“By the Labors of our Hands”:

An Analysis of Labor, Gender, and the Sisters of Charity in Kentucky and Ohio, 1812-1852

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the development of two communities of women religious beginning in the early nineteenth century: the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, founded in 1812, and the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, who arrived in Ohio in 1829 and became a diocesan community in 1852. Although administratively separate, these two apostolic communities shared a charism of service to the poor in the tradition of St. Vincent de Paul. The history of these two communities demonstrates the overlapping worlds women religious inhabited: their personal faith, their community life, their place in the Catholic Church, and their place in the regions they inhabited. These women were often met with admiration as they formed necessary social institutions such as schools, hospitals, and orphanages that provided services to all religious denominations.

Sisters' active engagement with their local communities defied anti-Catholic stereotypes at the time and created significant public roles for women. The skills needed to create and maintain successful social institutions demonstrate that these women were well-educated, largely self-sufficient, competent fundraisers, and well-liked by the Catholics and Protestants alike that they served. This dissertation argues for the importance of acknowledging and analyzing this tension: as celibate, educated women who used their skills for lifelong public service, the Sisters of Charity were clearly exceptional figures among nineteenth century women, though they did not challenge the gendered hierarchies of their church or American society.

To further understand this tension, this dissertation utilizes several cases studies of conflicts between sisters and their superiors in each community to examine the extent of their influence in deciding their community's current priorities and planning for the future. These case studies demonstrate that obedience did not have a fixed definition but is better understood instead as dynamic and situational between multiple locations and circumstances. These findings concerning gender, labor, institution and community building, and the growth of American Catholicism highlight the integral role that women and religion played in the antebellum era.

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In the words of Robert Orsi and the many women he spoke with whose experiences often described my own: “Thank you, St. Jude!” And finally: any honor or glory is not mine but Yours alone.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In February of 1846, Sister Mary Leake of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky wrote a letter to a fellow sister at the community's Nashville mission. Sister Claudia Elliott corresponded frequently with sisters at the Nazareth Motherhouse during her time in Nashville from 1844 until her death there in 1893, eager for news from women she no longer saw in person. Sister Mary explained that much had changed at the Motherhouse since Sister Claudia's departure. "We have so many new Sisters since you left you would hardly know old N.," she began, expressing a sentiment that mingled nostalgia with hope. Her next observation, however, cast the new community members in a rather unflattering light: "All-most all New-Yorks, you might suppose coming from such a distance, they were real beauties, but I declare, some of them make the big rats run."[1]

Such a wry remark was not especially rare in the many letters between women religious in the antebellum United States. Their vocation as Catholic women vowed to poverty, chastity, and obedience set them apart from wives and mothers, and their dedication to service made them well-known, and often loved, in the regions where they lived. As sisters, these women's path in life marked them as symbols of piety and virtue, but their good humor animated the very human relationships established both inside and outside of the community. The traditional image of a nun, wearing the classic head covering and dark garb of Catholic imagery, does not immediately lend itself to the idea of humor or amusement. And yet, underneath their habits, women like Sister Mary and Sister Claudia possessed all the humanity of other women of their time, sometimes more alike than different from other women in their observations of the world in which they lived. Yet undeniably, their lives were distinct, as they lived as unmarried women in community with shared resources, with a daily structure focused on prayer and work, all in pursuit of eternal salvation.

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[1] UNDA: Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm. Original Letter Book Vol. 5, p. 100: Letter from Sister Mary Leake to Sister Claudia Elliott (Nashville) from Nazareth, Feb 8, 1846.

This distinctness has intrigued scholars in recent decades, and a number have worked to correct the glaring absence of women religious from studies of American Catholicism -- studies that focused largely on the role of priests and the institutional development of the church in the nineteenth century. This new scholarship has proliferated to the extent that a survey of the historiography by Bernadette McCauley confidently opens with: "Good news – it is no longer necessary to introduce a discussion of the history of women religious in the United States by noting the historical neglect of a life that attracted so many women for so long."[2] Despite its growth as a subfield, the impact of women religious on broader narratives of American history has remained insufficient, particularly in the first four decades of the nineteenth century. Scholarly acknowledgment of their distinct lives has had the unintended side effect of isolating the examination of those lives, setting these women apart from both the institution and their Protestant counterparts. In reality, the history of women religious is an integral aspect of both the history of American Catholicism and the history of women in the United States.

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[2] Bernadette McCauley. "Nuns' Stories: Writing the History of Women Religious in the United States." *American Catholic Studies* 125, no. 4 (2014): 51.

This study focuses on the development of two communities of women religious beginning in the early nineteenth century: the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, founded in 1812, and the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, who arrived in Ohio in 1829 and became a diocesan community in 1852. Although administratively separate, these two apostolic communities shared a charism of service to the poor in the tradition of St. Vincent de Paul. This Vincentian tradition began in his founding of the Daughters of Charity in France in 1633 with the purpose of forgoing the cloister in order to directly serve the poor through spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Setting his community apart from traditional cloistered orders, St. Vincent forbade these women from wear veils, put up grilles in their houses, or even ring bells to mark devotions, all traditions and rules required by the cloister. The Daughters' vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity were not perpetual as were those taken by nuns but rather renewed privately each year.[3]

This community model and St. Vincent de Paul's vision of directly serving the poor continued in the United States. beginning with Elizabeth Seton's founding of the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Maryland in 1809, modeled largely after the French Daughters. The structure of Emmitsburg reflected a spirit of collaboration between Seton, the clerical superiors of the community, and the governing council of sisters; that spirit promoted collective decision making. Seton was, by all accounts, a charismatic leader, who quickly acquired the loyalty of other women and clergy alike; after her death in 1821, the community had to readjust to their mission without such a magnetic, powerful woman at its head. By mid-century, the community had expanded to have missions in thirty cities across the eastern United States and had also endured two conflicts that resulted in the establishment of two diocesan communities, the second being in Cincinnati.[4]

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[3] For more information on St. Vincent de Paul, the Vincentian tradition, and the Daughters of Charity, see: Mary Purcell, *The World of Monsieur Vincent* (New York: Scribner, 1963); Mildred Violet Woodgate, *St Louise De Marillac, Foundress of the Sisters of Charity* (St. Louis, Mo., London: B. Herder book Co., 1946); Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Both the Nazareth and the Cincinnati communities emerged from Elizabeth Seton's community, but in different ways. Due to Emmitsburg's success, one of the community's former ecclesiastical superiors, John Baptist Mary David, sought to create a similar community upon his reassignment to the diocese of Bardstown, Kentucky, where he had been sent to assist its new bishop, Benedict Flaget. Father David spread the word of his intentions to start a community of women religious, and in December of 1812, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth were established, with a young woman named Catherine Spalding elected their first Mother. After a lengthy discussion between David, Emmitsburg's superior John Dubois, and the bishop of Baltimore, John Carroll, the priests decided that Nazareth would be administratively separate from Emmitsburg, although both shared a similar set of rules and the Vincentian charism of service to the poor.

The Cincinnati community had a different history and a different administrative relationship to Emmitsburg. In 1829, a small group of Emmitsburg sisters were sent to Cincinnati to assist in the development of the newly-established diocese. This mission established a free school and continued to thrive until the late 1840s, when a transition of leadership at Emmitsburg resulted in a prolonged conflict that concluded with the dramatic establishment of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati as a diocesan community in 1852.

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[4] Judith Metz, S.C., "The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton's Sisters of Charity," *The U.S. Catholic Historian,* Vol. 14, No. 1, Beyond the Walls: Women Religious in American Life (Winter, 1996), 19.

These were small communities, although Nazareth was significantly larger during this period; in 1852, when Cincinnati became diocesan, only seven sisters remained, although they quickly received new members once they opened their own novitiate. Nazareth's growth fluctuated significantly in its first fifty years of existence, but at the outbreak of the Civil War, 160 sisters were living at the Motherhouse or the community's branch missions. Yet these tiny worlds can make historians rethink Catholicism, the overlap between women's work both in private and public, and the choices available to women in the nineteenth century. The history of these two communities demonstrates the overlapping worlds women religious inhabited: their personal faith, their community life, their place in the Catholic Church, and their place in the regions they inhabited. These worlds interacted with each other through the many relations that women religious fostered. Taken together, they offer rich insight into women's roles in the antebellum era, the performance of labor, relations between Catholics and non-Catholics, and the role of women religious in the growth of Catholicism.

Although the focus of this study is the women who lived in these communities and the significance of their lives and relationships, their regional context and time period significantly influence how the communities developed and what purpose they served. The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth were founded in 1812, and that year largely serves as the starting point of this narrative. The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the integral role they played in the development of the diocese of Bardstown, created in 1808 (though its first bishop, Benedict Flaget, was not in residence until 1811), demonstrate the necessity of studying Catholicism in the antebellum era outside the Northeast. The diocese of Bardstown has been characterized by historians such as John Dichtl and Michael Pasquier as a region of "frontier Catholicism," defined by Catholics living in the trans-Appalachian West and lacking a strong ecclesiastical presence.[5] This lack of ecclesiastical presence and institutionalization created gaps in social services, catechism instruction, and community building that women religious filled in absence of strong clerical support. The growth of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth until approximately 1850, the end point of this study, demonstrates the extent of their influence even before high numbers of Catholic immigrants from Europe permanently altered the development of American Catholicism.

