

A Silver Epiphany in Nevada



Bishop Gorman with Confirmation group at St. Joan of Arc Parish

The first convent of the Sisters of the Holy Family beyond the borders of California was established in the (then) small city of Las Vegas. It was established in answer to the heartfelt pleas of Bishop Thomas K. Gorman who should, perhaps, have the first word in the story. He penned a column for Nevada's Catholic paper in the late months of 1948, recalling his pastoral needs as a new Bishop in the state in the early 30's.

"Your then still young and inexperienced Shepherd ... Realizing the utter poverty of the little parishes involved, must try ...to interest some of those wonderful communities of religious women, organized for and devoted to the purpose of teaching religious truth to Catholic children attending public schools. Such communities could go out into the mission parishes...They would, because of their mobility, penetrate to the most remote towns, ranches and section houses."

The Bishop applied to the Sisters of the Holy Family on January 13, 1938.

"Could you not find a way to make a foundation in Las Vegas? Boulder City is only twenty miles distant over a paved government road. It should be an ideal field. Please try to find a way. God will surely bless such a work. Nevada's children have been neglected so long."

The Bishop applied to many orders of religious women with the same entreaty, but was met with gentle and sad refusal because of the lack of sisters

able to be released for such a work, and their already overextended efforts in many areas.

You may well imagine how downhearted this all made your Shepherd. Sometimes he wondered whether the handicaps were not so great that it would never be possible to make a going diocese out of Nevada. Then suddenly in the midst of this gloom, when hope for the future seemed to have reached the nadir, the dark clouds of near despair were swept away and the sunshine of hope broke through. One day, late in 1932, without previous warning, a letter came from Mother Consilio of the Holy Family Sisters, San Francisco, announcing that she and her council had decided to accept the Nevada mission and that she would like to come up here to look the field over.



“In due course, Mother Consilio (pictured at the left) and her companion, the present Mother General [Sister Celestine Delehanty] arrived in Reno. Your Shepherd drove them over the desert down to Las Vegas, along the weary gravel roads of the period. At that time it took two full days, and long days at that, to drive to Las Vegas from Reno. An overnight stop was made at Tonopah... At Las Vegas the prospects for their work were examined and Mother agreed to send sisters to work there. The little convent was started in a rented house in January, 1933 and the Holy Family Sisters have been there since.

“...Later the Holy Family Sisters made a foundation in Reno... and also conduct the Reno Day Home... in addition to carrying on their catechetical work with the children of our parishes.... At one time or another they have labored in the religious vacation school of nearly every parish in the diocese.”

“...the Holy Family Sisters work regularly in all the parishes of Las Vegas, from which point they visit and care for the children of Henderson, Boulder City and Sloan. In Reno likewise they care for the religious instruction of the children attending the public schools and every week go out from here to Sparks, Fallon, Carson, Virginia City, Gardnerville, Stewart Indian school and Verdi.”

The sisters did what they were accustomed to doing in every other area of their service -- many hours of home and hospital visiting, and a great deal of providing for the poor, whatever the needs seemed to be.

SHF NEVADA SCRAPBOOK



First Las Vegas Convent

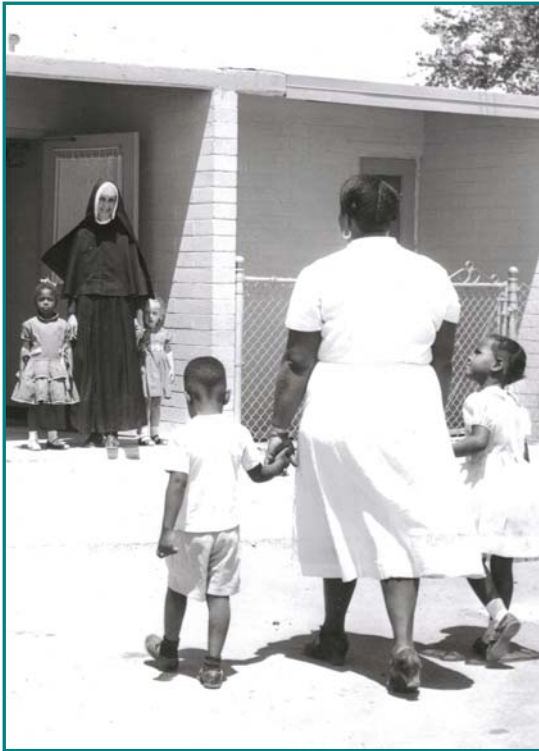
First Communion at St. James Parish, Las Vegas, NV.



First Communion Boulder city 1933

"New Christians, Steward Indian Reservation, 1956





Another of Holy Family's particular interests is the care of pre-school children of poor and working families. This work, under the patronage of the Variety Clubs of America (an organization of entertainers and those involved in the entertainment industry to foster charitable work, especially for children) began at Variety, Divine Providence Day Home, Las Vegas, in June of 1955. It is still going strong today, under the name Variety Early Learning Center.

Variety Day Home, Las Vegas 1955
(left) Sr. Antoinette gives the "official welcome."
(below) Sister interacts with children in the
"classroom" setting. This ministry was previously
called Divine Providence Variety Day Home.





Although the Sisters opened other convents and another Day Home in Nevada, spreading their ministries over the entire state, today's story is about Las Vegas.

Children in the Variety Day Home play ground, 1996.

The Feast of the Epiphany is a celebration of the manifestation of God, in the Child Jesus, to the nations of the World. The love of God for all people is proclaimed through catechesis in compassion and ministry of many kinds. It has been the great privilege of the Sisters of the Holy Family to be a part of the manifestation of those blessings throughout the Silver State.

