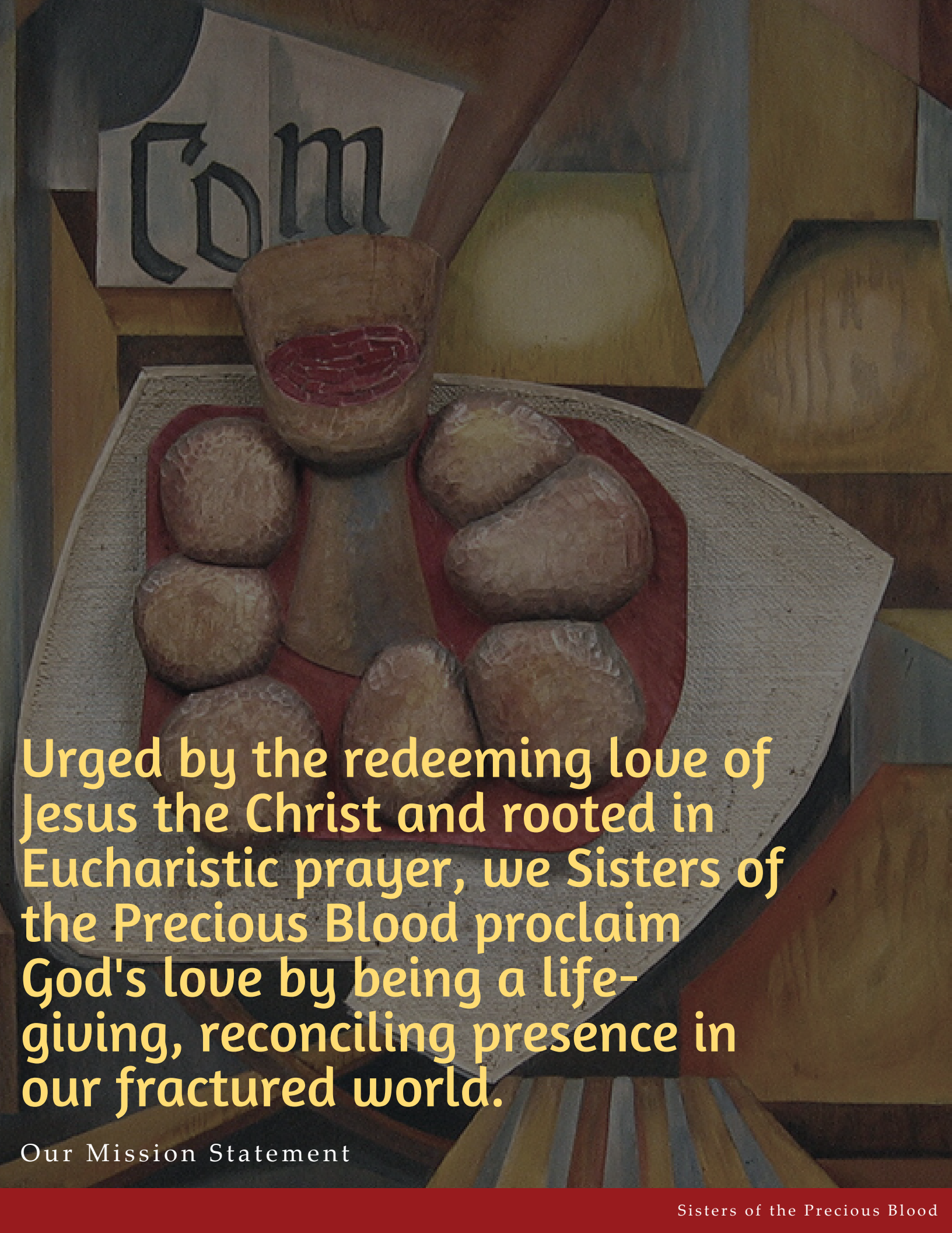


# **SISTERS OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD**

Proclaiming God's Love since 1834



A cubist painting depicting a still life of a chalice and bread. The chalice, filled with red liquid, sits on a white tablecloth. Around it are several round, textured loaves of bread. In the background, a sign with the letters 'Cm' is visible. The background is composed of various geometric shapes in shades of brown, tan, and grey.

Cm

Urged by the redeeming love of Jesus the Christ and rooted in Eucharistic prayer, we Sisters of the Precious Blood proclaim God's love by being a life-giving, reconciling presence in our fractured world.

