

Bon Secours Mercy Health Foundation Day Celebrations

As a Catholic health ministry, we stand in a rich and compelling tradition of the many founding congregations that started our various ministries. Remembering those legacies is an important part of our ongoing dedication to our ministry. In recognition of the three congregations that provide a foundation for our new ministry as Bon Secours Mercy Health, we celebrate three foundation days each year:

- **January 24: Bon Secours Day** – celebrating the date the first Sisters of Bon Secours professed their vows in St. Sulpice Church in Paris, France.
- **July 17: Humility of Mary Day** – celebrating the Feast of the Humility of Mary which is a central celebration for the Sisters of the Humility of Mary.
- **September 24: Mercy Day** – celebrating the opening of the first House of Mercy in 1827 in Dublin, Ireland by Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.

Remembering Our Roots: Sisters of the Humility of Mary July 17, 2023

In the village of Dommartin-sous-Amance, France, Marie-Antoinette Potier wanted to give her life to God. In serving the poor children in her village, she saw an opportunity to share her love of God with them. Father John Joseph Begel, a priest heading two village parishes, also saw the need to provide a Christian education for girls in poor villages. In 1854, Marie-Antoinette opened her home as a school, a workroom, and an orphanage, and with Father Begel, she set about revitalizing Christian life through the care and education of girls. Over time more women joined Marie-Antoinette in her endeavors and eventually they decided to become a religious congregation. Marie-Antoinette was named Mother Madelaine Potier. Once recognized as a religious congregation, called the Sisters of the Humility of Mary, the women involved in this educational mission then recognized other needs in the villages. Soon they were extending themselves through nursing families inside their homes, preparing children for the sacraments, and caring for local churches. In 1863, Fr. Louis Hoffer requested a few French-speaking sisters to come and teach the children in his parish in Louisville, Ohio. The entire community of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary decided to answer his call to come to America. Bishop Rappe of Cleveland wrote to Father Begel indicating that all of the sisters were welcome in his diocese to serve the needs of the people. Sadly, Mother Madelaine died prior to their departure in the spring of 1864. Thus, in May 1864, Father Begel, along with nine sisters, two novices, and four orphan girls, left France for their new life in America.

By summer's end there were sisters teaching in Louisville, Ohio, and Mother Anna Tabourat, now the congregation leader, and the rest of the community were settling in at their New Bedford,



Pennsylvania convent. During a smallpox epidemic, the sisters answered the call to help their neighbors by nursing in the nearby homes or by bringing children into their care. Injured railroad workers from nearby Lowellville learned that the sisters would care for them. An infirmary was set up on the convent grounds, which then became the first health care facility in the Mahoning Valley.

In 1911, local businessmen and parish priests established St. Elizabeth Hospital in Youngstown, Ohio. The bishop chose the Sisters of the Humility of Mary to administer and serve in this new hospital. In 1918, the sisters played a significant role in alleviating suffering caused by the Spanish influenza epidemic that had broken out in Cleveland. Their hard-work, service, and dedication during this epidemic were publicly acknowledged by the City of Cleveland. In Youngstown, during the height of the epidemic, several schools were turned into flu hospitals. Sisters from St. Elizabeth nursed the sick even after completing their own shifts. Mother Genevieve Downey, major superior of the congregation and the first administrator of St. Elizabeth, returned as interim administrator of both St. Elizabeth and Youngstown Hospital on the southside of the city, when the administrators of each of these hospitals contracted the virus.

In 1926, the sisters took over the ownership of St. Elizabeth Hospital. With the ownership of two other Ohio hospitals, St. Joseph Riverside Hospital in Warren and St. Joseph in Lorain, the health care ministry of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary was clearly established.

The health care facilities sponsored by the Sisters of the Humility of Mary were joined together in 1984 as the Humility of Mary Health Care System. In 1995, HM Health Services, an integrated delivery network, was formed under the leadership of the Humility of Mary Health Care System. Then in 1996, the Humility of Mary Health Care System became a region of Mercy Health System in Cincinnati, later renamed Catholic Health Partners. A new name, Mercy Health – Youngstown, was adopted in 2016. No matter the name, with over 100 years of service to the communities of northeast Ohio, the evolution of the health care ministry of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary has always sought to share in the healing ministry of Jesus and to serve the underserved in the region.

