A Suggestion from Heaven:
How the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity
Came to the Diocese of Columbus

The 1870s were a very difficult time for many, a
time of economic depression when jobs were
hard to find. Some parents were unable to buy
food or pay rent or otherwise care for their
children. Other parents had lost a spouse and
could not care for little children alone. Such little
children were found abandoned at the Sacred
Heart Academy in Columbus. The Dominican
Sisters took these children in and clothed and fed
them. Some remained in their care for a number
of months, but in time the parents usually
returned to claim them. Some little children also
were cared for by the Sisters of the Good
Shepherd on the west side, but this was not the
main apostolate of either the Dominican or the
Good Shepherd sisters. The question of how to
provide for such children weighed heavily on the
mind of Bishop Rosecrans until Divine
Providence sent him an answer.

A Call to Buffalo

Buffalo, New York in 1873 had two German
parishes. These had German Jesuit pastors but
only English-speaking religious to teach in their
schools. Hoping to reach the children and their
parents better with German-speaking teachers,
one of the pastors asked the Sisters of St. Francis
of Penance and Christian Charity in Capellen,
Germany and Heijthuizen, Holland to send
members of their community to teach. Many of
these sisters had been deprived of the worldly
portion of their activities by Chancellor
Bismarck's Kulturkampf and the community was
actively seeking work in foreign lands. The
Sisters decided to accept the invitation to
Buffalo. Mother Aloysia Lenders, Superior
General, would lead the group, which would
include three other sisters, namely Sister
Veronica Conradi, Sister Felicitas Dues, and
Sister Leonarda Hanappel. After some intense

Mother Aloysia Lenders, O.S.F.
(Courtesy of the Sisters of St. Francis)
study of English, the little group left the Motherhouse in Holland on May 15, 1874. Mother Aloysia and Sister Leonarda stopped at Aix-la-Chapelle to visit Ven. Mother Frances Schervier, foundress of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis. A remarkable friendship existed between the two superiors and Mother Frances asked her community in the United States to do everything possible for the travellers when they would reach the New World. The four sailed from Antwerp on May 18. They arrived in New York on June 5 and Mother Aloysia and Sister Leonarda set out for Buffalo on June 7 while their two companions settled temporarily in Newark, N.J.

On arriving in Buffalo, Mother Aloysia learned that Bishop Ryan of Buffalo would not welcome her Sisters into his diocese. The sisters whom they were to have displaced had laid their case before him and, feeling indebted to them, he had agreed that they should remain at the schools. He received Mother Aloysia coldly, told her he had quite enough sisters in his diocese, and quickly sent her away. A novena of Masses, prayers to the Sacred Heart on that great feast and on many other days, and a second visit to the bishop seemed not to help, for not only did Mother Aloysia not know where to turn, Sister Leonarda became ill and the doctor expected her to quickly depart for an eternal home.

Search for a Home

As Sister Leonarda did not improve, the Jesuit priests suggested that she be taken to Cincinnati, to the hospital of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis. Mother Aloysia accompanied her on the overnight railroad journey. (It seems likely that they passed through Columbus's Union Station on the Night Express of the Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati and Indianapolis Railroad, with a brief stop at 1:30 a.m. Did a drowsy Mother Aloysia glance out the window at the city? Certainly, she had no idea of the work Providence had ready for her Sisters in the Diocese of Columbus.) Mother Frances Schervier's sisters in Cincinnati, led by Mother Vincentia, warmly welcomed them at St. Francis Hospital and Sister Leonarda began a rapid recovery. Mother Vincentia offered to place her community's hospital at Quincy, Illinois at the disposal of Mother Aloysia and her companions, and Mother Aloysia did visit it, but since her three companions were all teachers, she refused this offer "and continued to storm Heaven to know God's Will as to the future."

