious Blood for her. Sister Lawrentia was of a simple, childlike disposition and had ever been able to draw a merry mood out of the little things of life. Those who were part of the community on July 4, 1910, will remember the trio of Sisters who sang old German songs at a picnic in Loretta Park. Sister Lawrentia stood between Sister Aloysius and Sister Magdalene and merrily sang, her face beaming with joy. All three singers had naturally full, true voices and an ear for music. The young members, although they did not understand the words, caught the joyous spirit of the entertainers.

Sister Lawrentia had never been a successful traveler. She had no sense of direction and could not readily discriminate between landmarks. Several amusing incidents resulted from this handicap which her sense of the ridiculous caused her to tell at her own expense. She could laugh heartily at her blunders. One bright autumn day, while Sister Lawrentia was a part of St. Stephen's Convent, several members of her family from Sublimity visited her. The Precious Blood Monastery in Portland, an interesting place of pilgrimage, was located over the crest of Mount Tabor, and its semi-public chapel was considered an artistic model of fine French art. The visitors from the country had never seen it and expressed a desire to do so. Sister Lawrentia, always willing to please, easily obtained permission to act as guide, and the party set forth to take the Mount Tabor streetcar east to seventy-third. Sister

knew that it was about thirty blocks up the hill before she was to leave the car which would not be far from a large deserted house which had the name of being haunted. From this point the bell tower of the monastery could be seen. After carefully watching the streets slipping by, Sister spotted the haunted landmark, rang the bell to stop the streetcar, and led her visitors to the sidewalk. They scanned the horizon but no cross-crowned tower was in sight. Sister Lawrentia had mistaken her landmark, but she was sure that the monastery was a short distance ahead. Her trusting pilgrims confidently followed her lagging footsteps block after block up the steep hill until they were beyond the reach of paved sidewalks, but the entrance to the monastery of the Sister Adorers of the Most Precious Blood was not found that day, and the footsore travelers were forced to take the streetcar back to St. Stevens.

Another incident much like to this one occurred about this same time. Sister Lawrentia was delegated to visit a Sister who was ill in St. Vincent's Hospital, and her companion was a Sister who frankly admitted that she knew nothing about traveling in the city. They were to take the Mount Tabor streetcar west to Fourth, where they were to transfer to the Twenty-third street car and get off at Glisan within sight of the Hospital. The two travelers made the transfer with safety, but they failed to get off at Glisan corner and rode quietly on until the conductor told them that they had reached the end of the line. Quite disconcerted, Sister Lawrentia demanded where St. Vincent's Hospital was and was relieved to learn that it was "way back there." He kindly advised them to keep their seats as the car would soon retrace its route. This trip had a happy ending, as the conductor saw to it that they got off within sight of St. Vincent's Hospital.

Despite these two ventures, at the close of the same year, Sister Lawrentia attempted to guide a third trip during the week of the priests' retreat when there was no Holy Mass in the parish churches. The Sisters stationed in St. Stephen's would start out at five-thirty on those bright June mornings and walk south to St. Ignatius' Church where the Jesuits were to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It was a good half hour's brisk walk, and the Sisters would make their morning meditation as they passed through the quiet streets while Portland's populace slept behind closed blinds. The local superior at St. Stephen's knew that Sister Lawrentia and Sister Alexia were not able to take so long a walk before their breakfast, so she kindly advised them to go the roundabout way by streetcar. The trip required two transfers, and Sister Lawrentia became hopelessly confused. After much travel they never reached St. Ignatius but did get back to St. Stephen's long after the breakfast had been cleared away. This was one trip that Sister Lawrentia did not laugh about because Sister Alexia was quite disconcerted over its complete, and to her, humiliating failure.

Sister Lawrentia had something in common with the humble lay Brother Juniper of Franciscan fame. In her effort to give herself completely to God, she practiced with a cheerful spirit - humility, unquestioning obedience, and poverty. These three

virtues influenced her visible exterior life - Not that she went to the extremes of cooking chickens without properly plucking the feathers or cutting off the legs of live pigs belonging to the neighbors; none the less, Sister practiced in a simple, straight forward manner a great detachment and an indifference to human respect.

#### Mother Mary Theresa Heuberger

In 1891 Frances Heuberger asked her father for permission to join her two elder sisters in the new Congregation. As the Catholic father set his seal of approval upon his sixteen-year-old daughter's choice of life, his advice was, "Aim high, Frances." He wished her to become a saint. This counsel made a lasting impression on the young girl's mind, and she, in turn, passed it on to other girls who expressed to her their aspirations to assume the duties which result from pronouncing the vows of religion. Frances was a thoughtful girl and gave promise of a long and useful life. She had a fine, clear intellect and had been reared in the highest Catholic ideals.

