

Very Reverend Central-Direction of the Louis Mission Society 1

During the past year we poor [ones] were again fortunate to receive 4,500 florins from the Central-Direction for the support of our missionary order, for which I, in the name of my Sisters, express thousandfold, deeply-felt thanks. Our thanks consist not of dead-letter words but of sincere prayer for our great benefactor and friends. My heart is filled with joy when I say that we were daily able, with a group of 2,400 children, to ask Almighty God and to storm all heaven for the Central-Direction and all members of the Mission Society. We asked that in His unbounded goodness, God might pour choicest blessings upon our benefactors in our beloved fatherland, that God may reward a thousand times by a happy eternity every little bit that you offer for the spread of God's Kingdom.

As already mentioned we have more than 4,000 children who are taught and cared for by the mission Sisters (the Order numbers 84 members) in 18 schools and four orphanages. These missions are placed principally under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and, therefore, bear her lovely name:

1. The Motherhouse in Milwaukee bears the beautiful title of Maria Regina Angelorum (Queen of Angels).
2. The novitiate house in Baltimore: Maria Mater Dolorosa (Sorrowful Mother) [St. James]
3. The branch [house] in Philadelphia: M. M. Purissima (Most pure Mother) [St. Peter].
4. Pittsburgh: M. Auxilium Christianorum (Help of Christians) [St. Philomena]
5. The Convent in Buffalo: Maria et St. Joseph [St. Mary]
6. The Convent in Carmel: B.V.M. di Monte Carmelo [Mount Calvary, Wisconsin]
7. The Convent in Detroit: Maria Mater Dei (Mother of God) [St. Mary]
8. The Convent in Alleghany: M. Regina Martyrum (Queen of Martyrs) St. Joseph Orphanage
9. The Convent in Rochester: M. sine labe concepta (M. conceived without sin) [St. Joseph]
10. The Convent in Rochester No. 2: Maria et St. Theresia [St. Peter and Paul]
11. The Convent in New York: Maria Regina sanctorum omnium (Queen of All Saints) Most Holy Redeemer
12. The Holy Cross Convent: Maria Refugium peccatorum (Refuge of sinners) [Holy Cross, Wisconsin]
13. St. Anthony Convent: Maria ad Nives (Mary of the Snows) [Fussville, now Menomonee Fall, Wisconsin]
14. The Convent in Port Washington: Desponsatio B.V.M. (Mary's betrothal) [St. Mary] [Mary's betrothal, January 23]

On this last feast day, our Order celebrates its church birthday, since on this day it was ratified by Christ's representative. As daughters of Mary we work under her

maternal protection for the spread of the kingdom of God, where Providence calls us. Truly a high and holy vocation! Would that many girls would heed it! Until now we have had no dearth, on the contrary a superfluity of candidates, who have asked for acceptance. Just lately 32 have asked to enter. In the past year 28 novices pronounced their vows, 21 postulants received the Holy habit, and 30 girls entered. In spite of this addition we still lack personnel to fill the needs of the missions. Eleven different places are asking for Sisters again; thousands of children are waiting and deserve a Catholic school.

For this, we have to have a greater number of Sisters; and if we had these, we could not possibly house them in our motherhouse, which, in spite of addition, is too small again. No less would we be able to buy branch houses elsewhere since poverty pinches, and in this regard we poor people do not know of a better plan than to turn once more to the high Central-Direction, humbly begging you to send us some alms. The kingdom of God spreads ever more and more but the expenses also are increased in this way by an unbelievable rise in prices, which teaches us to save in every possible way. It is a real miracle of God that our young people, who have to sit and study almost the whole day, are so happy, healthy, and satisfied with such meager food, which consists mainly of grain and vegetables. If it were not for the grace of vocation, these young people would not persevere; everywhere they meet privation, renunciation, subjection.

It is obvious that the growth---and in fact, the magnificent growth of the Order in America for the salvation of children's souls---lies in the design of God and is undeniable. Everything fits and blends so well; poverty alone oppresses and hinders our growth and here only the high Central-Direction is able to give what I again beg for most earnestly from the bottom of my heart in the name of the entire Order. We are forced to buy a site and to build a house either for boarders or candidates, since the former are also increasing greatly. For this we could perhaps save a sum of money gradually from the revenue of the Institute. Our candidates do not pay any board and do not earn anything during their time of training. If the Sisters on the missions did not save for the Motherhouse, how could it support 60 persons from year to year?