The history of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati begins with the arrival of the first sisters to the city in 1829. These sisters were members of the Sisters of Charity founded in Emmitsburg, Maryland, by Elizabeth Seton in 1809, and remained members of that community until 1852. That year, after a prolonged conflict with the Emmitsburg Motherhouse, seven of the thirteen sisters chose to form their own diocesan community under the authority of Archbishop John Purcell and no longer be affiliated with Emmitsburg.[6] This conflict, along with similar conflicts of authority occurring at Nazareth in the 1840s, demonstrate the dynamic nature of the vow of obedience and offer insight into the gendered structures governing sisters and their clerical superiors. Despite these conflicts, the sisters in both Nazareth and Cincinnati each managed social institutions that benefited both Protestants and Catholics in their regions. From 1829 to approximately 1850, a comparison of each community demonstrates differences in experience of anti-Catholicism, immigration, and slavery, while also presenting similarities of labor and institution building, conflicts of authority, and the experience of being women religious in the antebellum era.

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[5] Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[6] The remaining six sisters returned to Emmitsburg and were subsequently reassigned; they remained Sisters of Charity under Motherhouse authority.

Examining two communities over a period of approximately forty years allows the depth and complexity of relationships, conflicts, and successes on a smaller scale to illuminate broader patterns and arguments. Jill Lepore, reflecting on the nature of microhistory, posits that an emphasis on "the intensive studies of particular lives," particularly those of "hitherto obscure people," has the potential to shed significant light on the broader cultural and social issues of that time.[7] This methodology has been applied successfully to the field of women religious for a variety of reasons. Communities of women religious are difficult to generalize; each community has a particular history, charism, and connection to the local region that it serves. Cloistered and apostolic communities have fundamentally different understandings of their roles in society, and further complexities arise from certain communities being founded in Europe and transplanted to the United States and others, like the Sisters of Charity, originating in the United States – although not lacking European influence.

Consequently, historians have studied women religious most often through either in-depth examinations of single communities, or broader comparisons between different communities in search of similarities or differences. Even monographs offering large-scale pictures of women religious, such as Coburn and Smith's *Spirited Lives*, utilize case studies to make their argument – for Coburn and Smith, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet are at the center of their analysis.[8] Other studies of women religious focus on multiple communities in one geographic area, emphasizing the sisters' involvement in local histories and their contributions to region's development.[9] This study integrates both regional history and growth with two community histories in order to contextualize these community histories and to highlight their essential role in regional and ecclesiastical development. The Ohio River Valley region encompassed a wide variety of cultural practices, and Ohio and Kentucky developed in distinctly different ways despite their geographic proximity. By examining the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, the hierarchical nature of Kentucky and the Upper South and its influence of Catholicism in that area is highlighted. The Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati performed a similar mission in their own diocese, and yet despite a shared charism, regional factors created clear differences in terms of labor practices and experiences of anti-Catholicism.

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[7] Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography." *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (2001): 131.

Despite their differences, both communities present case studies of conflicts of authority that reveal meaningful patterns in the dynamics of sister-superior relationships. Analyzing these case studies offers valuable insight into the gendered nature of community life and the Catholic church, freedoms and restrictions present in a vowed life, and understanding how clerical power has shaped the narratives of American Catholicism despite the sisters' significant present and influence in their dioceses.

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[8] Other examples of in-depth community studies include: Emily Clark's *Masterless Mistresses* on the Ursulines, Mary Beth Fraser Connolly's *Women of Faith* on the Sisters of Mercy, and Diane Batts Morrow's *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* on the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

[9] Maureen Fitzgerald in *Habits of Compassion* focuses on Irish sisters in New York City; Suellen Hoy in *Good Hearts* examines several communities in the Chicago area.

For well over a century, the number of women religious in the United States far outweighed that of priests and brothers, making them an undeniable "public face" of Catholicism in a majority-Protestant nation.[10] A variety of structural and academic factors, however, has long rendered the significance of their lives and labor "invisible."[11] Women's histories have often relied on the emergence of Protestant women's benevolent organizations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to construct theories of womanhood and its relation to public and private power. Theories of "separate spheres" and its implicit relationship to the growth of "the cult of domesticity" in the Early Republic rely on Protestant understandings of "the home" as the moral center of society, necessitating protection from the temptations and corruptions of "the public," with women becoming synonymous with home. This generalization has worked to limit the ways in which historians categorize women's experiences, although it has been successfully used to demonstrate the significant constraints women in early America faced in their choices.[12] Maureen Fitzgerald has demonstrated the shortcomings of the "separate spheres" discourse, particularly in regard to the study of women religious, arguing thatj "part of the reason that nuns have remained virtually invisible in nineteenth-century women's history is that the measures, or signposts, of their public power do not fit the framework constructed for understanding the power of Protestant middle-class and elite women during the same period."[13] Protestant women had few feasible alternatives to their expected path of marriage and motherhood; their participation in benevolence work was largely dictated by their age and marital status, with motherhood often limiting their amount of involvement.[14]

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[10] McCauley, "Nuns' Stories," 67.

[11] Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System 1830-1920* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 8-9.

[12] Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), xiv-xv.

With their vow of celibacy, women religious forged a different path: they were single by choice, and chose also to use their skills in service to God. This path allowed them to become "some of the best educated and most publicly active women of their time," with many mother superiors exhibiting the organizational, administrative, and financial skills that some scholars have argued could have them considered as some of the "first female CEOs."[15] Despite their impressive women-led organization, public engagement, and freedom from husbands and children, however, to say that women religious in the United States mounted a substantial challenge to contemporary understandings of gender and femininity would lack nuance. So, too, would an argument that their participation in celibate, female-centered community life freed them from the authority of men. Analyzing the position of women religious such as the two Sisters of

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[13] Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion*, 9.

[14] Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 71. As Boylan argues: "Regardless of the catalyst, when married women leaders interrupted or ended their careers in benevolence, they were refusing to permit vocation to compete with family. By subordinating their volunteer careers to their family labor, and matching volunteer work with particular phases of their marital and reproductive lives, these leaders enacted and reproduced a gender ideology based on feminine self-sacrifice and subordination."

[15] Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 3.

Charity communities requires an acknowledgment of nuance and potential contradictions: as celibate, educated women who used their skills for lifelong public service, they were clearly exceptional figures among nineteenth century women. Yet they did not challenge the gendered hierarchies of their church. The nature of their agency is not easily understood in the dichotomies of public and private power.

To understand more fully the choices women religious made – first to enter apostolic community life, and then to strive to meet the standards of their community and their faith for the rest of their lives – requires an acknowledgment and thorough analysis of the centrality of Catholic beliefs. As Mary Beth Fraser Connolly points out in her study of the Sisters of Mercy in Chicago, "Religious faith - a specific belief in God and participation in a church - was fundamental to how many women constructed their lives, related to their families, and moved through society."[16] Although intangible in itself, religious faith produced tangible and material developments throughout the nineteenth century. The study of women religious emphasizes this reality, as apostolic orders frequently established myriad social institutions that provided not only spiritual but material support for those in need, regardless of denomination. The centrality of faith, however, is not always clear in historians' analysis of women religious, whether the study surveys many communities or concentrates on one or two in-depth. The observation that scholars working on women's history "continue to evince a certain squeamishness about religious faith" continues to resonate, despite recent advances in the field.[17] Historians have made an effort to historicize and contextualize these women's choices and to understand better the nature of public and private power. Such analyses often highlight the sisters' achievements rather than their personal lives, and consequently, lack clear attention to the role of spirituality. Catholic women's faith is reduced to merely "an interesting curiosity" of women's history rather than its impetus.[18]

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[16] Mary Beth Fraser Connolly, *Women of Faith: The Chicago Sisters of Mercy and the Evolution of a Religious Community* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 5.

[17] Deirdre Raftery, "The "Third Wave" is Digital: Researching Histories of Women Religious in the Twenty-first Century." *American Catholic Studies* 128, no. 2 (2017): 31.

Although the experience and texture of faith has often been given short shrift, religion has been acknowledged as a motivational force in women's history. Studies of Protestant women were integral to the development of the theory of separate spheres, and the significance of their Protestantism is evident in analysis of the origins of women's benevolent organizations. These narratives portray a fairly consistent evolution. First, religious belief inspires women to embrace public activism and women's rights. Once moved into this public sphere, involvement in political and social causes and advancement in employment and education become the important story.[19] Maureen Fitzgerald persuasively argues that though they too were motivated by faith, Catholic women religious had fundamentally different strengths and faced different constraints. While Protestant women gained a greater public presence through their claims of virtue as mothers, Catholic sisters' visibility increased through work they did living in celibate female communities. They became known not only for their distinct style of dress, but for the institutions they founded and managed.[20]

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[18] Fraser Connolly, *Women of Faith,* 6.

[19] Fraser Connolly, *Women of Faith,* 6.

[20] Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion*, 9-10.

Another factor complicating discussions of women religious is the ever-present but structurally separate male clerical hierarchy in the Catholic Church. In older studies of American Catholicism, "Catholic" was nearly synonymous with "priests," often as a result of the preservation of clerical personal records and correspondences.[21] This presents a particularly skewed picture for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when priests in the United States were notoriously scarce while communities of women religious grew steadily. The latter's numbers grew exponentially beginning in the early 1830s, preceding the influx of European, and particularly Irish, immigration in the 1840s and 1850s.[22] Sisters' commanding numbers and dedication to the growth of Catholicism in the early United States lend credence to the argument that women religious "built the American Catholic Church infrastructure, which educated and cared for the laity for well over a century."[23] The very structure of Catholicism, however, ensured that women religious could not, and would not seek to be, distant from clergy in an organization or spiritual sense. The sacramentality of Catholic theology ensured that sisters would not be found far from priests in any extended capacity. Since priests had the sole authority to perform the sacraments, and regular partaking of the sacraments was a requirement to reach eternal salvation, communities of women religious could not fulfill their primary purpose of leading sisters to a holy life on earth without male clergy. Arguments proposing that women religious could operate "largely independent" from priests are misleading.[24]

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[21] One of the earliest works on American Catholicism that laid the foundation for the field and its clerical emphasis was John Gilmary Shea's four-volume *History of the Catholic Church in the United States* (New York, 1886-1892). For other traditional works on priests in the United States and clerical historiography, see: John Tracy Ellis, *A Select Bibliography of the Catholic Church in the United States* (New York: Declan X. McMullen Co., 1947); John Paul Cadden, *The Historiography of the American Catholic Church, 1785-1943* (New York: Arno Press, 1978); and John Tracy Ellis and Robert Trisco, *A Guide to American Catholic History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1982). For more recent scholarship continuing the trend of ecclesiastical and institutional histories, see: James Hennessey, S.J., *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Random House, 1997); Joseph Chinnici, *Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic Spiritual Life in the United States* (New York: Orbis Book2, 1996); Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Westport: Praeger, 2004); and John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

[22] Joseph G. Mannard, "Our Dear Houses are Here, There + Every Where: The Convent Revolution in Antebellum America." *American Catholic Studies*, Vol. 128, No.2 (Summer 2017): 5.

