

**WRAC Congregation Story 1: Significant Historical Event, Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland, OH, by Cynthia Glavac, OSU**

**Our Gateways to the “Inner City” of Cleveland, Ohio**

In 1850, we, the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland, arrived in Cleveland, Ohio, from Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, to establish the parochial-school system. During the next 117 years, we founded the first women’s college in Ohio, 3 all-girls’ high schools, and we staffed 26 diocesan-elementary schools, whose attendance consisted of white children, mostly from the suburban East Side of Cleveland (“Community List” 1-22).

However, during our Chapter in the summer of 1966, directed by the Second Vatican Council’s document, *Declaration on Christian Education*, which had been proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in October 1965, we concentrated on effective means to carry out the directives of the declaration (Hearon 32). Of particular focus to us, a teaching congregation, was the statement, “This vocation [of teaching] demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation, and *continuing readiness to renew and to adapt*” (Pope Paul VI). Also during that 1966 Chapter, we established, for the first time, a committee whose focus was more inclusive than classroom teaching, the “Social Apostolate” committee.

Keeping in mind Vatican II’s mandate to “renew and adapt” (Pope Paul VI), and also motivated by an awareness of the increasing poverty in Cleveland’s “inner” city, in June 1967, we initiated the St. James Project in collaboration with Father William Cook, the Rector of St. James Episcopal Church. The program actually began several months before, the result of a conversation between our Sister Margaret Clare Miller and Father Cook. That spring, Margaret Clare and a few other sisters had attended Mass in St. James Church to complete a requirement for a religion course they were taking. After the

Mass, Margaret Clare and Bill Cook, agreeing that the children of the neighborhood, which was 90% Black, needed a summer program (Cook), decided to initiate one that very summer.

The program began on Monday, June 26, and on the Saturday before, 19 Ursuline sisters made house-to-house visits on neighboring streets, inviting parents to send their children to the summer program.

About 125 children appeared on the first day; 150 by the end of the week (“Gum Chewers”). The five-week, weekday morning program offered arts and crafts, music, films, sewing, outside recreational activities and sports, field trips, tutoring, some religion instruction, snacks, and a government-funded lunch.

The first summer program was so successful that the following fall, 1967, the program expanded to a year-round one of Saturday-morning sessions and to eastern-suburban parishes through the recruitment of student volunteers. The program consisted of the same activities as those included in the summer program, and classes were held from 10:00 am – 12:00 pm.

For the two following summers, 1968 and 1969, the program continued. The accompanying photo, taken on July 18, 1968, perfectly illustrates these summer programs at St. James. Here, Sr. Mary Jean Raymond is working on an art project with the program’s children. That summer, our General Superior, Sister Annunciata Witz, had assigned seven junior-professed sisters, including Mary Jean (Javor), to St. James.

By 1970, the needs of both the summer and year-round programs outgrew the facilities of Saint James Church. Father William Cook had also left the parish, and

consequently, so had funding, as the Episcopal Diocese had financially supported the program by regular allocation and payment (Miller, "Letter to Issenmann," 1).

Sr. Margaret Clare then moved the program to St. Edward Roman Catholic Church, East 69<sup>th</sup> Street and Woodland Avenue, where, as she said, "The people and problems are much like those at St. James" (Miller, "Work Program"). She changed the name of the program from the "Saint James Project" to the incorporated "Saint Angela Foundation" (Miller, "Program on the Move") after our foundress, St. Angela Merici, and established a Board of Trustees. To raise funds to meet her annual budget of \$9,000 (\$40 per child) (Scharf), Margaret Clare petitioned diocesan personnel and parishioners at the schools where she taught. Donations, both large and small, enabled her to maintain both the summer and year-round programs through 1976.

