



A Short History
of the
Sisters of St. Joseph
Tipton, Indiana
1888 - 1994

HISTORY OF THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF TIPTON, INDIANA

Sister Gertrude Moffitt was received into the community of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cleveland, Ohio in 1879. God had imbued her with a pioneering spirit, and when she received a letter from Father Lentz of Tipton, Indiana inviting her to come and establish a school in his parish, she was ready to go about her "Father's Business".

Sister Gertrude's Cleveland community was not in favor of her leaving their community as she was a talented teacher, excellent musician and artist. However, with the help of the superior of Watertown, New York and two young novices, Sister Josephine Hynes, a friend of Sister Gertrude, and Sister Theresa Thistlewaite, a young girl from Sheridan, Sister Gertrude was able to begin her journey into the unknowns of pioneer Indiana. On March 11, 1888, Sister Gertrude and her two companions left from Watertown, New York for Tipton, Indiana where Sister Gertrude laid the foundation for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tipton, Indiana on March 15, 1888.

These pioneer Sisters endured many hardships. The school was small, the parish was poor, and the Sisters had not much income. They did fancy work and pieced quilts which they sold to provide a few extra pennies to supplement their meager stipend from the parish. From the beginning of the foundation, it was characteristic of the Sisters of St. Joseph to work with and for the poor. For many years, teaching and nursing were the two ministries of the little community. They taught in the poorer parochial schools of the diocese where the bishops asked for their services. They served the poor and needy in their first hospital, Good Samaritan in Kokomo, Indiana. Later on the community sponsored St. Joseph Memorial Hospital in Kokomo, Mercy Hospital in Elwood, Indiana and St. Charles Hospital in Bend, Oregon. No one was ever turned away for lack of money. Many of the Sisters cared for the sick poor in their homes.

The Sisters saw many changes as they moved from a small cottage to a brick building across from St. John's in Tipton. This brick building was financed by Mother Gertrude's father who was in the gold mining business. This was his legacy to his daughter as he died a few years later.

In 1904, the well-known St. Joseph Academy was built on land purchased north of the city. This was the era of the Boarding school and until 1972 when the Academy closed its doors, many young girls from all over the United States and Central American countries received an excellent education. Many of the academy graduates, inspired by their Sister teachers, entered St. Joseph Convent. In 1910, a second building called St. Joseph Convent was built adjacent to the Academy.

This became the home for the Sisters and for those who entered the Order. In 1958, St. Joseph Junior College was established and the postulants and novices were educated in this institution, housed in renovated parts of the Convent. The college closed in 1972 also. In 1932, St. Katharine Hall was built. It became the gym, the auditorium, and home economics department.

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As the Order grew in the 1950's, the building termed the St. Joseph Motherhouse was built. It became the residence for the Academy boarders, the home for the academy teachers, for the Sisters in Administration, and the retired Sisters. Also a fifteen bed infirmary was included in the new building. When the Academy closed in 1972, and there were fewer novices for the Convent building, both original buildings were razed. St. Katharine Hall remains. The Migrant Day Care used this building from 1972 to 1991. With all the renovation in the Motherhouse, it became necessary to use St. Katherine Hall as a storage place.

Change was the constant factor through the years following Vatican Council II. The community, open to the Spirit, made drastic changes in ministries. At present the small community works in a variety of ministries: Education, Counseling, Hospital Administration, Pastoral Care, Pastoral Ministries, Utilization Review in hospitals, Evangelization, Business Offices, CCD Directors, Spiritual Directors, Community Administration. The community had a Sister in retreat work in Wales for 2 years and has a missionary in Haiti. The Sisters do home nursing and visit the sick in nursing homes. The community has musicians, a calligrapher and a potter. The Spirit blows where it will!

One of the biggest changes the community has experienced is the use of the Motherhouse. After the Academy closed in 1972, it became necessary to find a use for all the unoccupied rooms. The Sisters hosted families of wedding groups, small retreat groups, groups of religious women discussing changes in their Orders, and a variety of small groups. In the 1980's, St. Joseph Conference Center began its rapid growth. The spirit of ecumenism was evident in the wide variety of church groups who had found "just the right, quiet, hospitable place for retreats and workshops." There are daily meeting groups, week end meetings, and week-long educational workshops. Sometimes there are three or four meeting groups meeting at the same time. In the past five years, the Conference Center has been going full force. Many groups book reservations a year ahead. But still the 3rd floor rooms were empty many times.

The community ages run from the 40's to the 90's. The Conference Center gives the perfect opportunity for the retired Sisters to remain a part of activity, and those who use our Center never fail to acknowledge the hospitality which is one of the charisms of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tipton, Indiana.

In 1978, the Community voted to accept Co-Members into the Order. The Christian men and women share in the prayer life, help in ministries of the Order, and enjoy companionship with the Sisters. Meetings are scheduled regularly.

In 1986, through a grant from the Lilly Foundation, a Development Office was established. The purpose is to solicit funds to help ministries and projects that are not funded by salary. A booklet, aptly named "The Cornerstone" is sent to relatives and benefactors of the Community to keep them informed about the ministries they are helping to fund, as well as about

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other works of the community. The Sisters value the financial help to fund ministries and to build a reserve to be able to help the poor and needy who ask for assistance.

In 1989, the House of Prayer, a Montana Log Cabin, was built north of the Motherhouse. It is the dream of an anonymous donor, and is beautifully furnished in every detail. The House is open to anyone who desires peace and quiet for meditation and the fee is a donation. It is booked solid years ahead.

On March 5, 1990, Sr. Ann Weller set out for the community's first foreign mission--Haiti. The commitment voted on by the community involves sending personnel and supplying funds for Hospice St. Joseph in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The Hospice ministers to the sick poor in Haiti.

In 1991, the former Chaplains house (which was our St. Mary's Boys Academy when it was built) was remodeled and became a retreat house "Little Noddfa" under the guidance of Sister Wanda Wetli who had returned from 2 years in a retreat house in Wales "Noddfa".

August 1992, at the annual Assembly, the community voted to renovate the Mother house in order to use all the space left vacant after the Academy closed and not used fully by Conference Group. January, 1993 work began in earnest on the renovation. By October 24, 1993 we had Open House for people to view our completed work. There are comfortable apartments or private rooms for the retired Sisters. A completely remodeled infirmary of 12 beds with all the modern facilities. The 25 Conference rooms, each with its own bathroom facilities (some with 2 beds) are completely refurbished. The two-room apartments are available for anyone who wishes to live with us, share prayers, meals, activities, and companionship. There are always rooms available for the guests of the Sisters or residents.

November 1, 1992, the Community gathered to decide on an appropriate name for our building as Motherhouse no longer fit a place of so many activities. By an almost unanimous vote we decided on St. Joseph Center. With our Retirement Home, Infirmary for the Sisters, Conference Center, Apartments for residents, Hospice St. Joseph, Little Noddfa, and the House of Prayer, this part of our campus is a Center of Activity. This is Mother Gertrude's dream come true!

This small, viable community lives in the present, honors the past, and looks to what the Church and the Spirit will ask of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tipton, Indiana in the future.

Sister Ruth Whalen, *Archivist*
December, 1993