[23] Fraser Connolly, *Women of Faith,* 3.

Sisters' relationships with priests and the dynamics between the two groups remain topics of ongoing examination, with Catholic sisters at times compared to Protestant women. Central to this comparison is Protestant women's relationships to their husbands; the legal and social implications of marriage placed significant constraints on their choices throughout the nineteenth century. Women religious, as unmarried women, had no parallel relationship. Priests were not husbands. Yet they were essential to women's religious communities. Their connection to the sacraments made them a necessity in and of themselves, and a number of communities recognized a priest or bishop as their ecclesiastical superior. The authority of male superiors and expectations for proper behavior were often outlined in a community's constitution. Sisters' vow of obedience was implicitly connected to clerical authority, although it did not pertain exclusively to priests. Sisters were expected to recognize a variety of superiors, from more experienced sisters, mother superiors and other female administrators, local priests or confessors who frequently interacted with the sisters, and up the broader hierarchy of bishops and archbishops when necessary.

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[24] Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion*, 10.

How did taking a vow of obedience affect the agency and available choices of sisters? Obedience is an ethos and a practice, interpreted, accepted, and departed from in myriad ways; it is not simply the opposite of disobedience. Women in apostolic communities, who took annual vows, considered their choice of obedience itself, as well as how to live up to it, frequently. Vows did not provide a singular answer to how women religious should navigate their lives; rather, it was possible for vows to exist "in conflict" with individual experiences, so that sisters could attempt to "[negotiate] their relative weight and balance in any situation or circumstance."[25] What a priest considered disobedient might differ from the perspective of a mother superior, and even the same priest might react differently to similar situations for any number of reasons, such as a result of previous experience or in preference of certain sisters. Individual experiences and different personalities, however, can only account for so much when it comes to historians identifying broader trends among women religious. Conflicts between clerical superiors and sisters demonstrate the ongoing negotiations for governance within the context of vowed obedience that suggest broader patterns of centralization beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Crises of authority occurred in both the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg, including those sisters living in Cincinnati, and these case studies illuminate the complexity and dynamic nature of obedience within religious communities.

The religious life was a distinct vocation that created opportunities not available to women who married and became mothers. Such a life allowed for access to education, administrative skills, and the option to have a lifelong occupation if a sister could use her particular skills to meet a community need. The types of labor that sisters performed, however, often overlapped with the daily labor performed by lay women, and sisters' vow of poverty meant that they, like many married women, did not stake individual claim to their earnings. Many communities of women religious, including the Sisters of Charity, spent significant time performing domestic labor, both for their own upkeep as well as in service to local seminaries. Industrialization had profound effects on contemporary understandings of division of labor between men and women, and sisters faced these consequences alongside other women. In her study of the value of housework in the early United States, Jeanne Boydston argues that "the chief historical effect of industrial capitalism on housework has thus been to exclude it from the economy."[26] This invisibility of women's labor has presented an obstacle to fully understanding the value of sisters' labors and their role in local economies.

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[25] Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion*, 28.

Without wages, how can historians conceive of sisters' economic contributions, especially considering the defining factor of taking a vow of poverty? As Boydston points out, industrialization in early America developed a culture in which "labor" became synonymous with wages, and "wages" synonymous with manhood.[27] Sisters, unable to earn wages, possessed a distinct sense of femininity that helped formulate an image that these women were not of this earth and not tied to wages or the possessions that wages might provide. However, the vast majority of sisters' time was, in fact, filled with work, and this work tied them intimately to earthly matters. Their daily labor consisted of largely the same tasks needing to be done in both lower- and middle-class households in the early nineteenth century: "Food had to be cooked, clothes had to be laundered, and floors had to be scrubbed. Mattresses and pallets had to be aired, dishes had to be washed, candles and lamps had to be tended, and fires had to be built and regulated."[28] Sisters also spent a great deal of energy caring for the surrounding community. They taught young girls, cared for orphans, and nursed the sick, which occasionally included their clerical superiors. Given the similarities in duties, it is not unreasonable to think of religious communities as a certain type of household. Sisters' labor connected them to each other and to those they served, and their domestic labor was often rendered "invisible," both within the church and within the American economy more broadly. Their dedication to humility only enhanced this invisibility.

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[26] Boydston, *Home and Work,* xv.

[27] Boydston, *Home and Work,* 31.

The gendered division of labor in the antebellum era is implicitly connected to understanding the concept of "separate spheres," a theoretical framework that has been both widely exercised and vigorously challenged.[29] The study of women religious presents another group within which to examine this framework. In one sense, women religious fall clearly within the realm of acceptable domestic work for nineteenth-century women. Joseph Mannard characterized the domestic labor formed by sisters as a "maternity of the spirit"; that is, that their care for orphans, students, the sick and the poor of their surrounding area was a feminine expression of nurturing, virtuous love meant to correct society's "public" corruptions.[30] Women religious did not merely conform to the cult of true womanhood, Mannard argues, they also "institutionalized" domestic ideology in their vows and in the makings of a vowed life. Ultimately, this made the role of the mother, in essence, indistinguishable from that of the sister: "Above all, the nun in the cloister shared with the mother in the home a commitment to self-sacrifice for the sake of others."[31] However, such language conflates the experiences of active and contemplative religious orders. Apostolic women engaging in life without following prescriptions of cloister did practice daily acts of self-sacrifice, but the visible signs of their lives – their dress, communal life, daily structured prayer, care for those not of blood relation – suggest that conflating mothers and sisters overlooks important historical realities.

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[28] Boydston, *Home and Work,* 126.

[29] Classic descriptions of the "separate spheres" model in the antebellum United States include: Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151-75; Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century American* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); and Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Challenges to this traditional model are numerous; for concise overviews and analysis of the model's limitations, see: Linda K. Kerber, Nancy F. Cott, Robert Gross, Lynn Hunt, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and Christine M. Stansell, "Beyond Roles, Beyond Spheres: Thinking about Gender in the Early Republic." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1989): 565-85. Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988), 9-39; Carroll Lasser, "Beyond Separate Spheres: The Power of Public Opinion," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21, no. 1 (2001): 115-23.

In addition to analyzing where women religious fit within intersecting structures of class, gender, and labor, it is also necessary for historians to consider what sisters themselves thought about the circumstances in which they lived. Historians have raised the question of intent when evaluating and interpreting the actions and motivations of women religious: if sisters did not *intend* to alter a particular system, then could they do so in spite of their intention? For Mannard, sisters' lack of intention to challenge the gender roles of their time, both by choosing a vowed life and by instilling those gender roles within the young girls that they taught, invalidates the possibility that the differences between their lives and the lives of married women presented a challenge to contemporary domestic ideology. In examining various communities of women religious in Chicago, however, Suellen Hoy argues that the sisters' actions speak for themselves in "quietly challenging" the cult of true womanhood.[32] Their benevolent work of teaching, nursing, caring for the poor, and sometimes actively challenging injustices made their public work a visible model for lay women. For Hoy, this modeling of behavior and the possibility that lay women might believe that they too might engage in work beyond their role as mothers is, in itself, a challenge to domestic ideology, regardless of intent. Religious life and married life paralleled each other in that each woman's ability to exercise agency was still largely dependent on male authority, but outside this power dynamic, significant differences emerged. The constant presence of other women, an agreed upon code of behavior, and the opportunity to participate in decision making within a community's council all contributed to the sense of freedom offered in religious life.

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[30] Joseph Mannard, "Maternity…of the Spirit: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America." *U.S. Catholic Historian*. Vol. 5, No. 3/4, Women in the Catholic Community (Summer - Fall, 1986), pp. 305-324.

[31] Mannard, "Maternity of the Spirit," 318.

Women religious thus help us rethink the possibilities of gendered labor, as well as the institutional supports for the denomination that would by the end of the nineteenth century be the largest in the United States. The sisters' lives and work also help historians to reconsider the way anti-Catholicism shaped Catholic experience. The Nazareth and

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[32] Suellen Hoy, *Good Hearts: Catholic Sisters in Chicago's Past* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 45.

Cincinnati communities draw our attention away from the Northeast, where both American Catholic history broadly construed and studies of women religious in the United States have focused most frequently. Scholarship on religion in the nineteenth century assumes this region as the locus or starting point for religious organization and identifying the roots of how religion, often implicitly assumed to be synonymous with Protestantism, influenced the new nation in terms of legislation, gender roles, and the politics of church and state. Integral to this regional analysis is a focus on Protestant-Catholic relations, with the Catholic minority struggling for social and political recognition in the face of Protestants wary of papist influence. The dominance of this narrative has prevented more historians from looking at the limits of anti-Catholicism and exploring ways that Catholics confidently participated in the growing nation. One early but still cited study is Ray Billington's *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860*, published in 1938. Billington begins with the development of anti-Catholic attitudes in England and argues that these hostilities were transported across the Atlantic with the first English colonists before flourishing in the United States in the 1840s and 1850s with emergence of the Know-Nothing party that embraced an explicitly anti-immigrant, and therefore anti-Catholic, platform. Andrew Stern has identified the irony in such a deeply-rooted historical assumption, pointing out that "the nineteenth-century Know-Nothing complaint that an undemocratic Catholic Church stood in tension with political democracy became, ironically, a favored theme, of twentieth-century American Catholic historians."[33]

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[33] Andrew H.M. Stern, *Southern Crucifix, Southern Cross: Catholic-Protestant Relations in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2012), 3.