Our Mission Statement

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Sisters of the Precious Blood





# THE BEGINNING

**1834-1836**

In the summer of 1833, an elderly widow trekked through the Swiss mountains to the Shrine of Mary at Einsiedeln seeking to know the will of God. Having been a loving wife, mother and grandmother was not enough... nor was attending daily Mass, praying at mountain shrines, giving alms and baking bread for the poor. Sixty-nine year old Maria Anna Brunner was restless. What else should she be doing?

The following winter she made a pilgrimage to Rome where she heard followers of St. Gaspar del Bufalo preaching the themes of redemption, reparation and reconciliation through the Precious Blood of Jesus. Therein she found the answer to her quest for God's will. She was filled with an overwhelming desire to spread this devotion for the rest of her life.

**WE MUST LET IT BE KNOWN  
HOW THE BLOOD OF CHRIST  
CLEANSES THE SOULS AND  
SANCTIFIES THEM.**

**-St. Gaspar del Bufalo**

Strengthened by this tremendous grace, Maria Anna was eager to return home to the new life to which she felt called. While spending her nights and days in prayer, she took care of the young men in the seminary her son had established and taught orphan girls in Castle Loewenberg. Her passionate love of God became contagious, and soon other women joined her in her life of prayer and good works. Thus was the birth of the congregation.





# THE FOUNDATION OF THE CONGREGATION

**1834-1843**

Maria Anna's son, Francis de Sales, was a restless man. He had joined a Benedictine Monastery and then became a Trappist. Later, he felt a call to become a missionary, applying to the Vatican for an assignment. Two years after his mother's death, in 1838, while in Rome on one of his trips, he was attracted by a fiery man of great eloquence, wearing a large crucifix. He inquired about him, only to discover that he was a member of the Society of the Precious Blood about which his mother had spoken to him so convincingly. He dropped his own plans and joined the Society founded by St. Gaspar.





The Very Reverend Francis de Sales Brunner,  
son of Mother Maria Anna Brunner

**TO SAVE BUT ONE SOUL IS  
AN UNSPEAKABLY GREAT  
ACCOMPLISHMENT; IT IS  
GREATER THAN THE  
CONQUEST OF THE ENTIRE  
WORLD.**

**- Mother Brunner**

While he awaited his mission assignment from the Society, he returned to Switzerland and again took up his work of training young men to become priests, though now it was for the Precious Blood Society. Maria Anna's followers assisted in this endeavor.

Given his experience living a Benedictine Rule, Francis de Sales developed a Rule of Life for the community living at Castle Loewenberg. The men and women—sisters, priests, brothers and students—lived a life of prayer, work and study. After the death of his mother, Maria Anna, in 1836, Father Brunner became the spiritual director of this small community.

In 1843, after years of eager waiting, word finally came from Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati, Ohio, calling for ministers to serve German Catholic immigrants in his diocese. It took Fr. Brunner only two months to gather supplies and to select seven priests, seven brothers and students for the American Mission of the Society of the Precious Blood.





1836-1844

# EXPANSION TO AMERICA

Meanwhile, the sisters residing at Castle Loewenberg were anxiously waiting to join their brothers in their mission work in America. Their prayers were intensified as they asked for patience to know the will of God.

A short time later in the spring of 1844, word came from Father Brunner that sisters were urgently needed. As a result in the following summer, three sisters arrived in the wooded areas of northern Ohio. Within a week after their arrival, the needs of the church were made known to them through a visit by Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati. Their search for the will of God became evident. The German immigrants needed teachers, and so the sisters began to teach.

