

St. Louis, mo 1836...

BOSTON 2013 AND BEYOND...

The Sponsored Ministries of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Boston strive to bring the message of God's active and inclusive love to persons of all races and religious beliefs especially those who find themselves at the breaking points of society.

Bethany Health Care Center ♦ Bethany Hill School ♦ Fontbonne Academy Jackson School ♦ Regis College ♦ Saint Joseph Preparatory High School ♦ Walnut Park Montessori School

### Arrival IN THE New World — St. Louis, MO

**Reading:** A combination of circumstances contributed to the first establishment of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in America. Through her work with the Propagation of

the Faith, Felicité Duras, also known as Countess de la Rochejacqueline, was greatly moved by a letter from Bishop Rosati, the first Bishop of St.

Louis, asking for sisters who would undertake instruction of "deaf-mutes." She offered to defray the expense of establishing a community of Sisters of Saint Joseph in this diocese of St. Louis. She had a great love and admiration for Mother St. John Fontbonne and asked her to send the sisters to America. The bishop would accept six sisters to instruct the children, and in addition to these six, two others, Sisters St. John and Celestine, arrived a year later to teach the deaf.

So the first six sisters, the oldest 30, the youngest 21, set sail from LeHavre, France January 17, 1836, on the ship, the Natchez. The sisters enjoyed the hospitality of the Ursuline Sisters for two weeks, learning much about life in America. The sisters also told them to disguise their religious habit when going abroad and while traveling to St. Louis. They boarded the steamer, the George Collier, traveled up the Mississippi and reached their destination March 25, 1836. In a letter of introduction the Archbishop of Lyon recommended the sisters by stating – "They will be excellent catechists, good infirmarians, and zealous instructors."

— Excerpts from <http://www.csjsl.org/about-us/our-heritage.php>

**Response:** Saints of God in glory, be with us, rejoice with us, sing praise with us, and pray with us now. - Bernadette Farrell

**SISTER FEBRONIE FONTBONNE** ...although tiny in size, she was large in spirit,...much wiser than her years...had the ability to bring a certain peacefulness wherever she went.

**SISTER DELPHINE FONTBONNE**...short and quick like her sister... everything she did, she did with her whole heart, trying to do it perfectly.

**SISTER ST. PROTAIS DEBOILLE**... It was as though she had been born realizing God's special love, not only for her, but also for all God's creatures...her whole body burned with a desire to go to America, to undertake anything, even to give her life...

**SISTER MARGUERITE FELICITÉ BOUTE**...tall, beautiful, smiling woman, gentle and generous; ...named for the Countess de la Rochejacqueline... named aptly as she was full of joy; ...had a quick, contagious smile.

**SISTER FEBRONIE CHAPPELON**...tall and big-boned with dark, deep-set eyes and strong nose.. silent , kind, and gentle in spirit...

**SISTER PHILOMENE VILANE**... a small, round, capable bundle of energy with gray-green eyes that sparkled as she began each new task...she was used to hard work ...she loved her work...had a way of knowing all kinds of things.

**CELESTINE POMMEREL** ...a tall woman with a fair complexion...with large, blue-green eyes which seemed able to see into your soul... a model of womanly grace, ...her simplicity and gentleness won all who came in contact with her.

**ST. JOHN FOURNIER**...a religious since the age of 14; she had been in a contemplative order; then, as the protégé of the Countess de la Rochejacqueline...feeling a deep call to work with the Indians of America she left the cloister and entered the Sisters of Saint Joseph in Lyon.

**COUNTESS DE LA ROCHEJACQUELINE**.... she possessed a deep passion to spread the Gospel ...wanted to go to the New World herself but because of her position it was impossible.

**FOR Reflection:** *These women, who made it possible for Sisters of Saint Joseph to grow and flourish in America, were zealous women. As trustees and administrators of a CSJ sponsored ministry, how am I/are we demonstrating zeal for furthering the mission and spirit of this ministry?*

*Select one of these women whose spirit inspires you. Pray to her that you may have the zeal and energy to continue to further the mission and spirit of the Sisters of Saint Joseph.*

*Prayer FOR THE 140th Anniversary of the Sisters of Saint Joseph — 1873-2013 AND BEYOND...*

God of Great Love, you are with us, for us, in us. May we who share in the spirit of the Sisters of Saint Joseph see relationship with God and others at the heart of all we do.

