

EARLY MINISTRIES OF THE SISTERS

By Sister Joan Marie Stelman

Even before St. Scholastica Monastery and the Diocese of Duluth were officially founded, our Benedictine Sisters began serving the people of Duluth in our two largest traditional ministries: health care and education. When Mother Scholastica Kerst answered the call to come to Duluth and work with Bishop McGolrick, she knew the difficulty of the undertaking. Father P.J. Mahoney put it this way at Sister Helen Quirk's funeral: "[Duluth] was a settlement of human beings of the pioneer sort...To accomplish any good, especially in a spiritual way, required great strength of character, a happy mixture of a great heart and indomitable courage. Everything had to be built from the foundation upwards, and a stupendous task it was to lay the foundation of schools and hospitals." Fortunately, Mother Scholastica had experience in the field of pioneering new schools and hospitals.

Our ministry of health care began with the founding of St. Mary's Hospital in 1888. There was a tremendous need for health care, given the dangerous occupations in logging, shipping, and mining in the area and the prevalence of contagious diseases like tuberculosis, typhoid, and smallpox. From the beginning one of the emphases of the Sisters' health-care ministry was care for the poor. Sister Amata Macket came up with the creative hospital ticket idea to try to provide care for the miners and lumberjacks while generating some income to keep the hospitals financially afloat. Sisters served in many areas: nursing, administration, medical records, housekeeping, dietetics, laboratory, clerical, and more. We worked in close cooperation with the physicians who were some of our greatest supporters and champions. We trained and collaborated with lay nurses and other health-care professionals, who helped us expand this ministry throughout the diocese.

Hospitals Owned and Operated by the Duluth Benedictines

St. Mary's Medical Center	1888-present *
St. Joseph's Hospital, East Grand Forks	1895-1896
St. Benedict's Hospital, Grand Rapids	1898-1912
St. Anthony's Hospital, Bemidji	1900-1920
St. Vincent's Hospital, Crookston	1900-1920
St. Joseph's Hospital, Brainerd	1902-present *
St. Michael's Hospital, Cass Lake	1904-1905
St. James Hospital, International Falls	1912-1913
Hibbing General Hospital	1942-1977
Miner's Hospital, Crosby	1946-1964

* Now sponsored

Education was our other historical work – another work needed desperately by the growing diocese. Schools were founded at all levels – elementary, secondary, and lastly The College of St. Scholastica in 1912. Again, the Sisters reached out to provide quality education to children who would not have had access to it otherwise, both through the Villa and through parish schools. In the summer, Sisters not only taught catechism to children in parishes without schools; they went to school themselves. The Sisters always tried to improve their skills and keep abreast of new knowledge and new methods. The Sisters operated more than 30 schools at all levels, most of them in the Diocese of Duluth, but also in Minneapolis, Cincinnati, Phoenix, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., where they responded to requests to come and serve from pastors and Bishops who knew of the amazing work they had done.

The Sisters also began work early on in another important area of ministry when they were asked by Bishop McGolrick to found an orphanage. In those days orphanages served not only as homes for children whose parents had died; they also provided foster care for children who were temporarily displaced by illness or injury in their families. Our social work ministries began with St. James, founded in the first St. Mary's Hospital Building in the West End. Care for the elderly was a natural outgrowth of our concern for all persons and our health-care ministry. It began with St. Ann's founded in the same location in the West End, after the construction of a new St. James in Woodland.



Sister Ernestine Rancourt signing a birth certificate

Photos from Monastery Archives

OF ST. SCHOLASTICA MONASTERY

Perhaps two of the most important hallmarks of the Sisters in our early days were flexibility and creativity. The Sisters knew how to make things work on the tightest of budgets and came up with ways to enhance and improve the quality of their work, following the teaching and example of Mother Scholastica. Following her lead, the Sisters had to be flexible in order to respond to the changing needs of the wider community.



Sister Amelia Faith and the girls at the orphanage

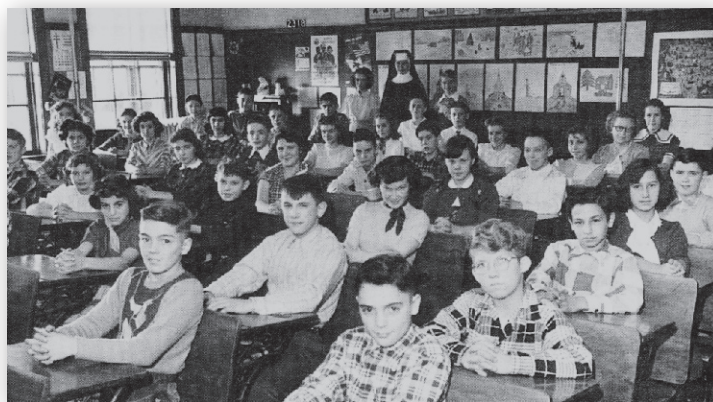


Sister Mary Martin Beringer and the boys

In his funeral homily for Mother Scholastica, Bishop McGolrick said, “When I look back to those early days of struggle and poverty...I turn with thanks to God and note the signal success of this community of St. Benedict.” He went on to talk about the gift the Sisters were to the region, saying, “The Sisters, trained by wise *Rule*, know that [platitudes] are not what the poor and suffering need, but friendly aid from those who take up part of the burden and lighten the load by sympathy and kindness, knowing the words of the Master, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you do to the least of these little ones, you do unto Me.’” His prayer for us was, “May God grant that those who live in the community, her children in faith...may so live and act according to her life and example, that they too, will hear the words, ‘enter thou into the joy of thy Lord’.” To which I think all of our Sisters, living and deceased, would reply with a resounding, AMEN!



College biology class 1935



Sister Marilyn Micke and class 1950s