Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
Office of IHM Mission Advancement
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...our mission: to evangelize, to catechize, to teach

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Did You Know...

Dear Friends,

Even good friends sometimes take one another for granted. We may assume, ***"You are my friend, so you already know this about me."*** We do not want to make that assumption. To help you learn more about our IHM Congregation, we are pleased to share the first installment of ***"Did You Know?"*** We hope you enjoy this simple introduction to highlights from our history, our founders, our growth, and the many ways we minister to and with those we serve. This month's focus is on our beginnings.

Did You Know...

- **The Need**: Reverend Louis Florent Gillet, a Belgian Redemptorist missionary, searched unsuccessfully for religious sisters to educate and minister to immigrants on the Michigan frontier whose spiritual and educational needs were largely unmet.
- **The Response**: Unable to find sisters for this mission, Father Gillet resolved to establish a religious community. The IHM Congregation was founded on November 10, 1845.
- **The Beginning**: Sister Theresa Maxis was the first to join him. From these humble beginnings, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary began to grow, inspired by love of God and neighbor.
- The IHM Congregation began in 1845 with three women who answered the call to establish what became the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: Mary Theresa Maxis (later Mother M. Theresa), Charlotte Ann Schaaf (Sister M. Ann), and Therese Renauld (Sister M. Celestine). Their legacy continues through the

congregations in Monroe, Michigan; Scranton, Pennsylvania; and Immaculata, Pennsylvania.

- **The First Convent**: The three women lived in a leaky log cabin along the River Raisin in Monroe, Michigan, with few basic furnishings or kitchen utensils.
- **The Spiritual Foundation**: Because Father Gillet was a Redemptorist priest, the new community was shaped by the spirituality of St. Alphonsus Liguori, founder of the Redemptorists.
- **Growing Needs in the Nineteenth Century**: As immigration increased in industrial centers, so did the need for basic education, religious instruction, spiritual care, and assistance with physical needs.
- **Expansion into Pennsylvania**: As parishes were established at a rate of nearly one each month, Philadelphia's fourth bishop, John Neumann, sought religious communities to staff the growing number of parochial schools. The newly formed IHM Sisters answered the call by taking responsibility for Saint Joseph School in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, which had previously been staffed by the Holy Cross Sisters.
- **Reading and a New Motherhouse**: In 1859, the Sisters began a second Pennsylvania mission in Reading. Their ministry soon inspired many women to seek membership in the community, leading to the establishment of a new Motherhouse at what is now St. Peter's Parish in Reading.
- **The Scranton Congregation**: In August 1871, the Congregation underwent its third and final division. The Most Reverend William O'Hara, bishop of the newly established Diocese of Scranton, asked Sisters already teaching within the diocese to form a new Motherhouse in Scranton, Pennsylvania.
- **From Reading to Immaculata**: As the number of Sisters in the Reading Motherhouse grew, the formation program moved to West Chester, Pennsylvania, in 1872. It remained there until 1966, when the present Motherhouse, Villa Maria House of Studies, was built in Immaculata, Pennsylvania.
- **The Immaculata Congregation Today**: Today, the Immaculata Congregation includes more than 400 Sisters serving in a wide range of ministries across New Hampshire, Texas, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, Georgia, Florida, and Peru.

Stay tuned for the next edition of ***Did You Know...***, when we will introduce Father Louis Florent Gillet, C.Ss.R., co-founder of the IHM Congregation.