American Catholic history, in the decades following *The Protestant Crusade*, became largely a history of European immigrants. James Hennessey's *American Catholicism* in 1981 was one of the largest compilations of what scholars began referring to as "the American Catholic experience," an experience that was largely immigrant by the mid-nineteenth century. The American Catholic experience as a scholarly topic was soon expanded upon by Jay Dolan in his seminal works *In Search of American Catholicism* and *The American Catholic Experience*. Dolan was praised for his attention to "immigrant devotionalism," and for attempting to understand how Catholicism shaped immigrants' daily experiences as well as their overall worldview. His source base, however, relied heavily on clerical records and the role of prominent prelates, limiting a more grassroots perspective. His focus on Catholic immigrants also, perhaps unintentionally, emphasized an urban experience, which strongly influenced the direction of the field by consistently connecting "American Catholicism" with Northeast urban centers.

This scholarly focus on the Northeast obscures the details and demographics of the development and growth of Catholicism for much of American history from the Revolution to the Civil War. Although estimates vary, some figures suggest a majority of the nation's Catholics lived in the South even as late as 1840. More definitively, as late as 1840, southern dioceses outnumbered northern seven to nine, and even in 1860, the North outnumbered the South only by seven dioceses.[34] Catholicism in the South had a strong presence not only in terms of structure but also in social and institutional forms:

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[34] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 4.

the first Catholic colleges appeared in Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, and Alabama; the first Catholic newspaper was the *United States Catholic Miscellany* in 1822 in Charleston.[35] Many of the oldest American-born Catholic families, with various members becoming prominent clergy or community members, settled in the South, including the Carrolls, the Spaldings, and the Fenwicks.

This study exploresj Catholicism in Kentucky, although connections are also made to other slaveholding states to identify broader patterns and provide comparisons. Catholicism in Kentucky took root beginning in the 1780s as groups of wealthy Catholic families from Maryland became frustrated with the production of their farms and looked to move to better prospects. In 1785, a "league" of sixty Catholic families was formed in Maryland who pledged to migrate in the near future to Kentucky.[36] These families settled almost exclusively in Nelson County, and created several Catholic settlements, including Pottinger's Creek, Hardin Creek, Cartwright's Creek, Bardstown, Cox Creek (or Fairfield), and parts of Scott County. The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth would later attract many women who were members of these families, in addition to women with family connections that remained in Maryland. As migrants from an established slaveholding state, where many of these families had made their wealth through landowning and slaveholding from the colonial settlement of Maryland, these families also ensured the continuation of the institution of slavery in their new home.

This lack of scholarly attention to Catholicism outside of the Northeast does not reflect the significant influence of Catholicism in Kentucky and other slaveholding states, although Catholics remained a minority. Religious communities of both men and women, from the earliest days of the United States, took root in the South, including the Order of St. Sulpice, the Order of Preachers, the Ursulines, the Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, and the Sisters of Loretto.[37] These communities realized that they were members of a religious minority within their nation, but their day to day experiences did not always reflect anti-Catholicism as a major factor in their lives or organizational efforts. The argument that hostility between Catholics and Protestants was the primary factor in an "American Catholic experience" is challenged by the evidence of mutual cooperation between the two groups in states in both the upper and lower South. As Andrew Stern has demonstrated, Protestants were often financially and socially supportive of Southern Catholics, donating consistently to their fundraising projects, sending their children to private Catholic schools, using Catholic hospitals, and intermarrying with Catholics with notable frequency.[38]

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Benedict Webb, *The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky* (Louisville: 1884), 27.

Stern was not the first historian to note this tendency towards cooperation between Protestants and Catholics when examining regions outside the urban Northeast. John Dichtl, focusing on Catholicism in the trans-Appalachian west in the early nineteenth century, argues that "the growth of the church in frontier areas…took place in a context both of cooperation and of competition with American Protestantism."[39] Like Stern's findings in the Old South, Dichtl points out that financial support of Catholic building projects was not uncommon in outside of Northeast urban centers, and he attributes this to Protestants' recognition that Catholics could offer services for both their own communities as well as Protestants, especially schools.[40] This broader pattern of cooperation does not suggest that anti-Catholicism did not exist in any form outside the Northeast, but does present compelling contrasts to many case studies of religion focusing on that region.

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[37] The reasons for this settlement pattern are multifaceted but can largely be attributed to the origins of Catholic settlement in colonial Maryland. Stern argues that that Maryland as a Catholic haven was short-lived but continued to "serve as a symbol" for Catholics with Baltimore established as the first diocese. Old Catholic families with Maryland roots consistently provided the early Church with leaders, even after those families relocated and with the establishment of additional diocese. The most consistent Catholic migration away from Maryland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to Kentucky, although this pattern shifted after the American Revolution when South Carolina also became a popular destination for Catholics leaving Maryland. See Stern, 14-17.

[38] Stern, *Southern Crucifix,* 6, 19, 22, 39-40.

Catholics and Protestants alike faced the challenges of trying to settle and build communities in various degrees of wilderness. Scholarship focusing on these regions outside with Northeast challenge the prevalence of anti-Catholicism as a uniform experience, suggesting instead that moving away from the Northeast provided new opportunities for Catholics in regions without histories of prominent Protestant settlements. Dichtl argues that westward expansion allowed Catholics to escape some of the social and legal constraints of the Northeast, which resulted in Catholics in the frontier focusing on evangelization and conversion. Rejecting the idea that American Catholics must appear "less Catholic" in order to be good republican citizens, the west fostered an environment where they sought to form a distinct cultural identity. The lack of established institutions, however, proved to be a double-edged sword for Catholics: although Protestant influences were less prominent, Catholics also were forced to grapple with a priest shortage, distant parishes, a lack of other established social institutions, a shortage of financial and devotional resources, and murkiness concerning the authority of the eastern clergy and their oversight of frontier Catholics.[41]

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[39] John Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith: Bringing Catholicism to the West in the Early Republic* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 3.

[40] Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 96; 98-99. Dichtl does not emphasize the role that women religious in the region played in this vital institution-building process.

This institutional gap and lack of structural presence was largely filled by the efforts of women religious and their dedication to creating avenues and institutions to serve those in need. Migrants moving westward during the early and mid-nineteenth century sought freedom, economic security, and future success for their families, but the importance of religion to their cultural identities made them eager to reestablish their religious institutions as well. In addition to the need for churches, migrants often needed other forms of social support, and many frontier communities benefited from the dedication of sisters to the surrounding Catholic populations, who provided education and medical care in addition to advocating the needs of the lay population to clerical authorities when necessary. In Kentucky, institutional or community services were especially sparse due to lack of state regulation and absence of state-sponsored social services, making the sisters' labor vital, especially in terms of education and healthcare. The absence of uniform standards for doctors and nurses hindered professionalization, but it created space for others to practice, including clergy and women.[42]

Sisters specializing in education also filled a wide social gap, especially outside the Northeast. The Sisters of Charity established St. Peter's, the first permanently established free school in Ohio, in 1829, with the first public schools of Cincinnati not founded until later in 1830. The South broadly lacked schools; Kentucky waited until 1853 to establish a school in each county, but Southern preference for parochial and private schools remained, creating a stigma around free schools and hindering their success.[43] The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth began their mission to educate young girls by opening their first school in August of 1814. By 1825, sixty Sisters of Charity of Nazareth ministered and educated at schools they established in Nazareth, Bardstown, St. Thomas, Union County, Scott County, and Vincennes, Indiana, and would later move into Tennessee as well.[44] Because religious orders of woman ran so many of the schools in the South and typically educated only girls, the young women benefited disproportionately, and sisters played an integral role in promoting and expanding educational opportunities for girls.

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[41] Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith,* 3-7.

[42] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 43.

An additional regional factor cannot be overlooked in considering why Protestants appeared less antagonistic towards their Catholic neighbors in the South is: the practice of slaveholding. By being either slaveowners themselves, or by allowing human bondage to go unchallenged or unquestioned, Southern Catholics proved their dedication to being "good Southerners." Catholic families arriving in Kentucky had already accepted and benefited from slaveholding in Maryland, and their established wealth allowed them to become disproportionately represented in the ranks of the state's slaveholders. According to census records in 1810, half of the Catholic pioneers to central Kentucky owned slaves even though only a third of the state's general population did so; when tracking individual Catholics over decades, an even higher percentage emerges.[45] The prevalence of Catholic slaveholders in Kentucky can largely be explained through their place in the state's class structure. However, as a minority, Catholics also sought to assimilate into the broader culture to avoid nativist charges of disloyalty or foreignness. Slaveholding allowed Catholic families in Kentucky to acquire more wealth, create a shared practice with Protestants, and uphold the value of social order – all of which fostered friendly relationships with non-Catholic Kentuckians.

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[43] Stern, *Southern Crucifix,* 70-73.

[44] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 84.