"One evening, at the community recreation, Mother Vincentia asked her religious whether any one of them could suggest some opening for the sisters who had come over with Mother Aloysia. One of the youngest nuns said very timidly: 'Mother, there is no orphanage in Columbus, Ohio; could not the sisters open one there?' This suggestion seemed both to Mother Vincentia and to Mother Aloysia to come from Heaven. The next day they set out for Columbus and repaired to St. Francis Hospital. They sent over to the episcopal residence to request an audience of the Rt. Rev. Bishop Rosecrans, but the gracious Prelate replied that he would come to the Hospital himself, and in a short time he arrived. He listened with the greatest kindness to Mother Aloysia's story, and when he heard that she wished her sisters to be received into his Diocese and, if this were agreeable to him, to take charge of an orphanage, the good Bishop was very much pleased and at once engaged them for the one he intended to found in this city. His fatherly kindness fell like a balm on the heart of the anxious Superior, and seeing in these events, the Hand of God, she at once promised the Bishop that her nuns would take charge of the orphans."

Mother Aloysia returned to Cincinnati and wrote a letter to Buffalo, telling the Jesuit priest that she had decided to give up all thoughts of that city and settle her three sisters in Columbus. Meanwhile,
however, the Jesuit Fathers had succeeded in convincing Bishop Ryan of Buffalo to withdraw his refusal to admit the Franciscan Sisters, and the religious who had been teaching in the schools recognized the need for German teachers and retired from the scene of their own accord. The Fathers sent Mother Aloisia a telegram to come to Buffalo immediately, but said no further word. The Fathers had received her letter but had not opened it and on her arrival in Buffalo they were as stunned to learn that she had definitely decided upon Columbus as she was to learn that her Sisters now were expected to settle in Buffalo! The Jesuits protested the embarrassment that would result if the Sisters did not settle there, while their need for German teachers would go unfilled. After several days of prayer, consideration of the attitude of her Sisters in Germany, the prospects for her congregation in the Germany of the Iron Chancellor, the availability of candidates for the order whom the Jesuits had already recruited, the training of her three Sisters as teachers, and a brief meeting with Bishop Ryan, the decision was made: the Sisters would settle in Buffalo. Sister Veronica was named the first, temporary superior of the Sisters in Buffalo, Sister Leonarda would train the new candidates, and Sister Felicitas would look after their material needs. They settled into a little frame house while Mother Aloisia sent to Germany for six more Sisters and then departed to return to Europe. It had been three months since she had first landed in New York.

St. Vincent's Orphanage

Mother Aloisia, of course, never for a moment forgot the kindness of Bishop Rosecrans and her commitment to him. She had obtained from him a delay of six months. On her arrival in Germany, before the end of 1874, she sent three Sisters from Rheims to make the foundation in Columbus, Mother Euphrasia ans Sisters Clotilde and Aquinas. They arrived on the evening of December 22 and were received at the hospital by the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis. They were not there long when Bishop Rosecrans and his Vicar General, V. Rev. Bernard Hemsteger, called upon them to bid them welcome and lay out their plans.

Bishop Rosecrans obtained from Louis Zettler his house and seven acres (mostly covered by orchards) at Rose and East Main Street for $25,000, of which amount Mr. Zettler donated $10,000 and took a note for the remainder. The two-story brick house, converted to accommodate the Sisters and orphans, contained nine rooms and a chapel, the latter furnished by Holy Cross Parish. On February 2, 1875 some 500 Catholics of the city, led by the St. Patrick's total Abstinence Society, St. Joseph's Mutual Benevolent Society, the St. Patrick's School Society, and the Pope Pius IX Cadets, assembled at St. Francis Hospital and with the three Sisters processed in silence to the new St. Vincent's Orphanage. The building then was dedicated by the Bishop, assisted by Fathers J.B. Hemsteger, J. B. Eis, J. Cassella, M. Meara, and the students of St. Aloysius Seminary. The first residents were eight little girls who until then had been cared for by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

St. Vincent's Orphanage was expanded and modernized through the years. By 1917 about 4,000 orphans had been received and over 300 were then in residence. About this number were cared for by the Sisters for many years thereafter. St. Vincent's was "the" charity of the whole diocese and was supported largely by the Christmas Day collection at all parishes and a Fourth of July festival. In 1973 St. Vincent's changed its mission and changed its name from "Orphanage" to "Children's Center." It became a mental health agency providing day treatment and educational and residential services for children. St. Vincent Children's Center formed an operating agreement and a single management structure with Diocesan Child Guidance and in
1996 formally merged with that Center to form the Columbus Family and Child Guidance Centers. The last Sister-employee at St. Vincent retired in 1989, but several remained in residence until 1994. The name was changed to St. Vincent Family Centers in 2000, so that its Catholic identity would be apparent.

