



## **SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH, BRENTWOOD, NY BACKGROUNDER**

### **OUR MISSION**

The Sisters of St. Joseph believe in the power and presence of a loving God active in our world, for all time, and in this time. United with all who minister with us, we seek to bring God's healing and reconciling love where there is the greatest need. In this time, The Sisters of St. Joseph are called to be prophetic, publicly lamenting oppression as contrary to God's will and encouraging people to strive for an alternative future where coercive power and blind submission are replaced with collegiality, mutuality and egalitarianism.

We strive to expand our understanding of the injustices in our world and the gospel mandate to end oppression, exclusion, and violence, the unjust distribution of our resources and the exploitation of our earth. We also understand our responsibility to use our influence to counteract what undermines the expression of God's compassion for all. In particular we understand the importance of empowering women through education, mentoring and companionship. The issues of human trafficking, immigration, preservation of our earth are complex and require our informed and active involvement.

### **OUR HISTORY**

Three hundred sixty years ago in the hills circling the village of LePuy, France, the Spirit of God touched the hearts of a young priest and a group of women firing them with love for others and a vision of union with God and neighbor. This vision was to be achieved through prayer, service and reconciling love. The concept of a non-cloistered congregation including women of all classes and all backgrounds was unique in its time.

Small groups of these women spread throughout France where they earned a livelihood making lace, while devoting themselves to their goal of "dividing the city, seeking out its ills and curing them." In 1650 the group was established as a religious foundation.

The vitality and expansion of the Congregation continued until it was abruptly halted by the French Revolution. Convents were closed; Sisters were disbanded or were thrown into prison; some were even beheaded at the guillotine. In the aftermath of this chaos, it was thought that the Congregation had died.

However, after the Revolution, the Sisters of St. Joseph were re-founded by Mother St. John (Jeanne Fontbonne) who had narrowly escaped the guillotine herself. Once again the Congregation flourished. The new government called for universal education so the Sisters, once again meeting the needs of the times, became teachers.

In 1836, a request came from the Bishop of Missouri for the Sisters to come to America to teach deaf children. Three Sisters were sent to Carondelet, Missouri to establish a foundation and a school. The first U.S. ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph was the education of deaf children.

The Congregation spread throughout the heartland of the United States and to the west and east coasts. Like their foremothers, these Sisters sought out the "needs of the city" and worked to alleviate them. In 1856, at the request of the Bishop of Brooklyn, Mother Austin Kean came from Philadelphia to Brooklyn to found what is now the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood, New York.

Although our commitment to education continues from preschool to universities, we answered the call of Vatican II to respond to the needs of the times and expanded our ministries. Our sisters expanded their ministry of health care. Not only did we have a medical doctor and nurses, but sisters also became pastoral care ministers in hospitals, joined the staffs of rehab centers, became part of hospice care and worked in nursing homes and residences for those who needed assisted living.

The example of Jesus in caring for the poor, the widows and the orphans prompted us to become involved with social services. The *Providence Houses* were founded in which women who were abused or ex-offenders were welcomed with their children to live with us and have an opportunity to regain their dignity and independence. *Hour Children* took care of children whose mothers were in prison. Sisters working in parishes visited the homebound, opened food pantries, and journeyed with people in all phases of life.

Realizing that all creation is sacred and this earth is the provider of substance for all beings, an organic garden was planted as a symbol of reverence and care for our common home and sustainer.

### **WHO WE ARE:**

The Sisters of St. Joseph nurture the spiritual and physical needs of many through parish and social outreach programs. They are educators from elementary to the university level, social workers, health care professionals, lawyers, medical doctors, parish ministers, administrators and spiritual directors.

### **WHERE WE MINISTER:**

The largest order of Catholic women religious on Long Island with more than 500 members, the Sisters of St. Joseph have a 160-year tradition of ministering wherever they are needed including the Brooklyn, Rockville Centre and New York Archdioceses. The Sisters of St. Joseph seek to bring God's healing and reconciling love where there is the greatest need. Therefore we also minister in communities located Connecticut, Massachusetts, Florida, Indiana, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., Appalachia, California, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil.

### **CHALLENGES WE HAVE CHOSEN TO FACE AND WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED:**

- **WOMEN AND GIRLS**

Believing we are all equal as created by God, the Sisters of St. Joseph are committed to the respect and dignity of all. Since women and girls do not enjoy this equality, the Sisters work to ensure equal opportunity by education, by advocacy and by providing the means that allow women and girls to develop their gifts and make their voices heard. The Sisters of St. Joseph have a rich history of leading and supporting innovative programs created by women, shared by women and handed on to women and girls of all races, ethnicities and creeds.