Slavery was an integral aspect to Catholic life in Kentucky, and the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth participated in this practice without leaving any evidence of uncertainly or opposition. Slavery in Kentucky and other slaveholding states was an integral aspect of community success or failure. As Stern points out, all three female communities in Kentucky employed slave labor, and the national picture is clear: of the twelve communities established in the United States between 1790 and 1829, eight survived, seven of which acquired slaves. Of the communities that failed, none seemed to own slaves.[46] From its early years, slavery helped build the diocese of Bardstown, beginning with Bishop Flaget's inheritance of slaves from Thomas Howard; although not clearly substantiated in the records, slave labor is believed to have played a part in building the first cathedral in Bardstown.[47] The reality of Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and other communities of sisters owning slaves complicates and contradicts the established image of their benevolence. It is not possible to thoroughly analyze the success the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth achieved in terms of the size and scope of their social institutions without emphasizing the significance of the fact that much of this public service was possible only because sisters owned slaves who provided essential manual labor for farming and domestic work.

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[45] C. Walker Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky." *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (January 1998)," 44.

[46] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 168.

[47] Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky," 50.

Creating scholarship that reflects the many positions that Catholic women, particularly women religious, occupied in nineteenth-century America is a necessary but daunting task. The lives of women religious were situated in overlapping communities and structures, each with their own narratives. In their decision to join a particular community, each sister belonged to that order and was expected to conform to its rule. Beyond that local context, sisters as American women belonged to the same nation and society as their non-Catholic counterparts, thus following the same laws and sharing many customs. As Catholics, they were members of the Catholic Church specifically as an American religious institution; they were sometimes members of a parish with a distinctive ethnic or immigrant identity. They also saw themselves as part of a world-wide Church whose mission was to serve individuals on earth and remain connected to the idea of salvation in the afterlife. This project engages with each of these contexts individually as well as in the places they intersect.

This dissertation consists of five chapters analyzing the growth and significance of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati in one narrative from approximately 1812 to 1852. The first discusses the background and establishment of the Diocese of Bardstown with a focus on Catholicism in Kentucky and Ohio. Focusing on the founding of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, their governance structure, and the management of their finances, this chapter establishes the foundation of women religious in the United States and the significance of their role to both the nation and the Catholic Church, which each lacked strong institutional structures during this time period. The second chapter expands upon this foundation and traces the changes during 1820s in Nazareth and Cincinnati. This chapter emphasizes the importance of regional context, including how the dioceses of Bardstown and Cincinnati and the two communities of sisters raised the necessary funds to support their missions. These missions are described in detail, particularly the contributions the Sisters of Charity made by establishing schools and providing healthcare during cholera outbreaks in the region. The Sisters of Charity arrive in Cincinnati in 1829 to close this chapter.

Chapter three analyzes the structure of authority in each community, focusing on the relationship that the sisters had with their superiors. Spanning the decade of the 1830s, this period consisted of ongoing conflicts of authority at Nazareth in particular. Authoritarian and collaborative approaches to leadership, as exemplified by John David at Nazareth and Bishop John Purcell in Cincinnati, are analyzed to demonstrate both the possibilities and constraints sisters grappled with in community life. This chapter highlights the roles that gender and the vow of obedience played in negotiating conflicts between sisters and their superiors. Chapter four expands upon this analysis of the politics of authority in the 1840s by examining Purcell's relationship with the Sisters of Charity as they became increasingly involved the diocese of Cincinnati, while the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth negotiated with the bishop of Bardstown to decide the fate of their community. This chapter also examines the centrality of slavery to Nazareth's success and makes the case for scholars to look closely at the intersection of slavery and women religious. The sisters' benevolence work and their position as slaveholders were not contradictory actions but rather functioned as an additional way for them to exercise power.

Chapter five utilizes an additional case study in which sisters took action and negotiated with their superiors in order to shape their community's future. In the late 1840s, the Sisters of Charity Motherhouse in Emmitsburg, whose authority the sisters in Cincinnati were under, began the process of forming a "spiritual union" with the Daughters of Charity in France. This decision drastically altered the administrative structure of the Sisters of Charity and was made without the sisters' knowledge. One particular sister in Cincinnati, Margaret George, stood firmly in her disagreement with this decision; her actions resulted in transition of the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati to their own diocesan community, no longer an extension of Emmitsburg. This chapter contributes to the dissertation's overall arguments concerning gender, obedience, and the complex ways authority functioned in these communities of women religious.

This dissertation concludes by making the case that the study of women religious in the antebellum United States is a rich resource for women's history. This conclusion utilizes various methodologies employed by women's historians over the past several decades that serve to highlight how sisters' stories are women's stories, and as such, can be integrated into broader narratives concerning gender roles, power, relationships between women, and the growth of social institutions in the fledgling nation. Scholars' choices in deciding what groups and what stories are "worthy" of analysis have had the consequence of relegating women religious to their separate subfield. This project argues that integrating these community histories can benefit many fields beyond the clear association with Catholic history.

Sisters' labor and leadership left a material and spiritual legacy. It is visible in the institutions they built, the communities they left behind, and in the descriptions of sisters' labor to be found in newspapers and the reminiscences of those once in their care. The same documents give evidence of the centrality of relationships to the women's lives and work. These relationships were not peripheral to the Catholic church in the antebellum era; they were the foundation of Catholicism in a new nation. Relationships connected the sisters to each other, to their community's past, to the surrounding area they served, to their superiors, and to the politics of their time.

CHAPTER 2

THE GROWTH OF CATHOLICISM AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN EARLY KENTUCKY AND OHIO

Background and Establishment of the Dioceses of Bardstown and Cincinnati

Not long after his arrival in Bardstown, Kentucky, in 1811, Bishop Benedict Flaget remarked to his close friend Father Simon Bruté that he had already been overwhelmed with local Protestants interested in attending his church and learning more about Catholicism. Convinced such early enthusiasm was a sign of God's approval, Flaget confidently assured Bruté: "Oh! Dear confrere, send me some good priests and in a few years we will furnish a very interesting article for ecclesiastical history."[48]

The expansion of the Catholic Church west of the Appalachians occurred even as it grew in the northeast and maintained a significant presence below the Mason Dixon line. Baltimore had been established as the first diocese in the United States in 1789 with John Carroll as its bishop, and remained the sole diocese until 1808, when the Bardstown, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston sees were created. Ohio, and the rest of the vast area designated as the Northwest Territory, became part of the Diocese of Bardstown. Catholic settlement patterns in the United States began primarily with a large group of Catholic families arriving in Maryland under the leadership of Cecil Calvert, Lord Baltimore, in the 1630s. Calvert's "Maryland Design" promoted religious freedom for Catholics while conceding that Protestants would likely remain a majority of the colony's population. Religious toleration was legislated into law first in 1639 and finalized ten years later in the Act Concerning Religion, or Toleration Act. As one of the earliest official expressions of religious liberty in the British colonies, Catholics recognized Maryland's potential and established long-lasting roots in the region.[49]

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[48] UNDA: Sisters of Charity microfilm collection. Letter from Flaget to Bruté: July 20, 1812.

Despite this potential, security and peace for Catholics in Maryland did not endure. The instability of English politics, the spread of Puritanism in the colony, and a decline in royal authority in England all contributed to growing anti-Catholic sentiment, and in 1654, Maryland Protestants discarded the Toleration Act and outlawed Catholicism. In 1691, William III made Maryland a royal province, although he allowed the Calverts and other prominent landowning Catholics to keep their property. By just the next year, however, religious liberty came to an end with the establishment of the Church of England in the colony, and by the early 1700s, Catholics sought to leave the colony for better prospects.[50] By then, slavery had already become entrenched in the colony and within the landowning Catholics who lived there.[51]

Two developments in Kentucky in the late 1770s made the region increasingly attractive to migrants: the success of George Rogers Clark and his forces in subduing the Indians of Illinois Country in 1778, and the government of Virginia clarifying the rights of landholders in Kentucky.[52] The wave of migration that occurred to Lexington and the surrounding region in the 1780s were largely groups of families with strong kinship ties, drawing from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Piedmont.[53] Sometimes described as the "Old West," this expansion of the Appalachian upland including western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky was undertaken by predominantly Scots-Irish and German residents of Maryland and eastern Pennsylvania as well as lowland migrants who had been displaced by rising land prices and the establishment of an elite plantation class.[54]

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[49] Andrew H.M. Stern, *Southern Crucifix, Southern Cross: Catholic-Protestant Relations in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2012), 15.

[50] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 15-16.

[51] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes*, 3rd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1967), 76-77. According to Franklin, by the end of the eighteenth century, Maryland had approximately one hundred thousand black people, almost all of them enslaved.

[52] Lee Shai Weissbach. "The Peopling of Lexington, Kentucky: Growth and Mobility in a Frontier Town." *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 81, no. 2 (1983): 116.

Individual Catholics had entered north-central Kentucky in small numbers in the 1770s; a group from Maryland made a major settlement in Nelson County in 1785, which would grow into a strong presence in twelve central counties by 1807.[55] The first Kentucky parish was established in 1788 by missionary Father Charles Maurice Whelan, an Irish friar. Father Badin and Vicar-General Barrieres arrived in 1793 to care for approximately three hundred Catholics, most of whom had migrated from Catholic settlements in Maryland and Pennsylvania.[56]

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[53] Wassbach, "The Peopling of Lexington, Kentucky," 120. As Wassbach points out: "This is not surprising, given that the back parts of Virginia and North Carolina were settled primarily by families which had come first to Pennsylvania from Europe."

[54] John D. Barnhart. "Frontiersmen and Planters in the Formation of Kentucky." *The Journal of Southern History* 7, no. 1 (1941): 19.

[55] Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith,* 14.

[56] For a detailed account of the development of and history of Kentucky's settlement, without a Catholic emphasis, see: Stephen Aron, *How the West was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). For Kentucky's development in a broader geographic context, see: John C. Hudson, *Across This Land: A Regional Geography of the United States and Canada* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), particularly "The Bluegrass Kentucky," within chapter 8, "The Interior Low Plateaus."