Mother Mary Ludmilla, who was directing the Community and moulding the young subjects at the time of Frances' entrance into the novitiate, was eminently qualified to train this promising young girl, and the years that followed proved that she had succeeded well. The novitiate members with Mother Ludmilla took up residence in St. Mary's Orphanage on June 27, 1891, and the following week on the feast of the Most Precious Blood, July 6, Frances Heuberger and two other young women were invested in the holy habit. Frances was now Sister Mary Theresa, and to the end she patterned her life on that of her patron, St. Theresa of Avila. She aimed high as her father had counseled. Her novitiate passed quickly, and she took temporary vows August 15, 1892 and perpetual vows three years later.

In 1893, Sister Theresa was appointed to Visitation School in Verboort. That was the third year in which that school had been in operation in a wholly Catholic community. A. H. Ball, a fine educator, was school superintendent of Washington County, and, while inspecting the schools under his jurisdiction, he officially visited Sister Theresa's classroom. He realized that she was a rare teacher and suggested that she take teachers' examinations and certify for work in the public schools. Mr. Ball saw no reason why a teacher, though wearing a distinctive religious garb, should not teach the Catholic children under public school auspices in a district such as Verboort. Sister Theresa discussed the matter with Mother Seraphim. Mother was a very conservative administrator who mistrusted the public school system, because she had never dealt with it. She was fearful that submitting to public school officials would belittle the religious teaching vocation. Sister Theresa was unafraid and finally convinced her superior that there would be no lack of dignity in taking the examinations. She and Sister Angela Mahoney made a successful attempt. The following year they signed teachers' contracts with the Verboort public school

district number 97. The result of this venture had deep and lasting effects on the development of the Congregation which will be shown later.

For eight years Sister Theresa worked in Verboort, and many young women were inspired to follow her into the religious life. Sixteen of her pupils entered the Congregation and many more of the children of those whom she had taught to aim high joined the ranks later. Such was the force of good example.

Then in 1901, Sister Theresa, at the age of twenty-six, was elected general superior of the Congregation. Thus it became the duty of Mother Theresa to distinguish between what was essential and what was non-essential in the interior and exterior lives of the members of the Congregation. She was very young and had only ten years of religious life to guide her in making decisions for the development of the new Sisterhood.

Twenty years after being one of Mother Theresa's postulants, Sister Xavier Hyland paid her first superior this tribute: "It was Mother Theresa who helped me to lay the basis for my religious life. It was she who taught me to keep my mind on God while I worked. I owe her a great debt of gratitude." Mother Theresa could not have taught well had she not learned well. The golden chain of prayer that had been forged with the help of God's grace under Mother Ludmilla's watchful eyes grew stronger with the passing years. It was under the inspirational leadership of Mother Theresa that the Congregation entered upon a course of expansion and building. It was she who saw the necessity of steady income for a normal development in the work of education of youth, which was the end of the Institute. These problems were solved with the indispensable advice and encouragement of Archbishop Christie, who had in 1899 assumed charge of the Archdiocese of Oregon City, and with it the diocesan Congregation.

The facts of the expansion and growth during this administration are told later in the history of the Congregation so we will leave her great accomplishments to later chapters.

#### Sister Mary Vincent Ritzinger

Sister Mary Vincent Ritzinger, a step-sister of the three older Heubergers, was one in heart with them. Her mother was the beloved queen of the home of their youth and trusted by all. To her there had been no stepchildren. Sister Vincent was intelligent and had made the best of her meagre education; she was a naturally gifted pianist, but her greatest natural gift was her singing voice, which was sure and true; and with her retentive memory, she could save the day in any nerve-racking situation that came up in the problems that often suddenly arise in Church music in the parishes. Added to these gifts she was beautiful in face and form and possessed a natural grace of poise and bearing. But better than all these gifts was her sweet temper and affability. She was a friend to

all.

She had entered the Congregation in 1892 and spent twenty-eight years of unselfish service as a religious. In 1917 she became superior of Holy Cross, a boarding school for small boys during the pressing years of World War I when so many mothers were working. She took the upper classrooms of the building and opened more dormitories and made the place very attractive and homelike for the forty or more small boys who made this their home. This work Sister Vincent accomplished with the aid of Sister Mary Eugenia Eberhard, who was an indispensable advisor in the work.