When I said that everything was going so well for our growth, I did not intend to say that we meet no hindrance, no opposition, etc. No, that we receive, so to say, every day like our daily bread. They are the main substance of our vocation, but also our contentment, since we do not belong to the world and do not strive for its recognition or regard. On the contrary, we despise it. Steady as a root, a Mission Sister must stand at her post, in spite of the dangerous freedom of the land, as a slave of Jesus Christ, to Whom she dedicated herself entirely and eternally through the holy vows of the Order. Under many obstacles, she must hold on to her apostolic mission, have an effect on the work and, by, loyal performance of her duty and by good example, draw the world to herself without being touched by it herself. She must work entirely in the spirit of her Order in order to have her work blessed. Thanks be to eternal Goodness that I can say of every one of our schools and our Sisters, if not perfect in every regard, they are striving to be so. They are full of ambition and good will.

What are slander and contradiction for a School Sister when she has diligent, loyal pupils; when they promise to become practical Catholics and useful members of society; when she sees boarders, whom she admitted as heathens, changed into Christians? Already 20 children whom we received into our Institute or orphanages have received Baptism. Among them are grown girls 19, 17, 16, 15 years old who are descendants of Yankees and whose conversion proved very hard. Such American ladies whom heaven has endowed with favors of soul and body, are---observed with eyes of faith---doubly to be pitied. They are so well instructed and eager to enhance the charm of their youthful vigor and beauty, to curl their hair and to dress tastily, to appear becoming and pleasant in society. They study much, make great effort to be able to speak about the deeds of great men, about botany and astronomy. Already at five years of age they attend dancing school, spend much time at music, and all this only to show off, to boast, to please.

O misery! O distortion! O pitiful condition! Poor, in the real sense of the word, poor girls, you are to be pitied! You do not know your God, your destiny, the treasures of grace, of holy religion---and why? Because you yourself do not want to, have no need. Such girls join in all the prescribed prayers of the Institute, for years, like a machine. They listen to the religious instruction and are deaf. The word of God, however, pierces gradually like a two-edged sword into otherwise good, but in this regard, steel-like hearts. The petitions to Mary, whose medal every boarder of the Institute has to wear around her neck, their many prayers as well as those of the Sisters and the boarders, and the good example finally work on the hardened heart. They begin to think, to ask, to search, to renounce the prejudices which they received from Protestants. A battle between deceit and truth is begun in them. They become restless, which, in the beginning, they try to suppress in all possible manner. They want to resist. Divine Truth, however, denies them this. They feel themselves overcome, conquered by it. Finally they ask for instruction in the holy faith. Their request is honored. As catechumens they gradually feel the until-now-unknown peace; there is light in their soul. They are now believing, are baptized, and their happiness grounded. They hesitate for years until finally they accept the only sanctifying faith.

One pupil made an exception. Miss Sarah, an English girl was not headstrong throughout. Already only a few months after she entered our Institute, she began living as a good Catholic. Her heart was believing, but not so those of her relatives, upon whom she depended more or less as a half-orphan and by whom she was given a hard two-year battle. Sarah recognized the necessity of holy Baptism, yet was not permitted to receive the sacrament Sarah's sister seemed to suffer with her. She was a lady of refinement, had tender love and sympathy for her suffering sister, and tried every possible way to make her forget her ideas, as she called them --- but in vain. For Sarah this was a work of grace with which she faithfully cooperated; therefore, in spite of the remonstrances of her family, she accepted Baptism (*sine conditione*) and took the name of Mary Agnes. When asked why *Agnes* she answered enthusiastically: "The young gentle Agnes was a martyr of Christ!"

I never saw a young girl pray to God so fervently as Agnes after her Baptism. She knelt there motionless, like an artistically formed angel which --- as a well-turned masterpiece ---is placed on the altar as a symbol of devotion for the faithful. She was insensible to all the exterior impressions, even to the *Te Deum*, which the choir sang in thanksgiving! Tears of gratitude moistened her sunburned cheeks. She felt not only the nearness but also the presence of God. Her heart was the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit for she was born again by the water and the Holy Spirit. O happy, blessed child, I thought, regarding her with heartfelt joy, feeling happiness to have been able to work as a Mission Sister at the conversion of the unbeliever. Agnes was captivated. She recited a long prayer from which she--- so to say--- had to be awakened. Afterwards she stood in our midst more lovable than ever. Her dark eyes beamed as the overjoyed, smiling, speechless girl looked at us. As an adopted child of God, she was possessed with holy joy---with gratitude for the unspeakable love and mercy of God. Formerly a heathen, Agnes seemed to grasp readily that she was a child of God. Truly such an act compensates a School Sister for years of suffering and frustration. They are genuine joys, soul joys, which have their source only in God. They never deceive, and they last eternally.

Our boarders enjoy so many harmless joys. Christmas joys are so dear to them yet, these cannot be compared with the emotion and joy they feel, when they see their former heathen companion in her baptismal dress, as a Christian, a Catholic. A week later Agnes was with her unbelieving relatives. She sat at table with them where she was mockingly asked: "Sarah, are you baptized already, are you already a Catholic?" Whereupon Agnes answered heartily and unafraid, "Yes, I am baptized. I am a Catholic." On this answer her relatives fell silent and admired the timid, bashful Sarah.