Catholicism in the United States had first taken root in Maryland, and by some estimates, a majority of the nation's Catholics lived in the South until approximately 1840. This strength in numbers applied to structures as well as populations: southern dioceses outnumbered northern seven to nine until 1840, and afterwards the North retained only a modest majority of dioceses with twenty-two to the South's fifteen.[57] Kentucky's earliest settlers included members of these two groups, with one of the state's defining features in comparison to older states being that the planter class was not as deeply entrenched. Many early Catholic families in Kentucky were Maryland transplants, fitting the state's general demographic of "persons of moderate wealth and those who utilized the opportunities of the frontier to secure land and improve their social standing."[58] This setting offered a new opportunity for Catholicism to grow outside of east coast urban centers, influenced less by Protestant hostility and poor Catholic immigrants and shaped instead by wilderness conditions, slavery, and a newly developing class structure.

Of the four dioceses created in 1808 – New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Bardstown – Bardstown was geographically the largest. Kentucky was the location of both Bardstown and Louisville, where the see would later be moved. Benedict Flaget arrived in 1811 after his appointment to the bishopric, and by 1815 there were more than ten thousand Catholics and nineteen church structures in Kentucky alone. The state's Catholic population increased from roughly six thousand to between fifty and sixty thousand between 1800 and 1860, a small percentage of the overall population but particularly influential in larger cities like Louisville.[59] It was in this growing Catholic environment that the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth were established in 1812.[60]

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[57] Stern, *Southern Crucifix,* 4. These statistics cited in Stern are drawn from Bernard Code's *Dictionary of the American Catholic Hierarchy* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1940) 417-21. Here, "the South" refers to the states that joined the Confederacy plus the border states of Missouri, Kentucky, and Maryland, and "the North" refers to the states that joined the Union. Dioceses west of those states bordering the Mississippi plus Texas are excluded. The fifteen southern dioceses cited here are Baltimore, New Orleans, Bardstown, Richmond, Charleston, St. Louis, Mobile, Natchez, Nashville, Little Rock, Galveston, Savannah, Wheeling, Natchitoches, and Covington.

[58] Barnhart, "Frontiersmen and Planters," 23.

The region's growing number of Catholics were served by a small number of priests. This had consequences for the episcopacy as well as for daily Catholic life. Considering his extensive history and influence in Kentucky, and the paucity of other possibilities, Stephen Badin appeared to be a likely candidate for bishop once the possibility of creating a more westward diocese arose around 1807. However, prominent Catholic families in the region were "in the forefront of a concerted effort" to prevent Badin's election, largely through letters and petitions sent to Bishop Carroll in Baltimore. Badin's critics characterized him as overzealous. Complaints against him included opposition to dancing, denial of the sacraments even to the sick, inappropriate excommunications, cruel penances, and forbidding confession to the Dominicans.[61] A biographer of Bishop Flaget described Badin as taking "a rather 'dictatorial' stance" as a result of being the lone priest in the area for over a decade.[62] This conflict divided community families, and it remains uncertain to what extent the complaints were exaggerated or fabricated. In the end, they proved effective, as in 1808 word reached Kentucky that Benedict Flaget had received the bishop's appointment, apparently with Badin's own recommendation.[63]

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[59] Stern, *Southern Crucifix,* 13.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Mary Ellen Doyle, SCN, *Pioneer Spirit: Catherine Spalding, Sister of Charity of Nazareth* (University Press of Kentucky: Lexington, 2008), 19.

[62] Charles Lemarie, *A biography of Msgr. Benedict Joseph Flaget, b. 1763-d. 1850, first Bishop of the Dioceses of Bardstown and Louisville, Kentucky, 1811-1850* (Bardstown, Ky.: Flaget-Lemarie Group in conjunction with St. Joseph Proto-Cathedral Archives, 1992), 37.

Flaget did not celebrate his appointment. He intended to refuse the position, and after his fellow Sulpicians prayed about the subject, they agreed to support Flaget's refusal. Upon receiving the news that Flaget and the Sulpicians disagreed with his decision, Bishop Carroll wrote in response: "What, gentlemen, you have prayed! Do you think that before I presented your confrere I haven't prayed, and that the Cardinals who surround the Holy Father haven't prayed, and the Sovereign Pontiff himself hasn't prayed?...Well, I, I tell you that Abbé Flaget must accept."[64] With no other choice, Flaget reluctantly accepted the responsibility of becoming the first bishop of Bardstown. His temperament and personality were not suited to a position of prominent authority; often melancholy, Flaget struggled throughout his life with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. He detailed his feelings in a letter to another Sulpician after resigning himself to his new role: "I am so ashamed to see myself called to an office so far above my weakness that I did not dare to talk about it to anyone, and I still blush when anyone mentions it to me… To tell you that the news of my promotion made me ill is to express on a hundredth part of what passed in my heart," concluding that he had "nearly lost his head" over the matter.[65] Those close to Flaget, particularly his Sulpician superior, Father Emery, knew how difficult this new mission would be for such a sensitive man. It was possible, Emery decided, that a companion might boost Flaget's spirits and assist him in his duties. Nobody appeared more well-suited and willing to fulfill this role than one of Flaget's close friends, John Baptist Mary David.

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[63] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 20.

[64] Lemarie, *A biography of Msgr. Benedict Joseph Flaget,* 104-105.

[65] Lemarie, *A biography of Msgr. Benedict Joseph Flaget*, 107.

Flaget and David, both born in France, met in 1791 when they, along with Stephen Badin, sailed from Bordeaux to the United States to flee the hostility facing Catholic priests in France. Hoping to offer their services to the fledgling nation that faced a serious lack of priests to lead its early Church, the three met with Bishop Carroll upon their arrival in Philadelphia in March of 1792. In 1804, the bishop assigned David to teach at Georgetown College, where he became well-known for his intellect and strong personality. Bishop Carroll recognized him as a promising leader and appointed him first bishop of New Orleans; David refused, and unlike Flaget's, his refusal was accepted by Carroll. David's friendship with Flaget, however, made both Carroll and Emery wonder whether David still might play an important role when the four new dioceses were created in 1808. In 1809, Emery wrote to Carroll asking, "I know that M. Flaget will have need in the beginning, of some one to cheer and sustain him, M. David seems the most suitable but is he not indispensable in your seminary?"[66] Carroll agreed that it would be difficult to remove David from his place at Georgetown, but David was enthusiastic about the possibility of accompanying Flaget to Bardstown. When Emery proposed the plan to David, he responded willingly: "Although, my very dear Father, I am perfectly satisfied here, yet I am willing, if you judge proper, to accompany my Lord, my friend, my brother, to his Diocese."[67] David's affection for Flaget was clear in his responses, as he also admitted to Emery that "while there are many ties attaching me to Baltimore, friendship attaches me very strongly to this person."[68] The two men's personalities appeared to be a helpful complement: a melancholy Flaget and a boisterous David. The two were delayed in committing to a specific plan, however, as David remained necessary in Baltimore for the time being.

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[66] Columba Fox, SCN, *The Life of the Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David (1761-1841) Bishop of Bardstown and Founder of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth* (The United States Catholic Historical Society: New York, 1925), 24.

Plans for Flaget's new diocese continued, and his consecration took place on November 4, 1810, in Baltimore. The ceremony was performed by Bishop Carroll, and was also attended by Carroll's coadjutor, Leonard Neale, Bishop Michael Egan of Philadelphia, and Bishop Jean-Louis Cheverus of Boston. Flaget's trip to Bardstown was further delayed by the difficulties of travel from Baltimore to Kentucky, a precursor to the challenges he would face living in a place of considerably more wilderness than was found in Maryland. A letter after his consecration stated that although Flaget possessed a "great desire I had to go to join my flock after my consecration," the severe weather kept him in Baltimore and travel would not be attempted until the following spring.[69] In 1811, David received a new assignment: ecclesiastical superior to the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg. Founded by Elizabeth Seton in 1809, the apostolic community's leadership had developed a sense of collaboration between Elizabeth as Mother, a governing council of sisters, and priests. David's tendency to favor his own judgment challenged that ethos of collaboration and contributed to Seton's questioning of her desire to persist as Mother to the community.[70] David, however, seems to have considered his time there a success and would recall the Emmitsburg community as a model when he confronted new challenges in Kentucky.

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[67] Fox, *Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 25.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Lemarie, *A biography of Msgr. Benedict Joseph Flaget,* 129.

It was finally agreed that Flaget and David would leave for Kentucky in May of 1811. Their journey was not an easy one; Flaget later recounted in a letter that "I was obliged to perform part of my journey on foot, and I should have so traveled the entire way had not one of my young seminarians dismounted and presented me his horse."[71] The pair arrived in Bardstown on June 8, 1811, and was greeted by a sizable group of Kentucky Catholics, who were likely relieved to finally have their bishop in residence. Flaget remained deeply uncomfortable with his new position of authority, the realities and responsibilities which he had managed to avoid for two years; he confided in a friend soon after his arrival that "the idea that I was hereafter to speak, to write and to act as a Bishop, cast me into a profound sadness."[72] David, his zealous partner, hoped to bolster his spirits, but the challenges of the frontier diocese were daunting.

