



**First Community
in the U.S.
19-09-1956**



The first foundation of the Marist Sisters was on September 19, 1956 in Dearborn, a suburb of Detroit, Michigan.



Fr DePlauty and Mgr Deedy welcome the sisters as they deplane.

In the 1950's Detroit was booming with business and industry. The development of the auto industry and the economic prosperity attracted hundreds of thousands, such as European immigrants, and both black and white people from the South. All were seeking better jobs and the opportunity to live the American Dream. Detroit's population hit 1.85 million, making it America's fourth-largest city, with 296,000 manufacturing jobs.

This phenomenon had its impact on the Church in Detroit. Many people moved to the suburbs and many of them were religious people seeking a catholic education for their children. To meet this religious need, new parishes were sprouting up throughout the diocese and most of them wanted a catholic school. However, Cardinal Mooney in Detroit stipulated that no permission would be given for a school unless the parish had a firm commitment from a congregation of sisters to staff the school.

St Albert the Great was a new parish that began in Dearborn in 1956. Father Leo J. DePlauty was appointed pastor. He wanted a parochial school. He checked and pleaded with many congregations but none had any sisters to offer. His best friend, Father Louis Evon, was appointed pastor of St Barnabas in East Detroit, and was in the exact same situation.

The Marist Fathers staffed Notre Dame High School in Harper Woods. They were weekend assistants at St Albert the Great and at St Barnabas. Father Vincent Robichaud, SM, provincial of the Marist Fathers, mentioned to Father DePlaunty that there was a congregation of Marist Sisters, and among other ministries they were involved in education, but they were international and their general house was in Rome, Italy. "It was a long shot," Father Robichaud said, "but maybe there might be a possibility of getting that congregation to staff the schools."

Father dePlaunty was not one to let grass grow under his feet, so he and Father Evon jumped on a plane to Rome and met with the Very Reverend Mother Louis Chanel and the General Administration of the Marist Sisters. The two priests came back with great joy with a promise that both schools would be staffed by Marist Sisters. And that happened.

As a follow-up on the promise from Rome, Sister Dominic, Provincial of the Marist Sisters in Canada, and Sister Mary Regina, a general councilor from Rome, met with Father DePlaunty and drew up contracts and procedures. Plans were set in motion for visas, housing, education, working and living arrangements.

At that time, Ireland had many vocations and so the first sisters came from there. It was on September 19, 1956, that Mother Ephrem, Sisters Ildefonse, Justina, (MaryRose Keegan), Constance and Monessa stepped off a BOAC plane at Willow Run airport in Detroit.

Air travel was very different at that time. Right on the tarmac, as the five sisters deplaned after a sleepless night, were Monsignor Deady, Superintendent of Catholic Schools representing the diocese, Father dePlaunty, Father Evon, Father Robichaud, SM, Sister Dominic, SM, two IHM Sisters and two Sisters of Charity and a large contingent of parishioners representing parish and civic organizations. After introductions and welcome, there was an abundance of photographing before the sisters were escorted to their residence. A Mass of Thanksgiving at the parish church at noon was very well attended by parishioners.

Our residence was a three roomed bungalow which had been the parish rectory at 5130 Pardee Road. It was beautifully decorated with the Irish theme to welcome the sisters. The newly built convent, capable of housing twelve sisters comfortably, was ready for occupancy in 1964.

In the midst of so many adjustments, and without much lapse of time appointments began. Mother Dominic and Sister Ephrem visited Marygrove College, which was run by the IHM sisters. It was arranged that Sisters Ildefonse & Monessa would attend there. All fees were waived so as not to burden the parish with any fees and to ensure the independence of the Marist Congregation. Mother Ephrem and Sister Justina took over the two groups of first graders from the two lay teachers who had held the fort until the sisters arrived. Sister Constance was assigned to the convent and the supervision of students at school.

