

Sisters of Social Service

Rooted in the social teachings of the Church, we are sent to be pioneers



Celebrating 90 years of
working with and supporting
people on the margins of our
world through social services
and advocacy

The Sights and Sounds of Sawtelle Center

by Jamey Fitzpatrick, Development Director and
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Since there are so many ways to stay in touch today, we sometimes forget the days when it took a visit or a letter in the mail to reawaken a friendship and restart a conversation. A time when Sisters and others went and knocked on doors to find out how a family was, or to ask if someone needed help who was recovering from an illness or a recent addition to the family.

As we continue to celebrate the 90 years of Sisters of Social Service in Los Angeles, we are revisiting many ministries that were and are a vital part of the local communities where Sisters lived and worked.



Sisters helped build community within the walls of their centers, but more importantly they also nurtured it within the hearts and minds of residents and local businesses in the neighborhoods. They talked to the families and children to identify their gifts and created programs and found resources to meet those needs.

One such neighborhood was the Sawtelle neighborhood in West Los Angeles.

Peek inside the doors of Sawtelle Center, circa 1950

Imagine a huge open room bursting at the seams with the laughter and conversation of children. On one side, a group of smaller children are doing a craft project for Easter, while on the other end of the room the teenage boys animatedly plan a dance that they are in charge of organizing. A sister sits in the midst of each group, guiding and facilitating as needed, but also letting the children work things out for themselves. They are in the process of learning leadership skills and group dynamics, even if it seems like it's all about the dance or arts and crafts.

A girls' club will meet later with another sister out on the playground. Meanwhile, in the little kitchen out back next to the office, a cooking class is baking angel food cakes together. The elementary school boys and girls, bedecked in aprons and smiles, are hard at work following the recipes to make cakes for a parents' meeting that night.

Who were these children and teens?

You wouldn't have any idea from how well they worked together or the excitement in the air, that this was one of the few places these young people had to call their own in the neighborhood. Aside from the park and the markets, the afternoon time didn't offer many safe places to gather and socialize while their parents were working. It was a center where the activities offered ran the gamut from catechism to basketball – getting assistance with school work to learning to cook – and everything in between for families and children.

Most of the teens and younger children were first or second generation Mexican-Americans, and their parents moved into the area when the Japanese-Americans were forced into relocation camps during WWII. There were no "support services" in place for these families and their children – and so the Sisters of Social Service responded to the needs and potential they saw in these families.

Opened in 1948, Sawtelle Center soon became a neighborhood hub filled with programs and resources – from afterschool activities and clubs, to family education and support, and field trips to the surrounding areas (ocean, mountains, camping) which were still out of reach for so many. Children and families from overcrowded housing situations had places to play, learn and connect, and the Sisters who were lucky enough to work with them were filled with years of joy, growth, and friendship from these families and their children.

1948 to today

Between 1948 Sawtelle Center's founding in St. Sebastian's Parish Hall and present day Regis House Community Center, there have been a variety of changes and different locations over the years. Many SSS Sisters and Juniors of Social Service have been involved in the day-to-day operations and long-term sustainability of this vital resource for the families and local community. Sawtelle Center moved from Sawtelle Boulevard to Iowa Avenue in 1956, was rechristened Regis House Community Center and expanded services for the local community. With the help of the Juniors, they eventually moved in 1969 into buildings constructed specifically for the needs of a full-service community center.

Regis House East in MacArthur Park was open for about 8 years in the late 1980s and early 1990s to meet the needs in that area. In 2007, the Sisters of Social Service bought a commercial warehouse in Historic Filipinotown and renovated it to meet current family and program needs.

Los Amigos De Sotel - Friends of Sawtelle

Some of the adults who were once the teens and children filling Sawtelle Center with their laughter, creativity and excitement began getting together for reunions a few years ago. Some people weren't receiving high school reunion notices since they were pulled out of school to



help at home or work before graduating, and many friends from their old neighborhood were being left out. Thus, **Friends of Sawtelle** was born.