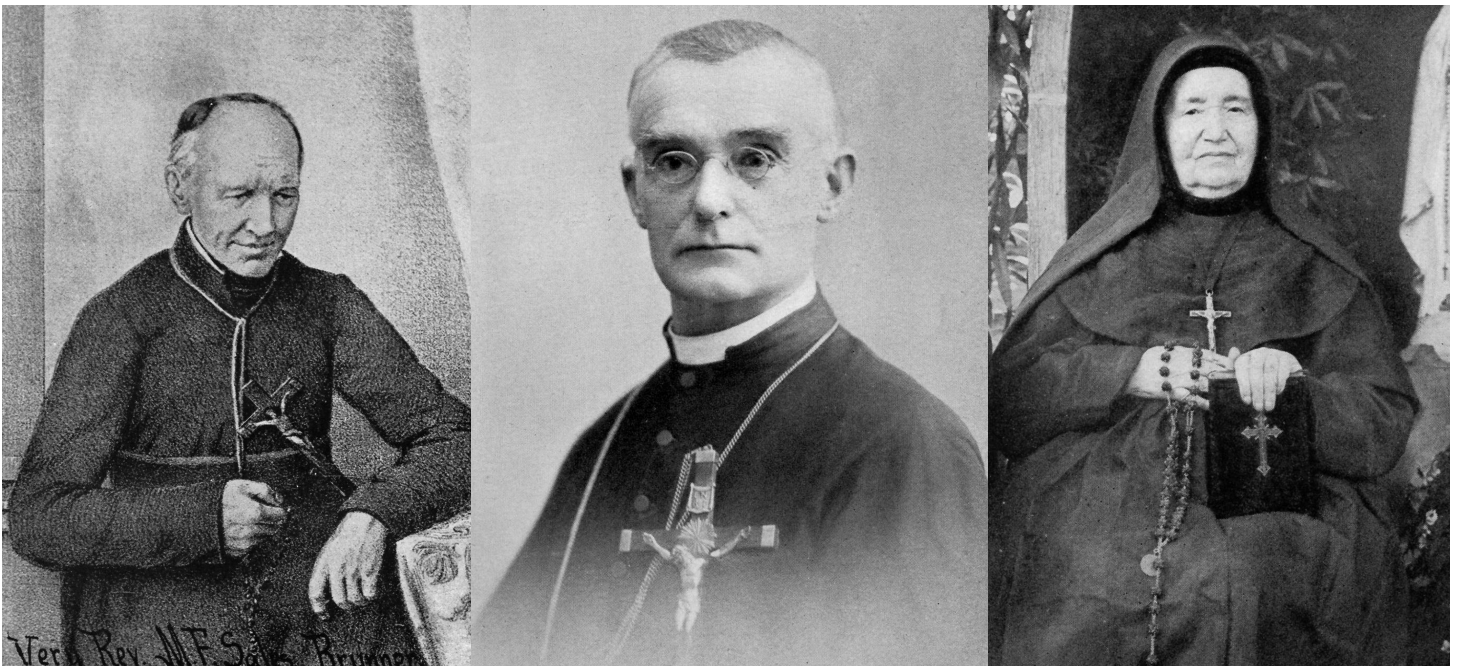
On Christmas Eve of 1844, the three sisters moved into the log house built for them in

New Riegel, Ohio. As the snow fell softly, the hearts of the sisters soared in praise of their God-Incarnate. On Christmas morning, 40 children came for religious instruction. Thus, the sisters began the ministry of prayer and education in the New World.



Voisard Sisters in habits (Top), and Convent in New Riegel, Ohio (Bottom).





The Very Reverend Francis de Sales Brunner, First Provincial in America (Left), The Very Reverend Andrew Klunker, Second Provincial in America (Center) and the Second Mother General, Mother Mary Kunigunda (Right).

# GROWTH IN AMERICA

**1844-1887**

After the sisters settled in New Riegel, Father Brunner found it necessary to expand services to German immigrants who were flocking to homestead Ohio. Energetically, he went about buying low-cost forested land, using the available wood to construct chapels and convents. Within twelve years he had established nine foundations in northern Ohio, and one in east central Indiana. With each expansion, he called for more sisters from Europe and encouraged local women to join the community.

Already in 1845, the first American candidate joined the fledgling community of 25 sisters. Within the next few years, the community was blessed with many new members, so that by 1855 there were 224 sisters. In 1850, the remaining 30 inhabitants of the Castle in Switzerland came to America.

Mother Brunner's legacy of prayer and service was very attractive to young women. The sisters led a life dedicated to praise and honor the Precious Blood of Jesus, principally in the Blessed Sacrament. They prayed night and day hours of adoration. They ministered to the German immigrants by teaching their children and caring for the poor and needy, especially orphans. Their life closely resembled the experience of Mother Brunner at Castle Loewenberg.

Father Brunner's ideal community was to have priests, sisters and brothers together, as the Holy Family, sharing prayer and work. His dream came to an end when Rome ordered the division in all religious congregations having men and women members. In 1887, sisters were separated from the men in organizational structure, though they remained together with one heart, one spirit, and one goal: collaborating in ministry and praising and honoring the Precious Blood of Jesus.



