

## The Story of our Origin

Ladies of Charity was the first of the great foundations of St. Vincent de Paul. At the time, St. Vincent was pastor at Chatillon-les-Dombes in the Diocese of Lyons, France. Before Mass on a Sunday in August 1617, a parishioner told him of a family living on a farm close by who had become ill and was in dire need. St. Vincent was so affected by the recounting of their suffering, and he told the story with such feeling to his congregation, that many went to the family with food and other necessities. After Vespers, St. Vincent went to the farm and there he saw the abundance of provisions donated in response to his appeal. He realized the efficacy of his words. *“These good people are exercising great charity,” he said, “but it is not well regulated. This poor family will have too many provisions at one time and some of them will be spoiled and wasted; in a short time these persons will be reduced to their former state of need. Would it not be possible to convince these good women to give themselves to God to serve the poor permanently?”*

A few days later, he assembled several women of the parish and suggested that they band together to carry out this good work. They agreed. He outlined rules that received the approbation of the Archbishop of Lyons, and this resulted in the formation of the first Association of the Ladies of Charity. It was canonically approved December 8, 1617, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

(From Manual of The Ladies of Charity of the United States of America, page 1)

## Ladies of Charity in the USA

Catherine Harkins, at age 23, had a dream in which she saw St. Vincent winding his way through the streets of Paris, gathering up children who were poor and neglected. In the dream, he directed Catherine to do the same. After several recurrences of the dream, Catherine shared the dream with her confessor, a Vincentian priest at St. Vincent's Church in St. Louis, MO. The priest suggested that it was probably more than a dream and guided her to pray.

Following the wisdom of St. Vincent de Paul, Catherine gathered a group of eleven women into a society whose goal was to serve those who were poor. They soon learned of the international organization of Ladies of Charity and with the help of their Spiritual Director became affiliated with the mother branch in Paris. Catherine Harkins became the first American President on December 8, 1857.

The group ministered to the poor who were sick and hungry, bringing remedies and food, and providing them much needed support with a compassionate touch. They addressed the needs of many families who were experiencing bankruptcy and depressed living conditions in the St. Louis area. Catherine was especially sensitive to the needs of neglected children at the House of the Guardian Angels. She saw to the educational needs of the underprivileged children living in the city as well as the vulnerable widows with young children.

St. Vincent would say that each of these events in the life of Catherine Harkins were a part of God's plan in the Providence of God and not just happenstance.

(From Vincentian Spirituality and Formation for Ladies of Charity of the United States of America, page 17)

## **LOC in Metro Kansas City (example)**

Sister Mathilde Comstock D.C. arrived in Kansas City, Missouri in 1952, to administer the work at St. Vincent's Maternity Hospital for unwed mothers and St. Anthony's Baby Home. She formally sought volunteers to provide hands-on care and fundraising projects. In April, 1952, fifty ladies gathered at Sister Mathilde's request and became known as Ladies of Charity – St. Anthony's Auxiliary. In April, 1965, the Association was patently erected, and on September 1, 1976, the Association received its charter from the Association of Ladies of Charity of the United States.

(From Ladies of Charity of Metropolitan Kansas City, Roster and Bylaws, page 2)