In 1920, Sister Vincent made a very fervent retreat under the inspiring Father Daniel Reidy, S.J. Immediately after retreat Sister became ill and underwent an appendectomy at the hospital. At this time it was discovered that she had an intestinal obstruction due to a tubercular condition. Sister Vincent never regained consciousness after the operation and died within twenty-four hours of it. The members of the Congregation were grief-stricken at the unexpected loss of their beloved Sister. To them it seemed that her life's work was not yet completed, but obviously God had ruled otherwise.

#### Sister Mary Francis Sweeney

Catherine Sweeney had come to Chicago from Ireland at an early age and here she had grown up to womanhood. She had an attack of yellow jaundice when she was about twenty-five, and the disease had not yielded to treatment. At the advice of her physician, she went west to Wyoming, seeking to regain her health; it was here that she met Sister Benedict and Sister Johanna on their begging tour through the western states. Sister became interested in the recently founded Congregation and in July of 1891, she joined Sister Engratia and Sister Theresa in the novitiate in Sublimity. She became Sister Mary Francis. For almost forty years she worked in the schools of the institute, and in 1930 she retired to the motherhouse because of failing sight. Here she prayed and meditated in semi-darkness until a heart spell in 1935 caused her death. After only two days as a bed patient she had peacefully expired in Our Lady's month. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin had ever been an outstanding influence in Sister Francis' long life of seventy-two years, forty-seven of which had been spent as a dutiful religious in the Congregation.

#### Sister Mary Agatha Hochmut

Margaret Hochmut had come to Mount Angel from Germany when she was a small child; and at the age of twenty-two she decided to enter religious life, taking the name of Sister Mary Agatha. She was the last member of the Congregation to be received in the Mariazell Convent in 1891. It was during June of that year that Mother Ludmilla with the young members moved to St. Mary's Orphanage. The institution at that time was becoming crowded and more help was needed to care for the children.

Sister Agatha was destined to become a very humble, dependable helper in the kitchens of the Congregation for more than fifty-five years. Sister was always very neat and clean in her personal habits, and she would hasten into the kitchen each morning; wearing a freshly ironed apron; then she would work quietly and unobtrusively at the task assigned to her until the long day was done. A Sister on one occasion compared Sister Agatha to an indispensable screw that holds a piece of machinery together and is never seen or noticed.

At last in 1945, her health began to fail and she could no longer carry on the routine of labor; Sister returned to the Motherhouse and spent her days in following the daily schedule of community living and praying much for the spiritual and temporal needs of the Congregation.

Sister Agatha, after a short illness, passed to a better life on the feast of the patronage of St. Francis Xavier, March 12, 1949. The end was as quiet and unobtrusive as her whole life had been. One of her companions paraphrased at that time: "Well done thou good and faithful servant. Because thou hast been faithful over many small things for many years, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." 'Twas well said!

#### Mariazell Changes Its Name

Mother Ludmilla left Mariazell for Beaverton in June of 1891 with the sixteen remaining religious. Hereafter Sublimity Convent was no longer Mariazell but St. Boniface Convent.

From this time until January of 1894, the story of the orphanage was to be closely linked with the history of the Congregation. A few months after the arrival at St. Mary's Home, three young women joined the novitiate. They were Anna O'Rourke, Fridolina Eyer, and Christine Landher.

Mother Ludmilla faced a tremendous task when she came to the orphanage. With the arrival of the three new postulants, she became responsible for a total of twenty-two religious, twelve of which were in the novitiate. The number of the children in the orphanage was continuously growing. Up to this time there had been only school-aged children to care for.

#### Chapter IV

##### Mother Mary Seraphim Elected

On the three days following the return of the O'Falion Sisters to Missouri the community made a retreat. At the close of the retreat, an election was held on June 29, 1892, in which Mother Seraphim became the Superior General. For the following nine years she held that office. It must have been a heavy burden for her young shoulders, but her friend Father Joseph Fessler was close at hand to advise her. She was to make her perpetual vows on August 15, 1895, when youthful Sister Mary Ignatia Reverman, Sister Mary Imelda VandeHey, and Sr. Mary Cassilda Murphy were to receive the holy habit.

#### Our Founder's Loving Interest

Archbishop Gross' interest in "his Sisters" never flagged. He visited the orphanage as often as possible in spite of the long trip by steam train or by slow horse and buggy over dusty country roads. He would come out and visit the children, then in the evening on bright warm days have supper with the Sisters. This was served picnic style on tables set up on the grassy plot behind the new convent.