As bishop of Bardstown, Flaget had his hands full in terms of sheer geography, responsible for the Catholic flock occupying most of modern-day Kentucky, Illinois, Tennessee, Missouri, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. Bishop Flaget felt the distance, both geographic and personal, between himself and the other new prelates; even as late as 1825, he wrote to the Archbishop of Baltimore lamenting that "[We are] as strange to one another as we are with the bishops of China…there is so little correspondence" among the different bishops.[73] Bardstown, like the rest of the United States in the early 1800s, suffered from a priest shortage that made foreign-born priests necessary and raised the issue of clerical pretenders. In his observations of the Catholic community in Kentucky, Badin remarked in 1807: "God only knows how many live in the backwoods, and not one priest!"[74] Hoping to improve this situation in his diocese, Bishop Flaget established a seminary, St. Thomas, in 1811 and a college, St. Joseph's, in 1819, in order to train his own clergy. During its first decade, however, St. Thomas met delays in producing priests; one-fourth of the seminarians in 1816, for example, were "difficult to handle," and were ultimately ordered by Flaget to return to Maryland. They were far from the only questionable characters to arrive in Bardstown, to the increasing frustration of the bishop.[75]

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[70] Catherine O'Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton: American Saint* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2018), 275-76; 282-84; 295-96.

[71] Fox, *Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 47-48.

[72] Ibid.

Within the vast diocese of Bardstown, Ohio had been identified as a growing Catholic region best suited to be established as its own diocese. In 1819, Bishop Flaget and fellow Sulpician Bishop Louis Dubourg of Louisiana, contacted Archbishop Ambrose Marèchal of Baltimore to obtain permission to petition the pope to create a diocese centered on Ohio, a state that had gathered a Catholic population of approximately three hundred families.[76] First, a qualified and willing candidate for the bishop of Cincinnati was needed. Several names were discussed among the relatively small number of American clergy. The first two were cousins Benedict Joseph and Edward Fenwick, both born in the United States. Benedict was a member of the Society of Jesus and known for his impressive theological and preaching skills while Edward had founded the first Dominican community in the country in 1805.[77] Although perhaps the first priest to visit Cincinnati and well-known and admired among many Catholics in Ohio, Edward was considered to have "very little learning."[78] Flaget was more impressed by a Russian priest named Demetrius Gallitzin, who spoke German like many of the Catholics in Ohio. However, Gallitzin was not a member of any religious order, and Flaget knew that without the support of an order, there would likely not be sufficient influence to see the appointment approved. All options considered, Flaget eventually wrote to Marèchal with an enthusiastic endorsement of Edward Fenwick. "If he has not all the learning he ought to have," Flaget wrote, "at least he has the appearance of having as much as I."[79]

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[73] Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith,* 66.

[74] Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith,* 14.

[75] Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith,* 67-69.

[76] Roger Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 10.

Archbishop Marèchal was less impressed with Edward and reluctant to support the nomination. In April of 1820, he proposed instead that John Baptist Mary David, the current coadjutor bishop of Bardstown, was the best choice, due in part to his belief that Bardstown did not need a coadjutor.[80] This recommendation, however, did not please Flaget or David himself. By November, Marèchal conceded and agreed that Edward

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Fortin, *Faith in Action,* 10-11.

Fenwick was the most suitable candidate. Rome approved the proposal, and on June 19, 1821, Pope Pius VII issued the bull that established the diocese of Cincinnati with Edward Dominic Fenwick as its bishop.[81] In addition to the state of Ohio, the new diocese included parts of Michigan as well the area of the Northwest Territory that would become Wisconsin.

In a letter written November of 1818, Fenwick described the difficulties of meeting the needs of the region's Catholics without a well-supported clergy. Noting that the state of Ohio had "about 500,000 souls," he lamented that "there is not a single priest. There are Germans and Irish who do not know any English at all."[82] In such circumstances, Fenwick's presence was often requested, and he spent a great deal of time on horseback to meet those desiring the sacraments. One instance records him traveling three hundred miles to meet with thirteen families who had written to him; records demonstrate that Fenwick in just two years' time baptized 162 people in Ohio.[83] Bishop Flaget made his first episcopal visit to Cincinnati on May 19, 1818, and noted the settlement patterns developing in the area: "At present, there are no other Catholics in Cincinnati than laborers and clerks. Yet, I think, nothing should be neglected to establish Religion here."[84] He was impressed by the piety and dedication of the Catholics in Cincinnati, who lacked resources or even a church, yet continued to gather and make plans for the future. By early 1819, a small wooden frame was erected as the first Catholic Church in Cincinnati. Only fifty-five by thirty feet in size, it was named St. Patrick Church, although locals referred to it often simply as Christ Church. Catholicism in Ohio was growing, and the arrival of the papal bull establishing Cincinnati as a diocese headed by Edward Fenwick in December of 1821 secured its future.[85]

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[81] Fortin, *Faith and Action,* 11.

[82] Fortin, *Faith and Action,* 14.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Fortin, *Faith and Action,* 15.

Throughout this era of priest shortages and struggles to find suitable bishops and adjutors, women's religious communities were understood to be essential to the planting of the faith. Flaget hoped to enlist the assistance of virtuous Catholic women to form a community in Nazareth, Kentucky with the purpose of providing physical, spiritual, and educational assistance to his congregations. Kentucky became home to three of the earliest communities of women religious established in the United States: David established the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth in 1812, followed by Charles Nerinckx and the Friends of Mary at the Foot of the Cross, commonly known as the Sisters of Loretto or Lorettines, later that same year, and later joined by the Sisters of St. Dominic, established by Samuel Wilson, OP, in 1821. The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth became the largest of these communities, expanding as far as Indiana, Kansas, and Tennessee throughout the nineteenth century. The growth of Catholicism in the Ohio River Valley and Upper South was possible in large part due to the sisters' dedication to serving their local communities and their willingness to perform difficult work.

That difficult work, and the planting of the Church as a whole, took place within the chronology and geography of the young American nation. Nazareth participated in slaveholding; Cincinnati became home to some of the immigrants who would become so essential to the United States' politics, economy, and culture. Both communities labored amidst the epidemics and financial panics that threatened all Americans, and within the complex rubric of law and custom that formed the United States' experiment in pluralism. The establishment of Sisters of Charity communities in these regions provides an in-depth perspective of how these broader processes impacted individual lives, and at the same time, were shaped by individual choices and patterns of relationships. The establishment of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth coincided with the diocese of Bardstown's earliest years, and consequently the community's growth occurred in the context of diocesan growth. Although the two must be taken together, an emphasis on the sisters' history demonstrates the importance of women's contributions to both Catholicism in Kentucky and the state in general.

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[85] Fortin, *Faith and Action,* 15-16.

Founding of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth

As Bardstown's bishop, Flaget had a long list of responsibilities. As Flaget's coadjutor, David took charge of creating a seminary, and also put out word that he was seeking virtuous young women interested in serving the community as sisters. A location was quickly found for the seminary, on a piece of land owned by Thomas Howard, and St. Thomas was established in November 1811. David's call for young women was first answered by Teresa Carrico, who was quickly followed by Elizabeth Wells in November of 1812. Discussions took place concerning whether it was wise to begin such a community at the onset of winter, and David hesitated, given a lack of funds. However, sources indicate that Teresa and Elizabeth urged David to have faith and begin, and so the two arrived at their new residence at St. Thomas on December 1, 1812.[86]

Catherine Spalding of Cox Creek joined the first two women on January 21, 1813. Catherine was only nineteen years old but had spent most of her life in Kentucky surrounded by a large family. Born in Charles County Maryland, she moved with her family to Nelson County, Kentucky, when she was only three years old. Her mother died shortly after their arrival in Kentucky; records are unclear concerning her paternity, but Catherine and her four siblings were raised by her uncle and aunt, Thomas and Elizabeth Spalding Elder, who had ten children of their own.[87] At about age sixteen, Catherine was sent to live in the nearby home of her cousin, Clementina Elder Clark, where she stayed until she made the decision to join the women at St. Thomas.

Teresa Carrico came from a Maryland family who had settled in Kentucky's Washington County, and she was four years older than Catherine. Early histories indicate that she had little to no education; she did not become a teacher, but contributed to the community with "a warmth and fidelity in friendship, together with robust health, practical domestic skills, a capacity and willingness for heavy manual labor, and an ever-deepening spirituality."[88] Elizabeth Wells was a Kentucky native who had converted to Catholicism under the instruction of Father Badin. She was thirty-seven years old and the sister of two military men; little is known about her personality aside from a description of being "a good but very peculiar person."[89] Regardless of their lives prior to St. Thomas, once the three women began living together, they faced the difficulties of their new mission together. They were beholden to Father David as their superior, who began arranging their tasks and daily schedules.

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[86] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 22. It is unclear in existing sources where the sisters initially stayed at the seminary. It is likely that they were given a room within Flaget's bishop quarters at St. Thomas.

[87] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 2-3.

[88] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 26.

The life in which these three women found themselves was stark. The eighteen-foot square cabin was a single room with a half-story attic in which the women slept. They had only one frying pan, one spoon, and two knives; cornbread and "middling," a coarse grain dish, comprised their menu.[90] Despite lacking more substantial nutrition, the three newcomers were expected to devote their days to service, which required manual labor. One of their main tasks was to spin, weave, and sew all the clothing for the seminarians at St. Thomas. Despite their minimal funds, they benefited from enslaved labor: Bishop Flaget owned slaves that he had inherited from a local wealthy family, the Howards, and he would send one or two to clear the land around St. Thomas and cut wood. The sisters also participated in field labor.[91]

Catherine's arrival in January of 1813 grew their number to three, but Father David recognized that such a number was still too small to carry out the duties of an official religious community. Religious communities adopted their own "rule" as well as created a constitution that specified expectations of behavior within the order for postulants, novices, and sisters. This document included a daily schedule of activities and outlined the relationships among the women themselves, their superiors, and the surrounding community. Father David knew it would be necessary to adopt a rule and implement a constitution in order to be recognized as an official order. He saw an obvious model for this plan in the Sisters of Charity founded in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 31.

[91] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 32.