In every relationship may we be and act in ever-widening circles of love poured out toward every kind of neighbor without distinction. May we live and work with the zeal of Christ Jesus, "that all may be one." AMEN



## Sisters of Saint Joseph of Boston – 1873...2013...and beyond

The Sisters of Saint Joseph arrived in Boston on October 2, 1873. This prayer is the third in a series of board prayers for 2013-2014 that reflect on the history that brought us to this moment as well as to a future without a prescribed set of blueprints — one open “to a God coming to us from the future” in ways we have yet to imagine.

### OUR PRAYERS WILL FOCUS ON THE SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH

1. beginnings in Le Puy, France, during the turbulent times of the mid-seventeenth century
2. renewal in Lyon, France, after the French Revolution
3. coming to the United States during the great expansion to the New World
4. arrival in Boston in response to the needs of a growing immigrant population
5. Sisters of Saint Joseph mission and spirit now and into the future.



## Beyond our beginnings to Arrival in THE The New World — St. Louis, MO

A combination of circumstances contributed to the first establishment of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in America. Through her work with the Propagation of the Faith, Felicité Duras, a Countess, was greatly moved by a letter which came in 1836 from Bishop Rosati, the first Bishop of St. Louis, asking for sisters who would undertake instruction of those who could not hear or speak. He had been advised by a friend in France to "...get the Sisters of Saint Joseph because they will do anything". Mother St. John Fontbonne made an appeal to the Congregation to pray and weigh the matter well of personally going to America.

The Countess offered to defray the expense of establishing a community of Sisters of Saint Joseph in this diocese of St. Louis. She had a great love and admiration for Mother St. John Fontbonne and asked her to send the sisters to America. The bishop would accept six sisters to instruct the children, and in addition to these six, two others be included to teach the deaf.



A small valiant group left Lyons on January 4, 1836 and took 49 days to cross the Atlantic Ocean. They traveled up the Mississippi River and on March 25, 1836 arrived in St. Louis. Of the first six, three lived in a log cabin in Carondelet, Missouri. Three moved to Cahokia, Illinois and served the community there. When these

Sisters of Saint Joseph arrived at their first foundation outside Europe, they brought with them the heritage of a tradition nearly two hundred years old. The sisters, like their neighbors, suffered material hardships of poverty, fever, and flood but were undaunted in their mission for the dear neighbor. They began a school in the rear of their cabin and taught Native American children as well as children who were hearing impaired. This was all part of the great missionary movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Other sisters arrived from LePuy, Bourg, and Chambéry and houses spread quickly throughout the United States and Canada. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century new houses and new congregations grew up from one another. Before they had spent a full ten years in the missionary lands of America, the sisters had put on disguises to avoid anti-Catholic prejudice. They shared the suffering of victims of racism because they had dared to treat their brothers and sisters as people made in the

image of God. [their 3<sup>rd</sup> ministry was a St. Joseph School for Negro Girls] – this in a time when slavery was still legal in the U.S. and St. Louis had a large slave market. Although the cultural difficulties were not at an end, they had made it through the most difficult decade.

In confronting prejudice and violence, they had to discern between adaptation necessary to settle into a new culture and a prophetic stance that would denounce a system of institutionalized sin. From these origins, they spread across the United States beginning new foundations and now are members of the organization known as The United States Federation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Think about this in the light of today's challenges...not much different!

### QUOTES FROM COMUNIDAD PARA EL MUNDO by Mary McGlone, CSJ

They were leaving behind everything they had known; their sole hope for the future rested in God and the relationships they had with one another. p. 101

...in spite of problems...the sisters began their educational labors immediately. Within a few days of their arrival in each place, they opened their schools. p. 103

With the experience of St. Joseph's School for Negro Girls, the sisters had entered into the heart of the most painful conflict in the history of the United States – the institutionalized violence of racism. ... when they confronted prejudice and violence, the little community had to discern between the adaptation necessary to settle into a new culture and a prophetic stance that would denounce a system of institutionalized sin. Their actions demonstrate that service to their dear neighbor was more important than any “reputation” that they might preserve. p. 118

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the missions of the Congregation extended from one end to the other of the United States. The work begun by the little band of six French missionaries who settled in a cabin in Carondelet gave birth to...one of the largest and most diverse congregations in their adopted nation. In contrast to congregations whose membership represented one dominant immigrant heritage, the Sisters of Saint Joseph reflected the diversity of the country itself and received members from all immigrant groups. p. 149

Analyzing the history of the first 60 years of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in America, one sees that a concordance between concrete circumstances and the innate spirit of the Congregation let them structure their life while preserving the freedom to respond to any need that presented itself to them. p. 150



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