Later there would be Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament for everybody followed by an instruction for the community. He often told the Sisters of the necessity of reaching Christian perfection by keeping the rule. He told them of the coming of the Redemptorist Fathers who would help him in his vast diocese and promised that the Fathers would carefully draw up a Constitution particularly for them in their apostolate in the schools of Oregon. His Grace early explained to them that nocturnal adoration was not for an active congregation such as he planned for them. For the Sisters this was a real sacrifice but they cheerfully submitted to his vision of things yet to come to pass.

#### Father Mark Gross

Father Mark Gross spent some time in Oregon during his brother's episcopacy. On one occasion he came to St. Mary's Home, Beaverton, to preach the Forty Hours Devotion to the Sisters and children there. He was an excellent speaker who understood how to appeal to the mentality of his audience, and the subject matter was always inspiring and opportune for both religious and youth. In those early days the resources of the orphanage were practically non-existent. Wax candles were expensive, and the Archbishop had given permission to light for Benediction two pure wax candles and the other ten might be of inexpensive tallow, molded there in the institution. Sister Johanna had made the altar beautiful with flowers from the Home garden. Father Gross came from the sacristy to expose the Blessed Sacrament. He stopped and examined the candles, then turned and motioned for the sacristan. "Not rubrical Not rubrical" he whispered. Sister attempted to explain, but in vain. "They must be wax. Pure bees' wax!" he insisted. Sister Johanna was obliged to bring out ten more wax candles from her meager store. However her supply was not exhausted but lasted on until there were sufficient funds to purchase more.

Father Gross might have been prodigal in the use of fine wax candles for the Blessed Sacrament, but he was influenced by a like generosity when the needs of the poor were to be supplied. On more than one occasion he had annoyed his elder brother by taking clothing from his own person and giving them to poor vagabonds from the railway tracks or city street. It is told that on two occasions Father Mark had sold a good watch to get money for a family in great need. Then His Excellency gave his brother a third watch but instructed him: "Mark, I am loaning this watch to you for your use only.

Remember that it is not your personal property! I shall ask for its return some day."

The younger brother took it gratefully for he had need of a timepiece. But again he found someone who was in dire need of the very necessities of life and in spite of His Excellency's instruction, he sold the third watch and gave the money to a family where help was sorely needed. The Archbishop shook his head hopelessly when he told the Sisters the incident, but they knew that under the same circumstances the Archbishop would have done the same.

#### St. Patrick's School - Portland

In 1892 Archbishop Gross gave the Congregation charge of St. Patrick's School in west Portland. This was a great boon to the Sisters on their shopping days as it gave them a place to rest and have lunch on those arduous occasions. Father Edward O'Dea was then pastor and the first Sisters there were Sister Engratia, Sister Aloysius, Sister Theresa, and Sister Vincent. All went well during his pastorate and that of Father Edward Donnelly, which followed. However, there seems to have been some covert criticism among the parishioners of that residential district of the city about the too German teachers for their American children.

The Congregation kept the school until 1899. When Archbishop Christie became Metropolitan of the diocese in June of that year, one of his first decisions was to give to the care of the Sisters of the Holy Names, St. Patrick's School. This act came as a blow to the Sisters of St. Mary which had been resting so securely under the sympathetic eyes of its founder, Archbishop Gross. The Sisters submitted without a word but, nonetheless, it felt orphaned indeed and slipped quietly back into the shadow of the firs and concentrated on the care of the orphans and teaching the parochial schools of Sublimity and Verboort.

#### Site for the Motherhouse Selected

In 1892 a wonderful new venture was made by the Congregation - a site for the Motherhouse was chosen. Funds for the project had been gathered little by little during the many begging tours that the Sisters had made in 1889 and the years that followed. The money collected on these humbling occasions had been placed in the keeping of Father Joseph Fessler. A plot of seven and one-half acres, just east of the Archdiocesan tract was purchased from George Hornbuckle as a site for this long-desired convent. It was to be a novitiate for the training of the young members and a home of rest and seclusion for the old and infirm.

#### The Motherhouse Becomes a Reality

William Holzhausen, a careful, dependable carpenter, began the construction of the central unit of the building the following spring. Archbishop Gross laid the cornerstone of August 13, 1893, dedicating it to Mary under the title of Our

Lady of Perpetual Help. Upon this same occasion he gave the holy habit to three young women - Catherine O'Rourke, Sister Mary Alexia; Anna Hassler, Sister Mary Barbara; and her younger sister, Lena, who became Sister Mary Cherubim. Mother Seraphim highly esteemed that Catholic family of Sublimity and said that charming young Lena should have the name of Cherubim to go with that of Seraphim in honor of the leaders of the angelic choir.