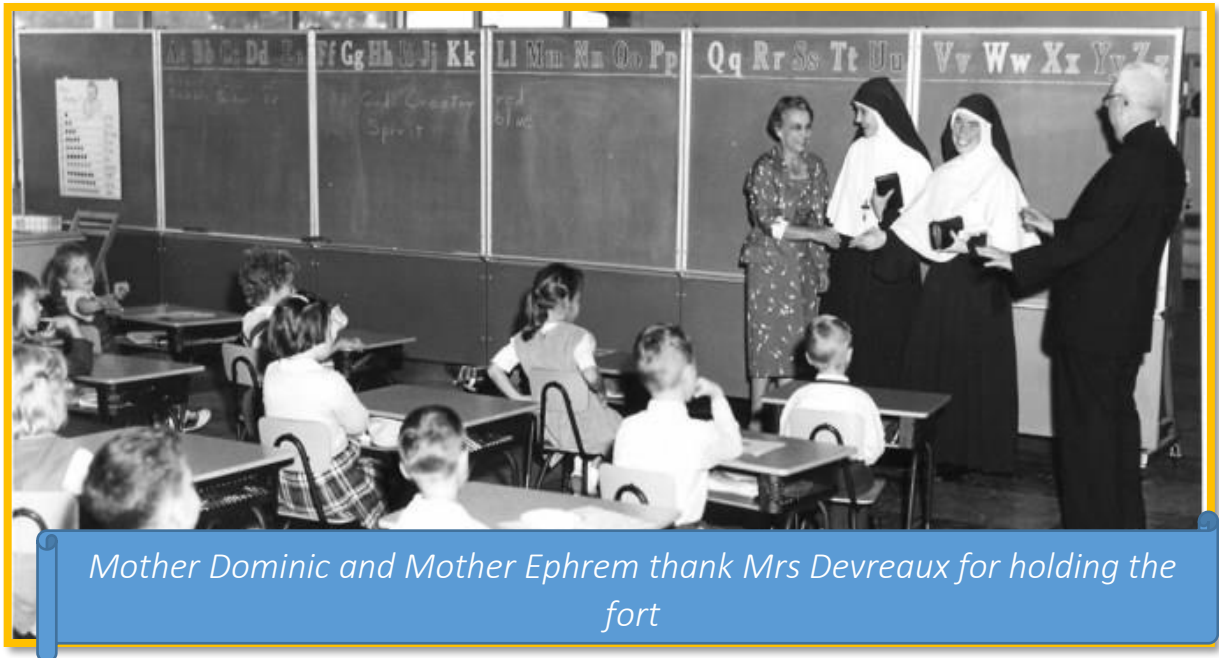
The following days were filled with activities. Of note was an open house for the religious communities in the diocese to come and meet the sisters. Representatives for more than ten congregations came and all made us feel welcome, needed and wanted. Most of them staffed schools. From once they learned that the system of education in Ireland was different from that of the States, offers of all kinds of help came. In fact, very soon the IHM sisters who staffed a school nearby arrived with educational materials of all sorts and their experienced teachers were on hand to give advice and guidance. And other congregations did likewise. It was inspiring to witness the sense of mission, the unity in ministry, the dedication to catholic education and the sisterly solidarity that existed among congregations.

An open house was also held for parishioners. The sisters were showered with gifts of all kinds of foods, linens, and house decorations.

The school began with two classes of first grade in a room owned by the public school and later the parish social hall was used. Each succeeding year two classes were added. A school with sixteen classrooms was built and for many years there were two sections of each grade – one through eight, with numbers over forty in each classroom.



Fr. DePlauty welcomes the sister to their new home on 5130 Pardee Road.



From the very beginning, all five sisters were involved in the religious education program for children who attended public schools. These classes were conducted after regular school hours. Again there were very large classes from grades one to eight. Eighty-eight children received First Communion and ninety-nine were confirmed in the spring of 1957.

To continue the expanding ministry Sister Berchmans (Teresa Reid) came from Ireland in 1957 and Sisters Annette (Frances Feeley) and Petronilla (Evelyn Brett) in 1958 and this was followed by other sisters from Ireland, England and Canada. We relocated to a larger house at 4672 Parker Avenue and in 1964 we moved into a newly built convent. From the Dearborn community St Barnabas School and later ministries were established in Wheeling, West Virginia, Chicago, Illinois and Texas.

The sisters administered and staffed the school until 1989. Because of a shortage of Marist Sisters, an IHM Sister then became principal and she was followed by lay principals. The sisters remained part of the staff until the end. In 2006 with great sadness on the part of the Sisters, parishioners and loyal friends, the school closed its doors for good. The sisters left in 2007.

The Marist Sisters are filled with gratitude; deep and sincere gratitude for the great privilege of having belonged to St Albert Parish Family; grateful for the wonderful parishioners who were our friends and who walked with us in love, support and friendship and helped us to get closer to Our Lord; lasting friendships were formed. These parents trusted us with the education of their children. And these same children inspired us with their loyalty and love of life. Again, treasured friendships were formed with these students and they continue to enrich our lives to this day The noble work, the dedication, and the sacrifice of so many who lovingly labored is known to God alone.