

Blessed Pauline's commitment to sick, poor created congregation

In 1873, a fearless, hope-filled mother foundress of the Sisters of Christian Charity, whose members were no longer welcome in Germany as religious teachers or caregivers because of the Kulturkampf (culture conflict) and, who was herself now living in Belgium, arrived in America to visit 18 members of the congregation.

Pastors of parishes founded to serve Catholics of German descent in North America and also in Argentina and Chile had invited the sisters. They came to minister in parishes such as St. Henry, New Orleans; Immaculate Conception, Melrose (Bronx), N.Y.; and St. Nicholas, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

The foundress, Mother Pauline was impressed by the expansiveness of the country, but was even more impressed by the vast field of service to the Church that lay open to her and to her sisters in America.

On April 14, 1985, then-Pope, now St. John Paul II would pronounce this woman of vision Blessed Pauline von Mallinckrodt.

Family Values

Blessed Pauline was born in Minden, Germany, June 3, 1817, a daughter of a well-known government official, Detmar, and a devout Catholic mother, Bernardine.

Detmar, a Lutheran, promised Bernardine he would have their children raised Catholic, even though it could mean the loss of his position because the government demanded that children be reared in the religion of the father.

Because Pauline was sickly at birth, her parents had her baptized at home. She recovered and grew into a lovely, lively little girl, to the delight of her parents and their many friends. In time, two sons and another daughter were added to the family – George, Herman and Bertha.

In spite of the family's wealth, the children were brought up in a home where the virtue of charity was practiced. Detmar invited sick and disabled villagers to ride in his carriage, and Bernardine collected donations for the poor and provided medical care for the sick.

By the time Pauline was 10, she knew how she wanted to spend her life. Her devotion to God was firm and her determination to help the sick and the poor was strengthened by the influence of Louise Hensel, her teacher at St. Leonard's Academy.

When she was 17, her mother died and she assumed the responsibility for the household. In time, while her brothers and sister continued their education, Pauline and her father moved to an estate that he had bought in Boeddeken. Each day, she walked to the church in Wewelsburg for early Mass. On her way home, the poor often stopped her and asked her to visit the sick. She always carried a basket of medicine and food for the needy.

During the winter, the family lived in Paderborn, where Pauline joined the Ladies Auxiliary, a group organized for the care of the sick and the poor. With her own money, she opened a center to care for the children of the poor, who often worked long hours. She also welcomed blind children and, in time, established the School for the Blind in Paderborn.

When her father died, Pauline searched for a religious order that would assume care for the children and especially, the blind. When she found none, the bishop encouraged her to found her own congregation.

On Aug. 21, 1849, her relatives, friends and her beloved blind children witnessed the birth of the Congregation of the Sisters of Christian Charity. She and her three companions received the Holy Habit during the Investing Ceremony in the Bussdorf Church in Paderborn.

In the ensuing years, Mother Pauline accepted offers to teach in school and education soon became the order's primary work. The sisters also staffed the School for the Blind and several orphanages.

Winds of Change

In 1871, Otto von Bismarck, imperial chancellor of Germany, took steps to unify and strengthen the country by a radical separation of Church and state, with the Church subservient to the state. At first, the sisters were prohibited from teaching in public schools. Later, the prohibition extended to their own private schools.

The May Laws of 1875 dissolved convents and stipulated that their property be managed by the state. Although Mother Pauline witnessed the destruction of her life's work, she trusted that God would provide. She wrote countless letters, visited many influential persons and took all the legal steps open to her, but to no avail. However, Divine Providence intervened in the form of requests from pastors for sisters to serve German immigrant parishes in North and South America.

In 1873, she visited Wilkes-Barre, Pa., in the Diocese of Scranton, where her sisters were serving at St. Nicholas Parish, as the site of the new motherhouse. When Mother Pauline visited her sisters again in 1880, she was delighted with the spacious building, but she was even more delighted by the flourishing community that greeted her.

The sisters were now serving in seven missions in the Diocese of Scranton as well as in 25 other missions in Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Father Henry Theodore Martens, pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish, New Brunswick, visited St. Michael School in Elizabeth, where the Sisters of Christian Charity were serving, and decided he wanted

ed them for his new school. He wrote to the motherhouse in Wilkes-Barre and in September 1877, he welcomed three professed sisters and a postulant to St. John's.

When visiting the convents in 1880, Mother Pauline also came to New Brunswick to see the sisters there. Today, the members of St. John the Baptist Parish have the unique privilege of being the only parish in the diocese that can say Blessed Pauline visited their parish and worshipped in their church.

In April 1881, when Mother Pauline was ill with pneumonia, she asked the sisters to light candles so that the room would be ready for the coming of the bridegroom, Jesus. She died peacefully April 30, which is now her feast day on the liturgical calendar.

In 1916, the North American motherhouse was transferred to Wilmette, Ill., to make it more centrally located. Mallinckrodt Convent in Wilkes-Barre was then known as St. Ann's.

By 1927, the congregation in North America had become so numerous that the North American Province was divided into

the Eastern Province with a motherhouse in Mendham, N.J., and the Western Province, with the motherhouse in Wilmette.

The Sisters of Christian Charity have been ministering in the Diocese of Metuchen since its founding in 1981.

Currently, they serve in:

- Metuchen, where one serves as a teacher at St. Francis of Assisi Cathedral School; one as the Middle School and High School Youth director for the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi Parish.

- Bernardsville, where the sisters serve as teachers in St. Elizabeth School and in Parish Ministry and Catechist Formation/Adult Education at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish.

- Kendall Park, where one serves as pastoral associate at St. Augustine of Canterbury Parish.

- Monroe Township, where two serve as pastoral associates at Nativity of Our Lord Parish.

- Skillman, where one serves at St. Charles Borromeo Parish as pastoral assistant for Family Support.



By Sister Mathilde DeLucy

"The Blessed Sacrament is my Life and my Bliss to It do I owe the Grace of my Holy Vocation" ~ Blessed Pauline von Mallinckrodt

In seventh grade, I felt for the first time, that God was calling me to be a Sister while I was attending the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Being in seventh grade, this was probably the last thing I wanted to be in my mind; and I didn't really know anything about religious life, and so I tucked it away. Yet, many times from then on when I would be at Mass, during the consecration, the same words I heard in seventh grade would tug at my heart: "One day I want you to serve me specially." I do not know why this translated in my mind that I was called to be a Sister, but the thought wouldn't leave me.

After entering high school, I continued to play the "put off" game, but God had me encounter more communities of

Reflection by a Sister of Christian Charity

religious women during these years. One of these communities happened to be the Sisters of Christian Charity. The SCCs were always so joyful and always incorporated in silent ways that "holy charity" was indeed the root of all their interactions with the students. "It is God's joy and love that should mark how we give ourselves to others. With these gifts we can help others to see Christ in us." These words that one Sister of Christian Charity said to a group of us in high school on a retreat were a second inspiration to my vocation and also helped me to see that "Yes! This is how I have been looking to love others!"

The more I got to know about the SCCs, the more I realized that God has put within my heart a gravitation to the same charism he has given to these Sisters and to our foundress, Blessed Pauline von Mallinckrodt. So I entered in 2011 and since then I have found the joy of being an SCC to be always evident to me within the context of our Eucharistic life-style lived in service to all of God's people.

For those who are looking at the possibility of being called to the religious life the best advice I could give is first to talk to sisters! If you find that there is something in their spirituality that attracts you ask more questions about it. Try to visit their local convents and then their house of formation to see how they live and pray together.