

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



“Sisters of Notre Dame: an historic transition”

After almost 100 years, the Province of the Sisters of Notre Dame here in the Diocese of Toledo will unite this July with the three other Provinces of Notre Dame Sisters in the United States, to form one Province which will be located in Chardon, Ohio, in the Diocese of Cleveland. As this column tries to touch on matters pertinent to all of us in the diocese, and because this is such a significant moment for the Sisters, I asked the present Provincial Superior, Sister Mary Delores Gatliff, SND, to share with us about this transition, their “Journey of Becoming One.” I’m so glad to offer here Sister’s message:

“On July 5, 2020, the four United States provinces of the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame will unite to form a single province. Why and how has this come about? What effects will this change have? We answer these questions in the context of our membership in an international Congregation, which calls upon its members in 17 countries around the globe to be united in One Heart, One Hope, and One Mission.”

Beginnings and expansion

Since 1874, when the first eight Sisters of Notre Dame arrived from Germany for the initial purpose of serving German immigrants, the sisters have responded to the needs of the Church in the areas of education, health care, and social service ministries. By 1880, more than 200 German sisters had immigrated to the USA. They found not only a refuge from the Anti-Catholic legislation in Prussia, but also a fertile ground for ministry among diverse populations, especially to those who were poor and lacking in resources. Vocations to the community were numerous, and by the mid 1920’s more than 650 sisters lived and ministered in dozens of locations.

The U.S. province center, initially located in Covington (Kentucky), moved to Cleveland (Ohio) in 1878. In 1924, Toledo and Covington were named as separate provinces. That same year, sisters from Cleveland started working in the Watts area of Los Angeles (California), which became the fourth U.S. province in 1961. Each province established its own provincial center

including a novitiate, built its own schools, and founded international missions.

Process and planning

Regular meetings of the sisters in leadership on the national and international level have increased awareness of new means of sharing our spirit and charism. We asked ourselves, "How are we being called to witness as apostolic women religious of the 21st century, committed to global transformation?"

In 2011, the leadership teams of the four U.S. provinces began to explore the possibility of re-unification. SND-USA gradually took shape, designed not as a business model or a merger, but as a process of "becoming one." We have relied on and experienced God's goodness and provident care, and the support and encouragement of our co-workers and those who partner with us. Our overwhelming response can only be one of gratitude! The global pandemic in which we find ourselves may have made these last steps a bit steeper, but our course has not shifted.

The new province center will be in Chardon, Ohio, and offices in each geographic area will serve local needs and contacts. Sister Margaret Mary Gorman from Chardon has been appointed the new Provincial. The new leadership team includes sisters from each former province; Sister Regina Marie Fisher from the Toledo area will serve on the new team.

What comes next for SND-USA?

We will maintain our witness in present geographical areas, while expanding our influence into new areas through active and web-based ministries as well as ministries of

presence. Sharing resources and personnel will unify our commitment and support for our sustainable sponsored ministries/institutions, allow us to develop strategies for sharing our mission and charism, and strengthen our efforts to promote justice, peace, and integrity of creation. Our Notre Dame spirituality and passion for mission will continue, with God's grace.

Sister Mary Delores Gatliff, who has served as Provincial of the Toledo Province from 2009 to the present, writes, 'Thank you to Bishop Thomas and the people of the Toledo Diocese, who have supported the sisters and enriched our lives over many years. We eagerly look forward to continuing our ministry among you!'

Even though after almost 100 years, the Diocese of Toledo will no longer be home to a Province of the Sisters of Notre Dame, we will happily continue to be home to so many of the sisters who serve faithfully in various capacities in our parishes and institutions. Please join me in expressing our deepest gratitude for the consecrated religious witness and work of the Sisters of Notre Dame here in our diocese, in looking forward to their continued presence among us, and in begging the Lord Jesus to grant all the sisters grace and peace during this transition!

+ Daniel E. Thomas

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