An eight member committee has been connecting with old friends and helping look up people and spread the word. Each year the group's size has grown, and now each August dozens of people show up to connect, catch up on the year and tell stories from growing up together in the Sawtelle neighborhood.

One of the founding members of **Friends of Sawtelle**, Esther Medina Garcia, wrote a wonderful historical peek into the times for those coming to the reunion. **See attached article!**

Regis House Community Center Today

by Jamey Fitzpatrick, Development Director
and Sr. Albertina Morales, SSS



Although more than 60 years has elapsed since **Sawtelle Center** began, kids still love cooking, families still need help navigating our complex world and **Regis House** is alive and well and filled with dozens of visitors each day. Now located in Historic Filipinotown after moving in 2007 to fill a pressing need, more than 300 families are served there monthly, with offerings for all ages.

Children and teens can participate in Summer Day Camps and afterschool programs, and special programs focus on the needs of middle school students and provide job training for older teens (14-25 years old). Along with activities for young people throughout the year, Regis House tailors classes, programs and other advocacy services to meet the needs of parents, seniors and other adults. Staff and volunteers are well-versed in local resources and referrals – whether the need is emergency aid or long-term support with education,



employment or other public services.



A weekly food distribution pantry supplements families' resources, and there are nutrition and cooking classes for children and teens. Sisters and staff would like to offer adult literacy classes again, but they currently lack the funding to make that dream a reality. Parent trainings are also offered when partnering agencies can collaborate - an area that Regis House is hoping to expand with the help of new grants they are actively seeking. Regis House is also available to provide some emergency food and clothing on a very limited basis when individuals or families find themselves in a severe crisis. All families find compassion and strategic support within the walls of Regis House as they deal with the day-to-day challenges of living in poverty and work toward stronger futures for themselves and their children.

Although 98% of participants at Regis House live under the poverty level, most parents are working two or more jobs to help provide for their families. Their teens and younger children benefit from a safe, structured place to get homework help, play, take classes, and work on leadership and other skills that support their academic and social development. And the wrap-around programs that Regis House creates address not only the immediate needs, but also the long-term growth and potential these individuals and families clearly possess. Regis House is committed to its mission of promoting and encouraging social, emotional and physical activities for children, young adults and families in need.



From its roots in ***Sawtelle Center*** to present day ***Regis House Community Center***, thousands of children, teens and families have participated in our programs and activities – and given their incredible gifts to our local and global communities through their lives and their work. We are blessed to have worked with and alongside so many courageous, diverse and incredible individuals – in hard times and good times – and look forward to many more years of people coming inside our doors to build community and connections that help them – ***and all of us*** - reach our full potential.



Timeline of the Sawtelle Center and Regis House

Between 1948 when Sawtelle Center was founded and present day Regis House Community Center there have been a variety of changes and different locations over the years:

1948 **Sisters of Social Service started clubs and programs in St. Sebastian's Parish Hall with the Juniors of Social Service volunteering and helping support their needs.**

1949 **The Juniors of Social Service (Juniors) rented a facility on Sawtelle Boulevard, allowing the program to serve more children and families than they could previously. This space was home to the program until 1956.**

1956 **Regis House Community Center**, as Sawtelle Center was now renamed, **moved into a 2 bedroom house on Iowa Avenue** where it operated until 1969 when it moved into a brand new building. It was located on a large lot with avocado trees they were able to convert into a huge play yard. The Juniors financed the purchase of the house and had the property paid for in 5 years, as well as continuing their long history of active, hands-on volunteering with the children and families participating in programs.



1969 **With the Juniors of Social Service championing fundraising and other logistics, Regis House moved into the new buildings** that were constructed specifically for the needs of a full-service community center. Programs continued here until June 2007.



1987 **Regis House East was founded in MacArthur Park, a culturally diverse neighborhood needing social service programs.** This second Regis House served local residents until 1995 when it closed due to the financial strains of trying to keep two vital centers going at the same time.

2007 **The Sisters of Social Service bought a commercial warehouse in Historic Filipinotown and had it renovated to best serve the children and families in Regis House Community Center's new neighborhood.** Regis House currently offers programs and services here to hundreds of families each month.



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