



Above: Sr. Elizabeth Carey (Sr. Xavier), Sr. Dymna Doran (Sr. de Sales), Sr. Anne Fitzsimons (Sr. John), Sr. Laverne Fullem, Sr. Mary Thomas Fullem, Sr. Yolanda Mendoza, Sr. Christa Parra, Sr. Raphael Quinn, Sr. Terri Stafford

Celebrating Our 70th year



We celebrate our IBVM Sisters' 70th year of service to SS. Simon and Jude Parish and Phoenix community.

August 22, 1954 - 2024



Image Above from Left: Sr. Josephine O'Brien (Mother Mary Jude), Sr. Elizabeth Carey (Mother Mary Xavier), Sr. Anna Bailey (Mother Mary Stanislaus) and Sr. Christine Gilsenan (Mother Mary Regis)

This anniversary marks seven decades of the IBVM Sisters' unwavering commitment to educational excellence, spiritual growth and community service. As we reflect on this journey that began in 1954, we recognize the countless contributions made by our Sisters and the cherished friendships formed along the way. Our Sisters are blessed to know many generations of families.



An Account of the Foundation and Apostolate of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto) in the Arizona Region

Twenty years ago, the State of Arizona, United States of America, became the scene of the missionary endeavour of a group of Irish Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On August 22, 1954, five sisters left Saint Michael's, Navan, County Meath, for Phoenix, Arizona, on the invitation of Bishop Gercke of the Diocese of Tucson, and of the Reverend Paul P. Smith, Pastor of SS. Simon and Jude Church, Phoenix, Arizona. The parish had been newly formed to meet the needs of a growing population in the suburbs of a thriving city in the Valley of the Sun.

The sisters were requested to staff the parochial school in an effort to provide Christian education for elementary school children whose parents chose to send them to a Catholic school rather than to the public state schools where God's name may not be mentioned. The school opened in September with four newly-constructed classrooms and about two hundred and ten students, boys and girls, between the ages of six to ten years. Each year, sisters were added to the community from the Navan family houses, while others were recalled to resume duties in the Diocese of Meath. Building projects were also undertaken by the parish until the parish plant was completed with a total of seventeen classrooms, cafeteria, kitchen, convent, rectory, libraries (adult and children's), audio-visual and music rooms, teachers' lounge, religious education office, facilities for approximately seven hundred students, ages six to fourteen. The final addition was the erection of the permanent Church, which today, is the Cathedral Church of the five-year-old Diocese of Phoenix.

Besides teaching a full schedule of academic subjects in the grade school, as well as art, music and physical education, kindergarten through grade eight, aided by a staff of lay teachers, the sisters also conducted religious education classes on Saturdays for students attending public state schools. They were also involved with the Mexican community in a mission Chapel of Ease, Santa Rosa, which is located within the boundaries of SS. Simon and Jude Parish. In those days, many of the people of Santa Rosa worked in the cotton and vegetable fields made possible through the miracles of irrigation in a desert land on the suburbs of the city, and today are engulfed within the boundaries of a fast-growing city that is aptly named Phoenix.

Due to the phenomenal growth of the Church of Phoenix, the financial burdens of providing quality education with absolutely no state aid, the rising cost of teacher salaries, the lack of numbers of religious personnel to staff classrooms, our schools can never hope to fulfill the needs of our Catholic parishioners — the ones who bear the financial burden and whose sacrifices make the parish school and school systems possible.

The academic standards of our schools are high, and our students are second to none as they take their places in the finest high schools. Athletic prowess is nurtured, with special emphasis on good sportsmanship. Science education is a must, and our students capture prizes not only in the state science fairs, but also in the state-sponsored mathematics, speech, art and spelling contests. Special awareness and generosity toward the less-fortunate are cultivated traits of our students, as they try to raise money to provide food, clothing and other needs of poor and underprivileged families.

Over the years, dramatic changes have taken place in the manner in which religious education programs are presented. Since parents are the primary educators of their children, they are invited to participate in the preparation of their children for the reception of the Sacraments. This instruction for adults is an integral part of our apostolate. From the traditional program of classroom instruction of the children, a total family-type religious education has emerged. Parents accompany the students to the classes. Activities which encourage participation by all members of the family during the coming week are explored. The children then go to their respective classrooms for instruction at their age and grade level, while speakers present the 'subject of the week' on an adult level to parents. Finally, all come together once again for a para-liturgical celebration, or an audio-visual or dramatic arts interpretation of the Word of God, followed by the family's celebration of the Eucharist together.