# SISTERS BECOME INDEPENDENT

1887-1910

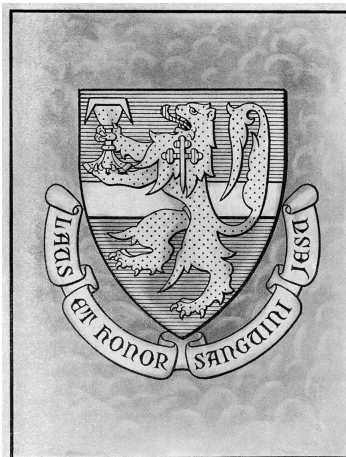
After an equitable separation of assets, the “Female Society of the Precious Blood,” numbering 451 sisters, was incorporated on May 6, 1887. The sisters now had resources that would permit them to respond to the developing needs of society and the church. Although they were still subject to the Archbishop of Cincinnati, they had already expanded into Indiana, Missouri, and Tennessee.

The sisters assumed responsibility for every aspect of their lives. They held elections for leadership, made decisions regarding their future, and updated the 1835 rule of life. In essence their life did not vary greatly from the way they had lived since Mother Brunner’s time.

In the latter part of the 19th century, thousands of German Catholics came to the United States seeking Catholic education from German-speaking women religious as a way to preserve their culture and their faith. The community was struggling to prepare sisters as teachers.

Although in 1893 there were 95 sisters teaching, the demand was intense.

With openness and courage, the congregation continued its quest to discover and follow God’s will. Although the foundations in Ohio still required many teachers, the sisters accepted a challenging mission in Arizona in 1903, before it was a state. Ten years later they went to California. As needs arose, the sisters trusted in the providence of God and responded with courage, joy and enthusiasm.



Insignia of the Sisters of the Precious Blood

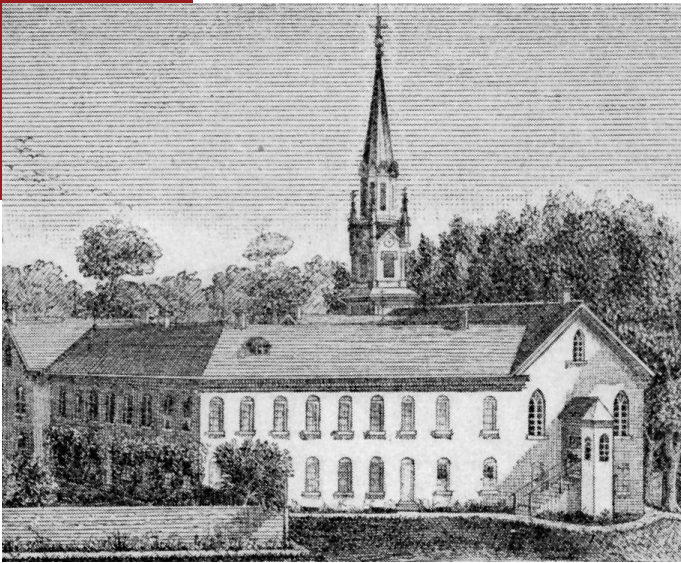


# THE COMMUNITY MATURES

1910-1945

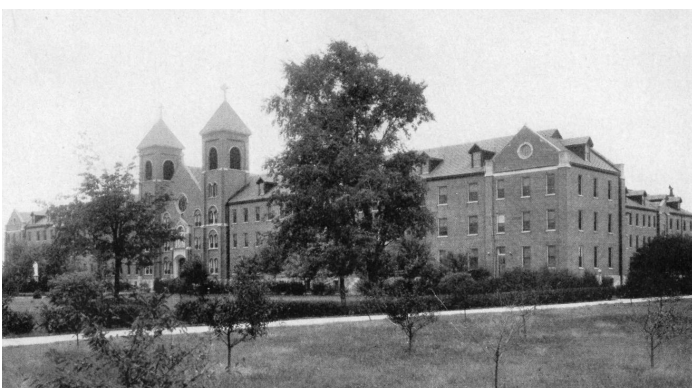
In the meantime, the sisters were exploring other works. True to the example of Mother Brunner's care for priests, the community began to accept work in seminaries and in Bishops' residences. Sisters also learned to provide health services to the aged and needy, as well as to educate and minister to the destitute and homeless. By 1908, there were 38 mission houses. Hard work was a hallmark of the Sisters of the Precious Blood.