That year the Sisters had the joy of making many exploring trips over the building to watch it grow slowly and surely upward. Then on January 18, 1894, Archbishop Gross came out to dedicate it. The weather had been cold and stormy, but on that day the sun rose into a bright blue sky and the air became soft and warm - quite unusual for that time of the year but a source of satisfaction to the Sisters on that day of rejoicing with their beloved founder.

It was not until May that all the cleaning up was completed and the few pieces of furniture that had been brought from Mariazell had been set in place. There were twelve new, white maple chairs which had been recently purchased for the guest department and sanctuary. These appeared to be too dainty for daily use but were still in places of honor in the convent seventy-five years later. There are two relics of those by-gone days preserved in the archives - a heavy iron muffin pan which had been given to the Sisters in Mariazell, and a large coffee mill manipulated by hand, which would hold a pound of coffee for one grinding. How this last was acquired has long since been forgotten. Interesting to relate, this mill was once again pressed into service during World War I. Then real coffee beans were too expensive to be used daily by the Sisters, and, as in the beginning, wheat was ground to make a morning breakfast drink for the community. In honor of this ancient relic, Sister M. Engratia Sparkman wrote the following little verse:

#### The Old Coffee Mill

In days of yore this coffee mill  
Ground coffee beans so fine  
To brew the coffee for the nuns  
Each morn for breakfast time.  
A novice young in starched white veil  
Would grind and grind away -  
And as she twirled the merry wheel  
Her A.M.D.G. she'd say  
We each are serving Christ the King,  
Dear coffee mill so true,  
And so we grind and wind and wind and grind  
To make this breakfast brew."

#### New Problems and a Solution

It was a happy day when Mother Seraphim and aged Sister Clara Hauck with the members of the novitiate took possession of the new motherhouse in May of 1894. However, funds for carrying on the new motherhouse were scant, and the young Sisters raised onions in the beaver dam garden to be

sold in the wholesale markets of Portland. At first this proved to be quite successful, and the account books show that during the year of 1397 a special storehouse was erected in which to keep the onions while awaiting a market for them. Between the years of 1897-1902 the same old account books show that \$2,031.40 accrued from the venture during that five-year period. This was an average of \$406.28 a year. It was a goodly sum, according to values of the time, but Mother Seraphim soon found it to be quite inadequate for the simple needs of the Sisters and the debts they were then owing on the buildings.

The parishes of the Archdiocese were to support the orphanage, but the mere pittance that was actually received was so small that the Sisters were forced to beg from the business men of Portland. The three parochial schools were supposed to be supported by tuition, but the people of Oregon were not accustomed to support education; they felt no obligation towards their parish schools. The amounts of tuition that came in were so small as to be almost nonexistent. Years of education would be necessary to convince the people of their duty in this matter.

A solution for the problem was discovered by Sister Theresa in Verboort. Sister had been appointed to that parochial school in 1893, and the county school superintendent, during his official visitations through Washington County, saw that Sister was a fine teacher and suggested that she take teachers' examinations to certify for work in the public schools. Sister Theresa and Sister Mary Angela Mahoney tried, and in the following year were certified teachers with contracts for District 97, Verboort. This plan proved to be a success as well as a source of regular funds for the support of the mother-house.

St. Boniface School, Sublimity, a few years later followed the example of Verboort. Sister Imelda certified for teaching in Marion County. Then in 1907 Father Phelan, C.S.C., Pastor of St. Louis, asked the Archbishop for permission to use the same plan for his parish in the French prairie. Joseph Peubenc and John Manning, school directors, called on Mother Seraphim and the Sisters assumed the task of teaching in district 59.

Because of this regular income, the raising and marketing of onions was discontinued, and the onion house became a granary and a storage place for potatoes. During the last thirty of its seventy years of service, it housed farm animals. In 196\* manufacturing and commerce had pushed westward from Beaverton and had encroached onto the seven and one-half acres purchased in 1892 by the Congregation.

#### Father Fessler and His Sister Become Ill

Late in 1895 both Father Fessler and his sister Rose fell ill. Father had long been a victim of dropsy; careful medical care and dieting had held the malady for a time. At last the ravaged of the disease affected his heart, but he continued to perform

his priestly duties as long as possible. In November of this year, his sister Rose became ill too. At first there was little concern about the seriousness of her condition, but by the beginning of 1896 the Sisters realized that her condition was critical.