The year 1972 marked a year of special blessing and progress for Arizona. The Spanish Province shared with us two sisters which helped us accept an offer to staff a school being vacated by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet in Prescott, a city in the mountains, one hundred miles from Phoenix, and also, the establishment of the Arizona Region on an experimental basis. The school in Prescott has eight grades with about two hundred-forty boys and girls enrolled. The coming of the sisters from Spain has brought new hope to the Mexican population of our parishes—a Catholic, Spanish-speaking people very numerous in the Southwest, many of whom, over the years, have been estranged from the Church due to the lack of priests who speak their language.

1973 marks a year of new hope for the future of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Arizona: the entrance of three American girls into our community. On September 8, 1974, they were received into the newly-opened Novitiate of the Arizona Region. May the Lord grant them perseverance.

SR. M. ELIZABETH.

* Two of these made Final Vows October 1

Dear Friends,

On August 22, 1954, the Feast of the Queenship of Mary, five members of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters) set out on a journey from Ireland to establish a new foundation of their Order in the United States of America, precisely in Phoenix, Arizona. The Sisters' names are: Sisters Kieran Duigenan, Angela O'Reilly, Jude O'Brien, Carmel Collier and Eithne Gallagher. They undertook this historic journey at the invitation of yours truly, Father Paul Smith, founding Pastor of Saints Simon and Jude Parish in northwest Phoenix.

Back in those days, when a new parish was founded, especially in a metropolitan area such as Phoenix, it was incumbent upon the pastor to establish a Catholic elementary school in conjunction with the founding of the parish. In our case, plans for the new school were under way as the first Church (now Smith Hall) was under construction.

However, there was a problem - where to find Catholic Nuns to staff the school! A couple of inquiries were made to no avail. A good friend of mine, Fr. Frank O'Reilly, whose sister, Angela, was a member of the Institute in Ireland, suggested that, perhaps, I should approach the Superior General of the Order with an invitation to send out Sisters to staff our school. Well, nothing ventured, nothing gained. I sent out the invitation to Rev. Mother Josepha.

A very important decision had to be made, and there was a lot of praying those days on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The series of negotiations went on for some time, while Mother Josepha kept reminding me that "God is good." Eventually, I enlisted the services of the top man in the diocese, Bishop Daniel J. Gercke of Tucson. It didn't hurt that the good bishop's sister was Kitty O'Shea from County Kerry in Ireland. Shortly thereafter, I received a letter from Mother Josepha stating that five of her Sisters had volunteered to come to Arizona and that a departure ceremony would be held on August 22, 1954, the Feast of the Queenship of Mary. That news was received with great rejoicing, and the rest is history.

Upon arrival in Phoenix the Sisters took up residence in a rented house at the corner of 27th Drive and Keim. At a later date, for greater convenience, they moved into the then rectory which is now the Life House, while the priests moved to another location in the vicinity. The school opened its doors in early September, 1954 with an enrollment of between 50 and 60 students in each of the first four classrooms, grades 1 to 4. A far cry from later years when the number of students per room was reduced to a smaller number for more effective education. The first Church and School were dedicated by Bishop Gercke on October 17, 1954. The Sisters adjusted well to their new surroundings, and the fears of some parents that their children would be coming home speaking with an "Irish brogue" never materialized! The Sisters spoke the "King's English"!

In the ensuing years the school grew by leaps and bounds, what with the addition of two classrooms each for grades 1 to 8. A kindergarten was added together with a cafeteria, library, and rooms for music, science and computer programs. Coaches were hired for boys and girls exercises on our spacious playgrounds which comprise our 17 acre plant. Students are given a good grounding in their faith with religion classes and regular participation in Church liturgies at all levels.

Additional Sisters arrived from Ireland and Spain as well as some local young ladies who embraced the religious life of the Institute. The Loreto Sisters, aided by professional and dedicated lay teachers provided and are providing a system of quality education which is second to none in Arizona, a fact that is well testified to by the Catholic and Public Schools in the area. The Sisters took possession of the much needed new convent in June, 1957. In January, 1985 a novitiate (Mary Ward House) was erected at the northeast corner of the parish property for the purpose of training women who are called to the Religious Life of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Our Loreto Sisters are involved in the total life of every parish in which they minister. Presently, in addition to Ss. Simon and Jude, the Sisters are ministering in Sacred Heart Parish and School in Prescott, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish and St. Mary's School in Flagstaff. They are also ministering in such programs as Parish Outreach, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Hospital Chaplaincy, Parish Religious Education and Special Education for the disadvantaged.

In conclusion, let me say that this letter does not do sufficient justice to the fine work of the Loreto Sisters in our communities. Congratulations are in order on the 40th Anniversary of their foundation in Arizona. We are eternally grateful to the five Sisters who blazed the trail in 1954 and to those who have followed in their footsteps over the years. I pray that God will bless the Institute with added members, so that the good work which began in 1954 will continue in the years ahead for the glory of God and the benefit of the people of God.

Sincerely,

Fr. Paul Smith