

### Order's ministry focuses on needy, especially children, poor, sick

Imagine, the Little Servant Sisters of the Immaculate Conception owe their origin in 1850 as a congregation to a remarkable lay apostle of the landed gentry in Poland, Blessed Edmund Bojanowski, celibate, (1814–1871). Their founder's great love for God and devotion to Mary bore fruit in compassionate service toward orphaned and uncared for children, the disadvantaged and the sick. As a precursor of Vatican Council II, Blessed Edmund's witness and service of love of neighbor had its source in the Gospel, dependent on a living union with Christ, especially in the Eucharist, and His Church. He was beatified by Pope St. John Paul II in Warsaw in 1999.

Today, the Little Servant Sisters continue to witness to Christ worldwide, living the evangelical law of total love of God and love of neighbor, in imitation of Mary, the humble handmaid of the Lord, and ministering to the needy, especially children, the poor, the sick and the elderly. This mission through baptism and religious consecration with public vows and a religious habit, in a community of prayer and works of mercy, is a particular relationship with Christ in their vocation.

In 1926, five Little Servant Sisters

arrived by steamship at Brooklyn, N.Y., from their Motherhouse in Stara Wies, near Brzozow, Poland, at the invitation of Father Wojciech Malusiecki, pastor of St. Mary Parish in Reading, Pa., where they opened a

kindergarten and youth ministry in a former rectory. Five years later, including almost two years at an orphanage on an old farm in Wilmington, Del., the community was providentially led to purchase the Hampton Cutter mansion property in Woodbridge, with charitable funds and the added help of Father Joseph Urban, pastor of St. Stephen Parish in Perth Amboy. The new residence, a prayer center, became St. Joseph's Home for orphans from

1931 to 1945. Local vocations were accepted. Religious education was conducted in nearby parishes and still continues. During World War II, countless refugees were assisted at the convent, clinic and adjacent hall. The existing Mt. Carmel Home Visiting Nursing Service was started. Various functions were held and St. Joseph's Charitable Society was active until the 1990's.

In 1968, St. Joseph's Home became the Provincial House with the establishment of Holy Trinity Province, until 1987 when the center of the

American Province was transferred to the new Provincialate in present-day Cherry Hill, where the Novitiate was established in 1942. It is near St. Mary's Catholic Home, which the sisters pioneered on a diocesan farm from 1940.

In 1973, the hall in Woodbridge became Strawberry Hill Senior Day Center, welcoming up to 100 guests until inevitable demolition in 2004.

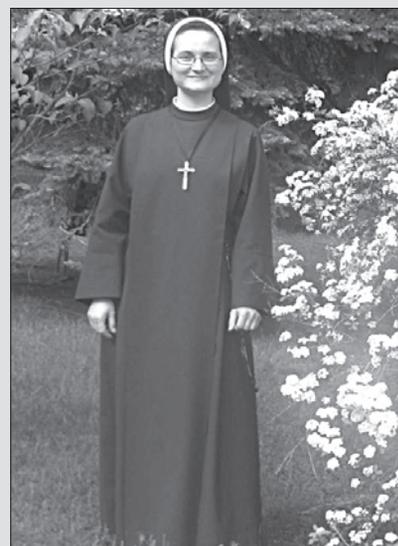
From 1973 to 2013, the Little Servant Sisters staffed Our Lady of Lourdes School in Milltown and from 1994 to 1996 St. Stanislaus Kostka School in Sayreville.

In 1981, the Little Servant Sisters of the Immaculate Conception entered a new venture in Woodbridge, with the dedication of their newly constructed

Saint Joseph Senior Residence for 60 residents. Today, the facility is an Assisted Living Home. In 1992, the adjacent Saint Joseph Nursing Center was added for 51 residents. In 2005, a new annex was opened at St. Joseph Convent. Thus the dream of the Little Servant Sisters was realized through trust in Divine Providence, hard work and fundraising with the collaboration of the religious community, the Church and benefactors.

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—*Blessed Edmund*



Little Servant Sister of the Immaculate Conception Sister Joanna Sopala

#### By Sister Joanna Sopala, LSIC

At the age of 13, I had my first cherished encounter with God after the tragic death of my younger brother. Despairing and with a broken heart, I searched for consolation and healing in prayer. God in his fatherly goodness dried my tears and strengthened me.

Sadly, the love and faithfulness of my young heart began to diminish. Slowly, my religious devotions took a back seat as I became totally absorbed by my studies. However, God waited patiently for me and did not allow me to forget the precious experience. He poured into my heart an increasing desire to return to his Eternal Love. In turn, I choose nursing as a means to express my love to God by ministering to my neighbor, but it was not enough. My heart felt empty, so in my search for happiness, I emigrated.

#### Reflection by a Servant Sister

Feeling estranged and alone in a foreign country, I turned to God for help. I found it at the Our Lady of Czestochowa Sanctuary, where the Most Sacred and Most Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary waited for me. Steadily my heart was filled with grace so that it began to radiate with love. As my fervor for prayer increased so did my thoughts about religious life. I began to comprehend that Jesus was inviting me to a more perfect life. Jesus' words "come and follow me" were persistently on my mind. This is what I wanted and desired with all my heart but found it difficult to believe. Joy intermingled with fear.

Consequently, in Czestochowa I met the Little Servant Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, whose charism is to love God above all and follow Jesus' example in serving the needy, especially the children, the poor and the sick. This charism perfectly matched my yearnings! Finally, I understood that this was my vocation — to be a Little Servant Sister.

What can I say or do in response to Jesus' love? On my knees, I can repeat with Mary, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done according to your word," and with a grateful heart whisper — thank you, Jesus.

*Sister Joanna Sopala serves as director of nursing at St. Joseph Senior Home, Woodbridge.*

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