It was then that their brother Father Charles Fessler came to the Orphanage from Wisconsin to assist his brother and sister. Rose Fessler died in January of 1896, but Father was to linger on for five weary months. He offered Holy Mass for the last time on the feast of the Holy Trinity. On June 20, 1896, Father Joseph Fessler passed from time into eternity and was laid in the cemetery of the Congregation.

Whether the whole sum or only a part of the money that Father Fessler turned over to Mother Seraphim before his death was his personal property or not has never been known. Many Sisters believed that a substantial part was money collected by them on their begging tours. It is known that the money went toward the purchase of the tract of fifty-seven acres adjoining the small acreage which had been bought in 1892. With this addition the convent then owned sixty-four and one-half acres. This furnished a fine bit of pasture land for the cows. So it was that the supply of butter and milk for the Sisters was made secure for many years.

Rose Fessler left her life insurance of one-thousand dollars to the Congregation. With this, Mother Seraphim purchased a number of articles for the chapel including the Stations of the Cross; these are still hanging in the third convent hall.

#### The Convent Cemetery

In 1900 the convent cemetery was moved to its present site. At that time there were three graves there - that of Rose Fessler, her brother, Reverend Joseph Fessler, and then on January 11, 1897, came the first death in the Congregation when the beloved Sister Mary Josephine Eifert went to her eternal reward. These three deaths had all been crowded into the space of a year, and it was their graves which were moved to the new site.

The next Sister to be given a plot was young Sister Mary Lucy Van Dale, a sixteen-year old novice, on April 6, 1903. Sister Lucy was followed on May 20, 1905, by the oldest member of the Congregation, Sister Mary Clara Hauck, who had reached the venerable age of eighty-five.

These were the first three Sisters to be laid in the cemetery plot which became a place of pilgrimage to the members of the Congregation. Mother Seraphim had a great devotion to the poor souls. During retreats and on certain other anniversary days the Sisters would walk to the cemetery in procession, praying a rosary aloud. When the paved highway was opened in front of the building, the custom was discontinued because of the constant flow of traffic so near to the convent. Nevertheless, private pilgrimages continued to be very frequently made to the cemetery - beautiful with flowers.

## A Period of Peaceful Growth (1891-1898)

In 1893, when the Motherhouse was completed, above its front portal were inscribed the words—Sisters of the Precious Blood. That was a day of great triumph for the humble Congregation. Then years later their name was changed to the Sisters of St. Mary. This was a heartache, but the sacrifice proved to be a blessing for the Sisters in the years ahead.

In 1890, four members were added to the first ten, and seven more during the next two years. It was then that young girls from the diocese sought admission into the Sisterhood and real growth began. In the summer of 1895 the Sisters posed for a picture beneath the inscription of that name (so beloved by the twenty-four who had been instructed by Mother Ludmilla and the younger ones who were being instructed by Mother Seraphim), and the community added up to thirty-two loyal, active members. This picture is still in the archives and has been used as an inspiration for a vocation-day theme presented by the novitiate in 1963.

In this picture are three postulants wearing the little black bonnets which were a part of their garb in those foundation days. This is the only picture extant in the Congregation that shows the bonnet. It brings a merry laugh to the modern girl who enters the novitiate now.

It was while Mother Theresa was in office and accepting postulants into the Congregation that their much despised black bonnet was supplanted by the jaunty sailor hat. The hat was an improvement over the bonnet, but both of them had the same problem - that of being kept in place on the head.

Sister Mary Clare Morressey entered during "sailor-hat days" and had much difficulty keeping her sailor hat in position on her long, thick hair-smoothed straight back from her forehead - that is without a hat pin, which article she frequently misplaced or lost. The sight of the postulant very piously holding her head in a stiff position to keep her unpinned hat in place during community prayers was a source of unholy merriment to her companions .

It has been told thus by the community verse-maker:

### The Odyssey of the Sailor Hat (1902-1908)

Tw'as in the year of nineteen-two  
Our postulants donned - all stiff and new -  
A hat!  
A black, straw hat!  
A black, straw, sailor hat!

Jauntily on each head it sat -  
Held firm and trim by -  
A pin!  
A long, black pin!  
A long, black, dangerous pin!

But oft there fell catastrophe -  
Just think a bit and you will see  
Of what great worth a pin can be.  
Alack, alas, alas, alas!