Former Mother House in Maria Stein, Ohio

The congregation continued to grow. Many Americans were attracted to the sisters' manner of life, and each year until 1912, candidates came from Europe to join them. Congregational leadership faced a huge challenge: Maria Stein, the Motherhouse since 1846, was no longer large enough. Also, its distance from an urban center with health and educational institutions called for a change. The decision to move from Maria Stein was difficult for many sisters, but the leadership was courageous and determined. Over several years the congregation had purchased land in an area northwest of Dayton. By 1921 the building of a million-dollar motherhouse was begun. It was dedicated on September 8, 1923, under the name, Salem Heights. Immediately the sisters began the custom of continuous adoration, and in 1926 the long-sought-for privilege of perpetual



Maria Joseph Mother House in Dayton, Ohio

exposition of the Blessed Sacrament was granted for the first time in Salem Heights Chapel.

After the move to Dayton, the congregation grew rapidly, and by 1937 there were 679 members, serving in many ministries, mostly education. Congregational prayer was changed from German to English and away from primarily devotional prayers. As the sisters became involved in the liturgical renewal, begun in 1939, they updated their daily communal prayer and worship.

In 1930 the congregation opened the Maria-Joseph Home for the Aged, the first such Catholic facility in the state of Ohio. During the Depression this institution became a haven for



Sr. Mary Terentia Cordonnier was one of the Sisters who made vestments at Salem Heights, now Maria Joseph.

many destitute seniors, and, though the congregation was in debt, it provided for the poor, even as Mother Brunner would have done.

During the war years (1941-1945), the sisters entered fully into the sacrifices required of citizens of the United States. All foreign-born sisters were naturalized. When peace came, the sisters rejoiced and gave thanks with the entire nation.





**1945-1965**

# THE "GOLDEN AGE"

Pictured: Sisters share holy card pictures in Chile.

As the congregation grew and moved into diverse ministries and various places, once again there was a need to consider the organizational structure. Since the congregation ministered in many dioceses, it became apparent that the congregation should become a pontifical institute, directly under the direction of the Vatican rather than solely the Archbishop of Cincinnati. After careful and persistent negotiations, this finally came about in 1946.



Sisters on a windy deck in Chile.

**DO NOT FORGET THE POOR.  
ALWAYS DO THEM AS MUCH  
GOOD AS YOU CAN, FOR YOU  
DO THIS TO GOD HIMSELF.**

**-Mother Maria Anna Brunner**

In the post-war years there was vibrancy in all aspects of American life, including the congregation. Two additions were built onto Salem Heights: one for high school girls considering religious life, and the other for a state-of-the-art nursing home for elderly sisters. By 1955 the congregation numbered 705. New schools opened in Virginia, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Florida and additional schools in California, Arizona, Colorado, Ohio, and Michigan. Management of two new homes for the elderly was undertaken. Seminaries and bishops' residences sought for sisters to direct domestic work.