A School Sister feels still other, although painful, joys when she takes the place of mother to poor forsaken children. Foundlings arouse perhaps the deepest sympathy; therefore, they also possess our entire love. Fifteen such creatures, who have been disowned by their own mothers --- one might say, thrown to be devoured by pigs --- have been brought to us. Such children naturally die soon, live a few weeks, often only a few hours, which in spite of good care, can not be avoided, since from the first of their life they have been exposed to the influence of the weather. We received children who were found on the road, in the snow, at street corners and in pools. In spite of their pain, such poor little mites have great graces. They receive holy Baptism, and with this are heirs of heaven, to which they are entitled on account of their innocence; yet, how painfully they had to suffer beforehand. Scarcely born, they have to battle with death and its sorrows. They look at one so understandingly, as if they wanted to tell you their pain. Before cruel death robs them of the light of their eyes, they fix their eyes on the nurse as if they wanted to thank her and to promise her a prayer on the other side. I trust much in their prayers to God.

Last summer when cholera reigned almost everywhere, our orphanage and schoolhouse in [St. Mary], Detroit, was turned into a hospital for children. The Sisters of Mercy were crowded with so many sick people that they had to put them even in the corridors. During two to three months our Sisters nursed 90 children, among them

newly-born children, who had to be taken from cholera-afflicted mothers. Of these, 54 were a sacrifice to the epidemic. The Sisters were spared; they think with gratitude and comfort of the dangerous but also meritorious time. Thanks to Providence for such jewels which we are enabled to set aside treasures for eternity, which no thief can steal, no moths can eat. How rich a School Sister, despised by the world, becomes through all this! How satisfied she lives and how happy she dies!

Our now deceased companion Sister Mary Christina [Pothier], gave sufficient witness to this. Our tears for her are not yet dried. She died recently on March 6 as a child of grace. Her life and her death were entirely in the spirit of her name *Christina* and bespoke a good member of the Order. She was born an Indian and belonged to the Ottawa tribe, which was the mightiest, but also the cruelest. She was born in a forest on the feast of the Assumption, 1830. When she was ten years old she was baptized with her parents and her three brothers and sisters by a Jesuit Father. At that time she heard and learned the Our Father. As a young girl in the full bloom of youth she entered our Order five years ago, where until her death she gave good example by her obedience, gentleness, humility, love and service. Last fall she pronounced her vows with visible emotion and devotion.

Soon after, she became ill.<sup>2</sup> After she happily recovered from this, a hectic fever seized her, which in a short time took all her strength. Galloping consumption was added, which brought a quick death in a short time. The good Sister sank visibly, withal, very cheerful, patient, and resigned to God's will. She lay only a few days in bed, during which time she received the last sacraments very devoutly and became resigned to her approaching death. With great resignation she looked toward her end. No fault oppressed her. Like slumbering innocence she lay on her death bed. Death did not seem to have any bitterness for her. She prayed until her last breath, renewing her holy vows, muttering the words, weak unto death: "O my Jesus, out of love for you I desire to die for you in poverty, chastity, and obedience." The words reechoed like a dark echo in the cramped half-broken breast. With a glance at her crucified Lord, she breathed forth her angelic soul. Her corpse was beautiful to behold: the natural Indian color had disappeared. She looked like pale wax. Peace exuded from her countenance which allowed one to conjecture about her peace in eternity.

She is a crushed lily who, according to the witness of her confessor, died in her baptismal innocence having never committed a mortal sin. She inspired every one who saw her corpse with respect and love. The children did not want to leave her, always asking to see Sister Christina again. Every one who saw her was edified. Fervently her beads were kissed. A Protestant lady was so impressed by the corpse that she declared she wanted to become a Catholic and a School Sister. As painful as the early death of this wonderful Sister was, so consoling was her death for us. Although the dear much loved one rests in the cool grave, she still lives in the good example that she gave us, until we see her again in the true homeland. God grant it! May she pray to God for us! May she pray for us --- for the art of dying well, for which we can best prepare by loyally fulfilling the duties of our vocation. In the same way we can repay and show efficacious gratitude to the high Central-Direction, which so graciously aids the plan divine

Providence: the expansion of our Order which all of us promise to bring about with the help of God.

With the plea to graciously accept our sincere gratitude and to grant our humble request, I remain with greatest respect, honor, and gratitude,

The High Central-Direction's  
most humble and most obedient  
Mary Caroline Fries  
Poor School Sister

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1. This letter appears in part in Sister Mary Dympna Flynn, *Mother Caroline and the School Sisters of Notre Dame in North America*, Vol. 1 pp. 107-12
  2. The German word is *Schleimfieber* which translates as a fever involving phlegm and mucus. The exact nature of the malady is unclear.