Other Foundations

Mother Aloysia made two further foundations in the Diocese of Columbus. In 1875 Father John B. Eis, who spoke German and several other languages, invited her to staff the school at his new parish, Sacred Heart in Columbus. Mother Aloysia sent from Germany Mother Sophie, Sister Callista, and others. The Sisters added a two-year commercial high school there in 1892 and a four-year high school in 1957. Due to the declining Catholic population of the area and the opening of new diocesan high schools, Sacred Heart's high school was closed in 1966 and the elementary school in 1972, four years short of its centennial.

In 1870 a bare tract of land near New Lexington was given to Bishop Rosecrans on which to found a school. Four years later, the walls had been built but no further progress had been made.

Bishop Rosecrans asked the Franciscan Sisters to consider taking over the site and Mother Aloysia sent Mother Gonzaga Brexel with her community, who had just been expelled by Bismarck's government from the little town of Konitz near Danzig. Mother Gonzaga inspected the site and found it an ugly building surrounded by weeds, without a tree or a bit of lawn in sight. The neighboring clergy thought nothing could be done there, but Father Eis, who was secretary to the Bishop, guaranteed the Sisters' debts in starting the school, so the Sisters undertook the task. They opened St. Aloysius Academy, boarding school for girls, in 1876 that soon was flourishing. In the 1930s a military academy for younger boys was added and in 1948 the high school was opened to males. Declining enrollment brought about the decision to close the academy in 1969.

Mother Aloysia served as Superior of her congregation until 1876, then retired to a very quiet life. She always considered all the anxiety and labors connected with the American foundation to be insignificant compared with the good done here. She died in 1883 at the age of just fifty-four.

Subsequent foundations in the Diocese of Columbus were made by the Motherhouse at Buffalo, later (and now) at Stella Niagara, N.Y. These were:
St. Peter Parish elementary school in Columbus (1899 to 1969)

Sister M. Carolyn, O.S.F., at St. Peter School in Columbus, 1947.
St. Leo Parish elementary school in Columbus (1904 to about 1991)
St. John the Evangelist Parish elementary school in Columbus (1906 to the mid-1970s)
Holy Rosary Parish elementary school in Columbus (1906 to the early 1980s)
St. Ann's Infant Asylum (later Hospital) in Columbus (1908)
St. Rose Parish elementary school in New Lexington (1912 until 1987)
St. Rita's Home for working girls in Columbus (1924 to the mid-1970s)
St. Charles Seminary in Columbus (housekeeping from 1927 to the late 1970s)
St. Therese's Shrine in Columbus (1927 to the late 1970s)
St. Francis de Sales High School (1960 until 2000)
St. Anthony Parish elementary school in Columbus (1965 to the early 1980s)
St. Bernadette Parish elementary school in Lancaster (1967 until the early 1980s)
St. Francis Evangelization Center in McArthur (opened 1979).

In 1935 the Franciscan Sisters of Penance and Christian Charity had 156 Sisters on mission in the Diocese of Columbus. This number was second only to those in the Diocese of Buffalo; however, excluding the Sisters at the Motherhouse, those in the Columbus diocese outnumbered those in Buffalo by 156 to 115. This diocese, especially Perry County, was a rich source of vocations to the congregation. In early 2002 there were still some forty members of the congregation in the diocese. Bishop Rosecrans' kindness to Mother Aloysia and her promise to him have not been forgotten.