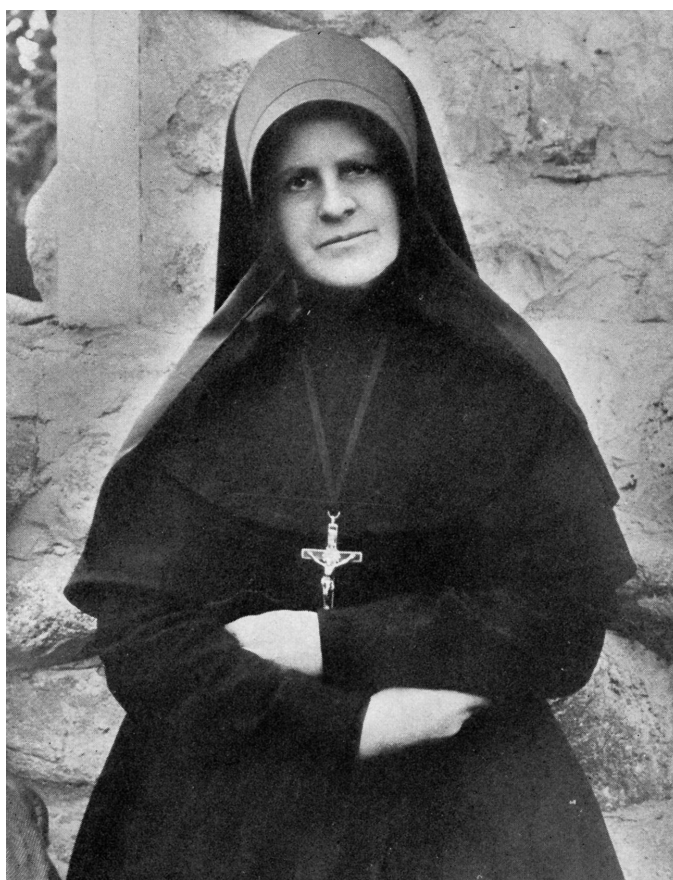


As the sisters gathered in assembly in 1954, they decided to expand ministry to missionary work in Chile, to begin retreat work, and to provide a cloister for sisters desiring a more contemplative lifestyle. At that assembly the habit of black serge worn since the 1890's was replaced by one of light gray made of an easily washable fabric. Young sisters became part of a newly formed Sisters Formation Program for their education and ministry preparation. By 1960 the congregation numbered 755.

In 1961, Vatican II began and in it a call for the renewal of religious communities. Sisters responded by reviewing all facets of their life. They were called to become aware of the signs of the times, and many entered into new ministries, especially religious education and pastoral ministry. In 1965, at the close of Vatican II, the congregation numbered 800 members.



Aspirants graduated in the middle of a crowded chapel at Salem Heights, now Maria Joseph.



Mother Mary Ludovica in the original black habit.



Sr. Mary Lou Voisard in the newer gray habit.





**1965-PRESENT**

# NEW LIFE EMERGES

The Sisters of the Precious Blood experienced the post Vatican II exodus from religious life, just as did other congregations. New members became fewer and some sisters sought dispensations. Consequently, schools and institutions were forced to cut back, and some closed completely.

In the special assembly of 1969, sisters discussed many issues and made important decisions regarding the congregation, one of which was “open placement.” For the first time in history, sisters were free to discern their own ministry. Many sisters left teaching and moved into varied works. This change affected living because sisters often chose sites distant from an established community. As a result, parish convents were either vacated or used for other parish activities. In order that sisters could move more freely among lay persons, some

chose contemporary clothing in place of the religious garb. Many also began living in apartments or small houses. The world of traditional sisters was changed.



Pictured: Sisters Margie & Mumbi (TOP) and Sisters join in prayer during an annual community gathering (BOTTOM).





With "open placement" Sisters are able to discern ministries in social work, among other careers.

As the number of sisters in the congregation declined, the need for a large motherhouse no longer existed. As Mother Brunner shared resources, the participants in the Assembly of 1975 agreed that the building should be renovated to accommodate both assisted living and nursing home residents, and to make it available to the general population. It was incorporated as "The Maria Joseph Living Care Center." Later, in 1985, it was sold to Samaritan Health Resource Services Inc, a member of The Sisters of Charity Health Care Systems. The former building of the Maria Joseph Home became the residence for sisters in 1979 and took the meaningful and historic name of Salem Heights. But the long-held and significant red-brick landmark on Salem Avenue no longer belonged to the congregation.



Many Sisters continue ministry and careers in education.

These events and changes called for renewed commitment on the part of the sisters in the latter part of the 20th century. As part of the challenge for a revitalization of the original charism upon which the congregation was founded, sisters intensified the study of Precious Blood Spirituality and Mother Brunner's life. Her example of prayer, work and service was embraced and motivated the sisters' responses to the needs of the contemporary world. Just as she gave bread to the poor, the sisters recognized their call to share resources.



Sr. Lakesha Church professes temporary vows in 2018.

The sisters designated a generous portion of the money received from the sale of the motherhouse as the "Maria Anna Brunner Fund" to give to those in need. Sisters were encouraged to move into service to the poor and the marginalized. Following the example of the foundress, each member diligently sought the will of God. This led sisters to foreign lands—with missions in Guatemala and Chile, and short term services in Poland, India and the Palestinian territories—to such places as the reservations of the American Indians, to Appalachia and to difficult and sometimes dangerous central cities. Sisters protested war and armaments; they prayed at the sites of homicides; they brought life-giving reconciliation to hurting families and to the sick, dying and imprisoned. Sisters continued their legacy of education since through knowledge lives are formed.





# CONCLUSION

The tradition of prayer and service continues. It is through prayer that the will of God is discovered; it is through service to others that God is experienced. As Mother Brunner trekked the difficult paths to the shrines in the Swiss mountains to discover the will of God, her followers continue that climb and that search.

written by Sr. Helen Weber, CPPS  
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## More Resources

**DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER**

**LENT E-BOOK WITH REFLECTIONS**

**VOCATION INFORMATION**

**PRECIOUS BLOOD SPIRITUALITY**

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