"What trouble there has come to pass!  
My pin! That sly, elusive pin is gone!  
Oh, how can I my hat keep on?  
I know that it will be askew!  
What shall I do? What can I do?"

### Further Development

The growth of the Congregation was to be less spectacular than it has so often been in foreign missionary institutions, or even among many of those institutes that are founded for teaching or social work at home. But, nonetheless, it has been steady and solid - like to that of the oak tree which reaches its great height in a hundred years or more.

In attempting to count the blessings bestowed by God upon this least Congregation is the boon of His Holiness, Pius XI, bestowing the Decree of Praise upon it in 1926 and of Final Approbation in 1934. Thus it became a Pontifical Institute only forty years after its foundation. Those early foundation days were often watered with bitter tears and fertilized with many humiliations. There were to be tears and humiliations to come, but they were mercifully shielded from view by the hand of a loving God. When they came, God gave the grace to bear them one by one for love of Him.

### English Language Versus the German

Into north central United States many Germans had come and taken up homesteads. They had settled down in groups and put up their own churches and schools, and among these people the German language was spoken. The sermons were preached in German and the children were taught to read and write in German. Many of these settlers were determined to keep their children German even after they realized that America offered many opportunities for them that they would never have enjoyed in their native land. They reached for the rewards but maintained that they were German and would remain so.

Soon there was friction between these people and the Americans, who came to fear that these newcomers were attempting to set up a German state within the borders of their own country. It became an imperative duty of the hierarchy to teach these settlers the necessity of becoming American citizens and bringing up their children as such - if they intended to enjoy the blessings of democracy. American bishops then took decisive action.

The first ten members of the Congregation were of German extraction. Sister Clara and Sister Benedict were born in Germany; the other eight were American born. However, all of them had received their education in German with the

exception of the convert, Sister Benedict, who had been given a good education in English before she became a novice in Ohio. Sister was strongly drawn to a contemplative life, and she was very happy in the semi-cloistered convent that she had entered. But there was a difference between her and the others. Of the next ten members, all but one were German by education. Sister Agatha was born in Germany, but had come to Mount Angel as a small child; but Sister Francis of Irish descent was the one outstanding exception of those whom Mother Ludmilla had trained. She never did master German.

This early training of these first Sisters was to prove to be a handicap in the first years of their apostolate in Oregon, but the problem was solved soon after the turn of the century - and that story is told later.

#### Our Beloved Founder Dies

Archbishop Gross had celebrated his silver jubilee as a bishop on April 27, 1898. There lay behind him twelve years as head of the Church in Georgia and thirteen years as Metropolitan of Oregon City.

The Sisters at the time had presented him with a gift of a set of the works of St. Alphonsus, beautifully bound in silver and white, and a tailor-made suit of clothes. Mother Seraphim had written quite simply of the gift: "Our saintly founder accepted with pleasure that token of gratitude and affection from his spiritual daughters.

At this time the Archbishop was sixty-three years of age, but the twenty-five years of strenuous missionary labor had undermined his health.

#### Inscription on Bell

*Venite Exultemus Domino, Jubilemus  
Deo Salutari Nostro Psalm XCIV*

Presented to the Convent of Our Lady of Perpetual Help by  
Mr. and Mrs. Bruno Boedigheimer  
August 15, 1898

#### Epilogue

The beautiful bell named Our Lady of Perpetual Help by our holy founder, Most Reverend Archbishop Gross, when he blessed it in 1898, still rings for the joys and sorrows and glories of our Lady and three times each day recalls them at the sweet sounds of the Angelus bell.

#### Our Community Bell

Far out in the reaches of Heaven,  
on shimmering waves sublime,  
Has sounded this bell's clear chiming  
offering praise from restraints of time.

From the chrismed hands of our Founder,  
while the ancient rites he said,  
Flowed alchemy of pontifical blessings;  
sacramental grace o'er the bell was spread.

Archbishop Gross, we lovingly thank you  
for this gift and the hundreds more -  
You made firm this foundation to Mary,  
set high aims to be striven for.

May God's angels attend the passage  
of the soul of each humble nun,  
As she flies free, with the bell's solemn tolling -  
a Unity of Beauty. "Well Done."  
Her Sisters in heaven give welcome  
repeating again, "Well done !"

Even though he was ailing, he continued to take the most exhausting trips in open buckboards or on horseback over the worst possible roads in all kinds of weather. He had never spared himself in ministering to his people. It is doubtful that he realized the seriousness of the condition of his health at that time nor did those about him.