+++ Details of Mother Aloysia's days in the U.S. are given by Sister M. Ligouri Mason, O.S.F. in *Mother Magdalen Daemen and Her Congregation*, [Buffalo, c. 1935]

53-C east
Matilda beloved wife of Dennis Clifford died Mar. 24, 1897 aged 44 y 1 m 19 d
(Father) Dennis Clifford died Dec. 19, 1910
Michael Clifford, born in Scabtaglen Parish Kerry Co. Ireland, Sep. 29, 1825 died in Columbus, O., Apr. 6, 1873
Katie dau. of M. & C. Clifford born in Athens Co. O., July 21, 1856 died in Columbus, O. Sep. 10, 1876
Catherine M. Clifford, 1823-1916
Michael

53-C west
p. 64, John Mangan, [no date; first payment made 1880 Nov. 27], half of lot 53. Graves: 1909 March 10; 1920 Feb. 19.
p. 295, William-Murphy, John Mangan, 1883 Dec. 16, lot 53 west half, transferred by Wm. Murphy; 224 Miller Ave.
(Mother) Anne wife of John J. Mangan died Mar. 10, 1909 May her soul r.i.p.
John J. Mangan, 1846-1920

MANGAN: Aloysius M. Sept. 13, 1935
Rosa M.

54-C north
p. 123, Thomas Hartnett, [no date of sale; first payment made 1881 July 4], lot 54 north half. Graves: 1887 Oct. 12; 1891 Sept. 10; 1891 Sept. 13; 1892 Dec. 5; 1914 Sept. 4; 1929 May 20. [no stones]

54-C south
Michael A. Ryan 1872-1937
Eva J. Ryan, 1883-[blank]
Juliet Ryan Fleming June 24, 1876-Nov. 18, 1938
Bridget wife of Maurice Griffin, born 5, 10, 1828, died 2, 10, 1903
Ettie Ryan, born 10, 9, 1877 died 9, 14, 1881

55-C
(Father) August Burkley 1860-1916
(Mother) Elizabeth Burkley 1863-1934
(Mother) Anna Schwenker 1865-1904
Thomas P. Agnew 1860+1948

56-C
Russell Richards Oct. 20, 1901-Sep. 8, 1910
John L. Richards born and died Sep. 27, 1907

57-C
p. 171, John Kelly, 1878 Apr. 8, lot 57. Graves: 1891 July 20; 1900 June 8; 1904 Dec. 27; 1909 March 29; 1910 March 4; 1914 June 6. "This lot transferred to Mrs. Mary Caito."

CAITO:
John A. Palumbo 1898-1934
(Daughter) Angela Palumbo 1898-1974
(Father) Gaetano 1862-1931
(Mother) Maria 1872-1958
(Grandson) Jude DiPiero 1947-1947
(Son) Michael A. May 22, 1900 - July 21, 1949
Margaret M. DiPiero 1908 -
Frank D. DiPiero S Sgt US Army World War II
Feb. 28, 1907+Mar. 2, 1982
Samuel T. Cauto 1893-1986
Goldie C. Cauto 1898-1982
Frank Peter Cauto US Navy World War I Dec. 12, 1896+June 9, 1984

58-C north
John Crawford 1851-1920
Ann his wife 1853-1913
William their son 1873-1878

58-C south
p. 105, Patrick Ready-Ruddy, Belle-St.-154, 276 W. Bread-St., Mary Ruddy, 375 S. Grant Ave., 1878 Apr. 30, lot 58 south half. Graves: 1878 Apr. 30 child; 1879 March 3; 1892 March 22; 1907 Dec. 9.
Nellie B. Ruddy died Mar. 17, 1947
John Ruddy died Aug. 15, 1880
Mary Ruddy died Feb. 28, 1895
Patrick Ruddy died Dec. 11, 1907
Mary Ann Ruddy died Nov. 23, 1936

59-C north
1889 Nov. 14; 1896 July 16; 1904 Mar. 4; 1909 July 31.

James W. Bailey 1860-1904
Jeremiah M. Collins 1835-1896
Margaret C. Dickinson 1861-1889
Nora A. Collins 1867-1881
Anna B. Collins 1869-1882
Jeremiah Collins 1872-1878

59-C south
p. 107, Mrs. Dominick Leonard, 28 West Maple St., 1878 July 26, lot 59 south half.
Graves: 1878 July 20 child [use of vault prior to purchase of lot]; 1881 Oct. 21 child; 1890 June 21 child; 1891 Sept. 11 child; 1903 Feb. 23 child; 1904 Jan. 27; 1909 Oct. 28; 1911 Apr. 8; 1912 Sept. 3; 1923 Apr. 23.
Ed Cosgrove 1898-1934