I believe the St. James Project was indeed our gateway to the "inner" city of Cleveland because just three months after that program first began, in the fall of 1967, our sisters started serving in another area in the "inner" city of Cleveland, the St. Martin de Porres Center, newly established by the Diocese of Cleveland in the Glenville area (1264 E. 123<sup>rd</sup> St.) of the city (Hearon 42). From its beginning to the present day, the St. Martin de Porres Center offers services to seniors and parents, including pregnant women, and it provides an afterschool program, shoes and clothing to children, meal delivery to older adults, some financial assistance, and food via a food pantry (Catholic Charities, Diocese of Cleveland).

Our sisters served as directors of this multi-service agency from 1967-79: Sister Joann Kessler was the very first director from 1967-70, followed by Sister Eugene Gear, 1970-72, and then Sister Joseph Therese Bombeco, 1972-79. One of the highlights of

the center's programs in the 1970s was "Camp Credo," a five-week, summer-day camp held on the grounds of our Villa Angela Academy, located on the shores of Lake Erie. Our junior-professed sisters (including me!) directed the program of sports and crafts. Government-funded lunches were provided for the children (Hearon 43). Our sisters continued to serve at the Martin de Porres Center throughout the 1980s and until 1996.

While our sisters were serving in the St. James Project *and* at the St. Martin de Porres Center, our Sr. Mary Dolores Healey, in collaboration with people of the near West-Side parishes of St. Malachi and St. Patrick, was finalizing plans for an interdenominational elementary school that would meet the needs of children growing up in a multi-racial-and-cultural environment, characterized by poor economic conditions, substandard housing, and crime (Hearon 34). This school, aptly named the Urban Community School, also took a unique approach to education: a non-graded, individualized program, "which will meet the diversified needs of the neighborhood and which will . . . provide a dynamic mode of the *best* that creative educational ideas can offer" (Healey, "A Proposal," 2). After Urban Community was in operation one year, its first director, Sr. Mary Dolores, wrote, "The Urban Community School has potentially a significance far beyond its present scope" (Healey, "Everybody Learns").

Our sisters have had a continuous presence in the school since it opened in the fall of 1968 until now, as one sister serves there. Currently, Urban Community is thriving with an enrollment of about 675 students, and because of its "multi-million-dollar endowment, high-quality education WILL be available to inner-city children in the future" (Doyle).

Also in 1968, we sent our first pair of sisters to the Cleveland Diocesan mission in El Salvador, which had been established in 1964. During our Chapter in the summer of 1966, we had decided to support the Cleveland mission and agreed to assign two sisters to El Salvador every five years (Glavac 52). We had a continuous presence in El Salvador, even after the murder of our Sr. Dorothy Kazel in 1980, until 2014. Fourteen of our sisters served in El Salvador throughout those years. Although this ministry was not an “inner-city” one, it took us beyond our classroom boundaries to serve another sector of the poor and marginalized.

Now, going full circle, I’d like to conclude with our St. James Project, focusing on Sr. Mary Jean Raymond, the young sister who served full time in this program during the summer of 1968. Mary Jean had actually begun her teaching ministry the year before, and for the following fourteen years, she served in Cleveland diocesan suburban elementary schools, and she did not think of returning to the city until 1981.

That year, she had heard that the pastor of St. Aloysius – St. Agatha Parish in the inner-city neighborhoods of Glenville and South Collinwood had requested sisters to teach in the school. Mary Jean and our directress of education at the time, Sr. Eugene Gear, visited the school, as Mary Jean tells it, “on a scorching hot summer night in July. The parish was having bingo, and after I met a few of the parishioners . . . I said to Sr. Eugene, ‘This is where I belong.’”

Mary Jean has been serving at St. Aloysius – St. Agatha ever since—for 41 years—and this past spring she was appointed by our diocese as the “Parish-Life Coordinator,” essentially assuming both a pastoral and administrative role in the parish.

For Mary Jean, the St. James Project was *her* gateway to the inner city, as she said years later, “It was definitely the work of the Holy Spirit that placed me at St. James” (Raymond).

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