#### The Bell of the Congregation

On August 15, 1893, Archbishop Gross presided for the last time at the ceremonies of the Congregation. Those receiving the habit were Sister Mary Catherine Bernards and Sister Mary Josephine Grant; those making vows were Sister Mary Alphonsa Siena, Sister Mary Louise Jansen, Sister Mary Veronica Jenck, and Sister Mary Hildegard Gergen.

It was on this occasion that the Archbishop blessed the big bell in honor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. This bell had been a gift of Sister Mary Cecilia's father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Bruno Boedigheimer of Sublimity. The bell was moved to the new Motherhouse and placed in the tower in September of 1930. It still faithfully rings the Angelus three times daily; it tolls solemnly for funerals; and proudly for the ceremonies of reception and profession of the young members; and joyfully as it ushers in the Easter festival.

#### Archbishop Gross goes to Washington, D.C.

In November of 1898 the bishops of America had been called to assemble in Washington, D.C. for a special conference. Willingly Archbishop Gross prepared for the long trip across the continent to attend. One drawing card may have been that it made possible his going back to the Redemptorist province where he had made his novitiate and been ordained a priest.

#### His Last Conference

A short time before he left for the meeting, he made a special visit to "his Sisters" in Beaverton. It was on this occasion that His Grace gave them what proved to be his last conference.

He reminded then of the necessity of aiming at a personal holiness if they expected to lead youth to holiness. After this introduction, he revealed to the Sisters for the first time that he "had suffered much" for them - that he had defended them against those who had not understood their position in the past - that he had not been swayed by some of his clergy who had strongly advised that, instead of forming a new congregation, he should encourage the young women to enter a congregation already established and in active service. He told the Sisters that he had prayed much and firmly believed that the right course had been chosen. Now that they understood more clearly what the love of their founder's heart was for them, they were breathless with appreciation and resolve for increased personal sanctity. Then he blessed them and went his way. Although they had realized dimly his personal efforts on their behalf, this was the first time they actually had heard it from him.

#### Death and Burial of Our Holy Founder

Archbishop Gross attended the conference in Washington, D.C., and later went on to Baltimore where he became ill. After a brief bout with a badly functioning heart, he seemed to have recovered his normal health, and he went to St. Charles' College where he conducted a retreat. This school held many memories for him as it was within its walls that he had begun his studies for the priesthood. After the closing of the retreat the Archbishop went to Annapolis. It was in that city that he had been ordained and there too had been the scene of his early labors as army chaplain during the Civil War. While making a short visit there he had a more serious recurrence of his heart trouble. One of his brothers took him back to St. Joseph's Hospital in Baltimore where he died somewhat unexpectedly of a valvular heart condition on Monday, November 14th, 1898.

The sad news of the death of Archbishop Gross was received in Oregon two hours later by his Vicar General, Reverend A. M. Blanchet, who immediately informed the clergy of the diocese. Reverend James H. Black had left for Baltimore on the previous Friday when news of His Grace's illness first reached Portland; therefore, he was there soon after the Archbishop's passing.

Archbishop Gross' devoted friend, Cardinal James Gibbons sang the solemn Requiem Mass, and the sermon was preached by a former fellow student - a Redemptorist, Reverend Benedict Neithart.

Archbishop Gross was laid to rest in the cemetery of the Most Holy Redeemer in Baltimore. Now the Sisters of the Congregation felt they were left orphans in truth. However, unknown to them, time proved that many parish priests had been sincere friends in those days of bitter trial - friends not only in words but also in deeds.

#### List of Priests Who Were Friends to th Sisters

The following is a partial list of these priests:

Father Anthony Hillebrand (later Monsignor)  
Father James Black (later Monsignor)  
Father James Rauw (later Monsignor)  
Father Arthur Lane (later Monsignor)  
Father Anthony Lainck (Pastor of Sublimity)  
Father Dominic Faber  
Father Anthony Moore  
Father Edward O'Dea (later bishop of Seattle)  
Father Charles O'Reilly (later bishop of Baker City)  
Father Bertram Orth (later bishop of Victoria)  
Father Edward Donnelly (built St. Stephen's Conv.)  
Father William A. Daly  
Father John Hughes

The debt to three Benedictine Superiors could never be paid with money:

Abbot Adelhelm Odermatt, O.S.B.  
Abbot Placidus Fuerst, O.S.B.  
Abbot Bernard Murphy, O.S.B.