60-C east
p. 96, Patrick McCue, 1877 Nov. 7, lot 60 east half.
Graves: 1877 Nov. 7; 1881 May 23; 1881[?] Sept. 28.
Charles, son of J. & L. McCue Apr. 11, 1893-Dec. 26, 1895

60-C west
p. 102, Mrs. Sarah Hollis, 1878 Feb. 25, lot 60 west half.
Graves: 1878 Feb. 25, two graves; 1881 Sept. 2 child; 1884 Sept. 19 child; 1888 Sept. 20 child; 1895 July 20 child.
(Mother) Sarah A. Hollis 1819-1902
Tommy Hollis died Oct. 21, 1884[?], Aged 7 m 23 d.
+ James Hollis of Stockport [broken] Ireland late of the 13 — Died Jan. 22 — aged 44 years also John son of J[?] & S.A. Hollis Died May 16, 1860 Aged 16 yrs 4 m 23 d.

+ Thomas Harrington, died Oct. 19, 1884 aged 21 y 6 m. Rest in Peace. Amen.
HARRINGTON: (Son) Robert 1893 + 1909
(Son) Thomas 1891 + 1920
(Father) Robert 1858 + 1932
(Mother) Mary 1862 + 1940
(Daughter) Helen 1896 + 1931
My Jesus Mercy

62-C south
p. 188, Catherine Gainey, Newark, 1880 Dec. 27, lot 62 south half.
Graves: 1880 Dec. 27; 1890 Sept. 8 child; 1899 Jan. 12; 1902 June 2.
Marg. Bresnahan in memory of our mother, may her soul rest in peace, 1831-1895
Mary, wife of Charles L. Rader, 1848-1902. Pray for me.

62-C north
(Father) Albert De Matteis Jan. 19, 1907 + Oct. 30, 1975
(Father) Thomas McEvoy Dec. 31, 1849 - Nov. 26, 1928
(Mother) Lizzie McEvoy died Jan. 21, 1899: aged 37 yrs.
Mary wife of Thomas Dillon died Jan. 19, 1909 aged 55 years.
Thomas Dillon died Apr. 13, 1908 aged 52 y.

63-C south
p. 98, Daniel Harrington; Robert Harrington 896 S. 4th St.; 1878 Jan. 27, lot 63 south.
Graves: 1878 Jan. 1 [charge for use of vault; child buried on Jan. 27]; 1909 March 11; 1920 Jan. 27.
Thomas Harrington, died Oct. 19, 1884 aged 21 y 6 m. Rest in Peace. Amen.
HARRINGTON: (Son) Robert 1893 + 1909
(Son) Thomas 1891 + 1920
(Father) Robert 1858 + 1932
(Mother) Mary 1862 + 1940
(Daughter) Helen 1896 + 1931
My Jesus Mercy

61-C
p. 169, John Costigan, 1877 Sept. 17, lot 61.
Kathrine Costigan 1880-1965

275
63-C north
(Mother) Helen Pearce 1896-1931
+ John J. Crawford Ohio Co C 4 Regt Ohio Inf Spanish American War May 18, 1875-Jan. 16, 1984
+ Rose Crawford 1863-1937

64-C west
p. 97, Mrs. Timothy Quinn, 351 W. Goodale St., 1878 Jan. 11, lot 64 west half. Graves: 1878 Jan. 11 child; 1906 May 6; 1906 July 12; 1924 March 13 to raising remains. Oct. 28, 1924 above lot transferred to Charles Kintz.
p. 524, Charles Kintz, 2418 Pontiac St., 1924, west half of lot 64 transferred from Mrs. Timothy Quinn. Graves: 1924 Oct. 28; 1927 Feb. 9.
James H. Kintz 1911-1932
(Father) Charles O. Kintz 1877-1927
(Mother) Clara S. Kintz 1880-1924
Robert L. Johnson 1937-1953
Thomas D. Johnson 1951-1974

(To be continued)

Side Altar -- But Where? Society member Jim Logsdon thinks this was somewhere in the northeastern part of the diocese. Does anyone recognize it?