

# Community grew from humble roots to global service

By Sister Noreen Neary, SC

In 1853, James Roosevelt Bayley, a nephew of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and the first bishop of Newark, sought a community of women religious for his newly-established diocese, which encompassed all of New Jersey. When his aunt's communities could spare none, he sent five young women from Newark and Paterson to the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati for initial formation with the understanding that two Sisters of Charity from New York – Sister Mary Xavier Mehegan and Sister Mary Catharine Nevin – would oversee the fledgling congregation.

Although free to return to New York, the two professed sisters cast their lot with the Church in New Jersey, founding the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth in September 1859.

Having already outgrown the original facility in Newark that served as an orphanage, a hospital and a novitiate, Mother Xavier purchased property from the diocese, which was relocating Seton Hall College from Madison to South Orange. On the feast of the Visitation in July 1860, the motherhouse was relocated to Morris County.

During Mother Xavier's tenure of 56 years, the community experienced remarkable growth in membership and ministries. Schools, hospitals, crèches (day nurseries), orphanages, a home for the incurably ill, a residence for working women and the first college for women in New Jersey were established. During the Civil War, Sisters of Charity cared for soldiers on both sides in emergency hospitals set up at the train stations in Newark and Trenton. Then, as now, the sisters extended themselves personally to the sick, the poor, the dying, the orphaned, the bereaved, in short, to all those in need.

Within the first quarter-century, the ministry of the Sisters of Char-

ity of Saint Elizabeth began to reach beyond New Jersey to Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Florida and other states. Beginning in 1925, the community began to serve the people of God in more distant areas, such as China, Bolivia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands and, in more recent times, El Salvador, Mexico and Haiti.

And, while the community was founded in a diocese that encompassed the entire state, as each new diocese has been established the Sisters of Charity have served the people of God in the dioceses of Paterson, Trenton, Camden and Metuchen, as well as the Archdiocese of Newark.

### New Ministries

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) profoundly altered religious life.

The council's directives to make the following of Christ in the Gospels the norm of religious life, to return to

the spirit of the founders and foundresses, and to adjust to the changed conditions of the times led to the establishment of new ministries and the revitalization of some traditional ministries, even as other commitments regrettably were ended. Religious women and men no longer viewed their vocation as separation from the world but as active involvement with the world. The Sisters responded enthusiastically to the Church's exhortations to hear the cries of the poor and to make justice a constitutive element of following Christ.

While we retain some of our earliest works, the Sisters of Charity also seek "to read the signs of the times" in keeping with the spirit of Vatican Council II. The opening of Josephine's Place in 2003 as the community's most recently sponsored work was unique in its history. In the words of Sister Judy Mertz, its founding vision was "to reflect the needs of women

as they articulated them and to be a place where they could feel safe, be respected, and form community with each other."

While new in its desire to work in partnership with the women it serves, its establishment also resonates with the community's heritage of service in Elizabeth, where the Sisters of Charity have sought to meet the educational and healthcare needs of its citizens since 1866.

Members of the community thank God for all the sisters who have gone before them and on whose strength it was built, for all those who have ministered with it since 1859, and for all who support its ministries.

The members celebrate their partnership with women and men of faith as together they work to realize the Reign of God.

*Sister Noreen Neary serves as archivist for the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth*



**Sister Jean Stabile**

Sister Jean Stabile (Sister Jean Francis) reflects that some things have changed since she entered the Sisters of Charity in 1943. For one thing, sisters no longer wear the habit of that day, which featured a cap with intricate starched ruffles called "flutes."

To Sister Jean, the essence of being a Sister of Charity, however, remains unchanged. "I never had any doubts about my vocation."

She is devoted to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and what Mother Seton and Saint Vincent dePaul both so beautifully and powerfully represented in the way they lived their lives. "Always do for others. Saint Vincent de Paul saw Christ in

## Reflection by a Sister of Charity

everyone. That is a beautiful thought to have with you in religious life. You are doing it for Christ."

She encourages others to read about St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, "because that would also sum up what the Sisters of Charity are all about — the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth."

It was at the now-closed St. Peter the Apostle High School in New Brunswick where Sister Jean first came in contact with the Sisters of Charity. "Until I got to St. Peter's, I didn't even know that the Sisters of Charity existed. At St. Peter's, Sisters of Charity taught practically every class. They were great teachers."

Sister Jean remembers hearing one of the Sisters of Charity, Sister Regina Marie, address the students on religious life during her senior year. She became convinced that God was calling her to religious life as a Sister of Charity

Sister Jean loved her assignments at St. Peter's, first as a teacher from 1955-1964, then as principal from 1979-1989. She loved interacting with the students and was obviously loved by them. She faithfully attended school

sporting events and pep rallies (perhaps using her cheerleading training from years earlier.) From time to time, she still proudly wears a wool jacket embroidered with "Sister Jean," which she wore when seated on the bench with the team at football games. She continues to keep in touch with several of her former students and loves to hear from former students who are now parents or teachers themselves.

Though no longer in full time ministry in education, Sister Jean remains vital and active. She loves to drive and coordinates the transportation program for sisters who live in the motherhouse in Convent Station. She goes out almost every day to drive a sister to an appointment to attend to another errand. When waiting for someone to be finished with an appointment, she prefers to use the time to take long walks rather than sit still in a waiting room.

Between all her comings and goings, Sister Jean also volunteers in the Sisters of Charity Development Office. She enjoys following sports and current events, and especially enjoys spending time with her loving extended family.

Sister Jean celebrated her 70th Jubilee as a Sister of Charity in 2013. Sister Jean, along with all the other Sisters of Charity, continues to pray every day for vocations. She trusts God, and hopes that women will listen for God's call to them.

Please  
pray for  
vocations