Renewing their mission directives in 2011, the Sisters of St. Joseph have devoted their time, resources and expertise to empowering women through education, advocacy and opportunities to share their gifts; to provide shelter and protection for women who have been abused or imprisoned and for children whose mothers are incarcerated.

#### **Spotlight Case In Point**

*Providence House* began in 1979 when four Sisters of St. Joseph offered a place to stay to a mother who was coming out of prison and reuniting with her young child. This grew out of a response to a need that Sister Elaine Roulet saw firsthand while ministering to ex-offenders at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility as Director of the Children's Center. Shortly prior to their release, women were approved for weekend furloughs so they could begin the reunification process with their families. The problem was that there was no place for them to stay on these weekend visits, since many times their children had been split up among relatives or were living in foster care.

*Providence House* has since grown from that house to include five transitional residences located in Brooklyn and Queens; a transitional residence and permanent housing program in Westchester; and an apartment program and two permanent housing facilities in Brooklyn. Much more than temporary housing, *Providence House* is a community where women receive support from each other and from the dedicated Sisters and staff who employ a holistic approach to guiding the women towards creating safe, stable homes of their own.

Many more mothers and children have followed over the past 30 years. To date, over 8,500 women and 4,500 children have lived at *Providence House*.

- EDUCATION

The Sisters of St. Joseph minister in elementary schools, high schools, colleges, universities, literacy programs and religious education programs. Many are administrators and faculty at St. Joseph's College in Brooklyn and Patchogue, NY. The Sisters of St. Joseph operate 5 schools for girls -- *Fontbonne Hall Academy, The Mary Louis Academy, Sacred Heart Academy, St. Joseph H.S. and Bishop Kearney H.S.* Additionally, the Sisters of St. Joseph operate an all-girls school in San Juan Puerto Rico -- *Academia Maria Reina*.

**Spotlight Case In Point**

The *CSJ Learning Connection for Adult Education* is a private, non-profit educational program sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph. *The Learning Connection* aims to provide the tools for the empowerment of women who are undereducated, lack a high school diploma, or speak languages other than English. In a multicultural, non-competitive setting, participants follow the course of study suited to their needs, abilities and personal goals. At the present time 215 women, mostly from Latin America, attend *The Learning Connection*. They represent 18 countries and speak six different languages.

- HEALTH CARE

The Sisters of St. Joseph care for the sick and frail with reverence and affection in hospitals, residences for the elderly, and in *Maria Regina*, our skilled nursing care facility.

**Spotlight Case In Point**

*Maria Regina* skilled nursing facility offers both long and short term care, and adult day health services. *Maria Regina* has consistently earned New York State's highest ratings as a health care facility, offering the best in patient care and clinical services in a community of hope, healing and hospitality.

- SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Sisters of St. Joseph advocate for social justice especially in the areas of human trafficking, immigration, non-violence, accessibility of health care and affordable housing. As members of the *NY Coalition of Religious Congregations -- Stop Trafficking of Persons (NY CRC -- STOP)*, we support a safe house for victims of human trafficking.

**Spotlight Case In Point**

*Hour Children*'s mission is to help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their children successfully rejoin the community, reunify with their families, and build healthy, independent and secure lives. To accomplish this, *Hour Children* provides compassionate and comprehensive services and encourages all to live and interact with dignity and respect. *Hour Children*'s vision is to break the cycle of intergenerational incarceration. *Hour Children* serves incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their children. *Hour Children*'s families are overwhelmingly people of color: 56% are African American, 26% Latina, and 18% white. More than 80% of our women have a childhood history of physical and sexual abuse and 82% are identified as substance abusers. The average level of education is 7<sup>th</sup> grade. They come from all areas of the state with the majority from the New York City boroughs.

- ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATION

The Sisters of St. Joseph are dedicated to ecological conservation for the sustainability of our planet and all creation.

**Spotlight Case In Point**

At our *Organic Garden* at our Brentwood campus, we invite the community and welcome visitors to share in our harvest - taking home freshly-laid eggs, just-picked vegetables and fruit, and homemade honey from our own honeybees. Schoolchildren come to visit with our chickens, rabbits and goats.

- SPIRITUALITY

The tradition of the Sisters of St. Joseph is characterized by our concern for all without distinction, making a difference in the local as well as the world community, and most of all, addressing the needs of our times.

**Spotlight Case In Point**

At *St. Joseph's Renewal Center* at our Brentwood campus, we welcome those who wish to be more connected with their inner selves, with God, and with others. Our Center, Chapel, Labyrinth and wooded grounds are an ideal, peaceful space to pray, to reflect, and to grow spiritually. We offer opportunities for retreats, parish and youth workshops, adult programs, support groups, and training in spiritual direction

**LEARN MORE:**

Please visit [www.brentwoodcsj.org](http://www.brentwoodcsj.org) for more information.

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