The Sisters of Charity were a religious community founded in the United States in 1809 by Elizabeth Bayley Seton, modeled in part after the Daughters of Charity in France. What began as a Motherhouse in rural Emmitsburg with only a few women and a small school for young girls, grew over the years into a thriving community of service with missions in Philadelphia, New York, and other cities and towns. David had briefly been appointed ecclesiastical superior of the sisters at Emmitsburg, succeeding Louis Dubourg there until David left to accompany Flaget to Kentucky and John Dubois was appointed to replace him.[92]

Once in Kentucky, David wanted to use the rule of St. Vincent, as modified and adopted at Emmitsburg, for his new community. This rule, also referred to as "the Vincentian tradition," was created by St. Vincent de Paul and established a charism of charity characterized by pastoral service to the poor. The Daughters of Charity in France, founded by de Paul, adopted this rule and a constitution outlining their mission and regulations of the sisters' daily lives. Benedict Flaget traveled to France in the summer of 1811 and returned with the rule and constitution of the Daughters, which Emmitsburg's superior, John Dubois, began translating and revising.[93] At Nazareth, David wanted access to this translated and revised version the Sisters of Charity adopted at Emmitsburg, but he also had a specific set of conditions in mind that would set Nazareth apart from Emmitsburg. David described the process as a "negotiation" from the earliest mentions of the situation in his letters. He had not been commissioned by Emmitsburg to begin a new branch of Sisters of Charity; however, David and Flaget both believed that the new diocese needed a community of pious women, and Emmitsburg appeared to be the best – and perhaps only – model for American women religious. Not only had their rule already been adopted from Europe and modified to fit an American context, but David himself had also spent time with Elizabeth Seton at Emmitsburg, giving him an idea of how such a community was run.[94] The superiors at Emmitsburg, however, remained wary of David's plans. The question of what connection the two groups should have continued to frustrate both sides.

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[92] O'Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton,* 275-276, 295-296.

[93] O'Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton*, 295.

The issue was taken to Bishop John Carroll to help solve. In an 1814 letter, David identified two points over which he was reluctant to surrender for the sake of having Emmitsburg and Nazareth join together as one large community. The first, and perhaps most obvious, problem was the distance between the two areas. In his letter, David expressed his belief that "the distance of the place and their poverty is an insurmountable obstacle," requiring a separate novitiate to be formed at Nazareth. To find a way to transport novices, postulants, and sisters between the Motherhouse at Emmitsburg and any other location for their missions necessitated time and money that neither region was likely to possess any time soon. David's second concern highlighted regional differences concerning titles and authority: "I would also have the Superior of this house to bear the title of Mother instead of that of Sister Servant…because no one bearing the name of servant in this new and half savage country, but slaves, the name of Sister Servant would expose the superior to the contempt of the young boarders."[95] In the conclusion of his letter to Carroll, David specified that, "if your Reverence would judge it otherwise, I will submit to your decision and suffer the name of Sister Servant, however repugnant to my judgment and to my feelings," but was not willing to compromise concerning his need for a novitiate in Kentucky.[96]

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[94] Concerns about the adaptation of the French rule to a new American context were voiced by Elizabeth Seton and John Carroll. Carroll wrote that the "distance, different manners, and habits of the two countries, France & the U.S." led him to believe that the sisters at Emmitsburg would not be "entirely conformable & the same with the institute of St. Vincent of Paul" (O'Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton*, 297). O'Donnell notes that the original plan involved obtaining Daughters of Charity from France to teach the American women their rule. As many as eighteen sisters were at one point designated for the United States, but ultimately could not obtain passports. Dubois' translation of the original French document that Emmitsburg adopted did not include any significant alterations to customs or practices, excluding Elizabeth Seton's desire for her children be permitted to reside in the community with her that Dubois made sure to include.

A clear resolution for the situation was surely desired by both parties as well as Bishop Carroll, who lacked clergymen to assist him in solving the frequent conflicts and concerns that arose from establishing the Catholic Church in a new, predominantly Protestant nation. David's letter presented a clear limit on the extent to which he was willing to compromise for the sake of union; the superiors at Emmitsburg were also reluctant to be associated with an inherently risky community-building endeavor in a wilderness diocese. John Dubois was particularly frustrated at David's plan, and wrote a series of "urgent" letters to Bishop Carroll to persuade David's requests.[97] Faced with little alternative, Carroll concluded the matter before the end of 1814:

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[95] Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Archives (hereafter abbreviated as SCNA): DLB 48, p. 61.

[96] Ibid.

[97] O'Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton*, 336-337.

> Although the Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg have based their rules on that of St. Vincent de Paul's in France, conditions in America call for some changes. There should be a novitiate in Kentucky for the Sisters of Charity there, the Superior should be designated some other name than Sister Servant, a clear distinction should be made between the two institutions for Sisters accepted in Kentucky should not have recurrence or entitled to support from St. Joseph's in Emmitsburg. This institution should not be burdened with unfit or unprofitable Sisters from Kentucky. No house should be liable for the debts or burdens contracted by the other.[98]

The matter was thus settled, creating two Sisters of Charity houses to teach and serve the poor, but to do so according to their own authorities. The arrangement allowed both communities to flourish for the next thirty years.

Following the practice established at Emmitsburg of electing a small council of sisters to participate in the decision-making process with the ecclesiastical superior, the sisters of Nazareth held their first election. Under David's "provisional rule," six women were required to hold an election for Mother Superior, Assistant, and Procuratrix. This number was met in spring of 1813, when Mary (Polly) Beaven, Harriet Gardiner, and Sarah (Sally) Sims arrived at St. Thomas. Sarah, sometimes called Sally, would leave Nazareth in October, with little being left of her on record. Mary, or "Polly," Beaven and Harriet Gardiner, however, are remembered for their differences in temperament. Polly was described as "calm and edifying," a virtuous and kind woman with no education or particular skill set. Harriet, even younger than Catherine Spalding, was remembered for having "a zeal for religious observance" and a dedication to learning.[99] After Bishop Flaget celebrated Mass, each of these six women met with him and Father David to declare their vote. The constitution established at Nazareth designated two official superiors to the sisters: an ecclesiastical superior, and the bishop of Bardstown. The ecclesiastical superior was to be appointed and approved by the bishop, with no formal channel for the sisters to express their preference, should they have one; although the ecclesiastical superior was under the authority of the bishop and consequently could not directly disobey him, the bishop's role as superior was, in practice, considered secondary. The ecclesiastical superior was the priest directly involved in the sisters' daily lives, acting as instructor and spiritual director, and often only consulting with the bishop when larger concerns arose in the community. That spring, Catherine was elected Mother Superior, with Harriet Gardiner as her assistant, and Betsey Wells as Procuratrix to administer goods.

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[98] SCNA: DLB 48, p. 62.

[99] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit*, 33.

Bishop Flaget, Father David, and a visiting Sulpician priest Ignatius Chabrat were present at the election and had no criticism of the choices made by the women. The community's constitution stipulated that each council position was for a three-year term, and each sister could only be re-elected once after each three-year term, although after another three years had passed, those previously elected could be elected again. Catherine would be elected Mother multiple times until her death, and her leadership drew praise from both the sisters and their superiors. Father David, from the first elections, admired the leadership displayed by Catherine and Harriet despite their youth: "I am very well pleased with my little mother and with her assistant. They have prudence and discretion beyond their age and experience."[100]

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[100] UNDA: Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm collection. Letter from page 82, letter number 22, David to Bruté (assumed): St. Thomas Seminary, Sept. 7, 1813.

The maintenance of a benevolent relationship between David and the sisters was essential to their survival in the early years at Nazareth. The maintenance of good relations required Catherine and the rest of the sisters to respect David's ultimate authority. During her first term as mother, Catherine would have to face numerous issues, some a result of frontier life and others unique to the challenges of communal living. To negotiate successfully these situations and ensure that the sisters were able to continue their mission, it was vital that the Mother Superior retained the support of Father David as their superior. A conflict of opinion could threaten the harmony of the community and brought the potential for punishment or shame if a superior believed his wishes were disobeyed.

Life in Community and Collective Leadership

Dress is used by many professions and many religious communities to signify belonging, and it has played an important role in Catholic sisterhoods. The sisters adopted their first religious habit on Holy Thursday of 1814. Described as consisting of "black cloth" produced by the sisters themselves, the clothing was designed to be similar to "sedate persons of their sex, who are not following the styles of the world."[101] Adorned with a "cape" and "headgear," the habit was likely similar to the style established at Emmitsburg by Elizabeth Seton, who adopted the attire of an Italian widow during her time in Europe and adopted a modified version of the garb for her sisterhood. In the early days of the community, the women were often engaged in spinning, weaving, and sewing, both for themselves and the seminarians at St. Thomas. The property for the seminary was owned by the Howard family, and the building had been repurposed for a dormitory and study building, including a small space of "little more than a table and benches" for local parish Mass in the larger downstairs room.[102] The sisters likely lived in two small rooms upstairs, although their daily schedule of tasks took them elsewhere. They were instructed to study for two hours each day in preparation to fulfill David's wish for them to open a school. For that purpose, the sisters allotted funds and labor to construct two additional log buildings which contained room enough for a large classroom and a dormitory connected to the sisters' residence "by a broad passage."[103] The attic space in one of the new buildings was reserved for a chapel. As the soon-to-be sisters had provided the seminarians with clothing and other domestic tasks, the seminarians returned the favor by making "12,000 bricks for a little chapel," as the women were anxious to have a place within their residence for God to be truly present.[104]

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[101] UNDA: Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm. Original in French Propaganda Fide in Rome. Secured through the courtesy of Brother David Spalding, CFX, August 1965. Microfilm pages 151b-c.

The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth began their mission to educate young girls by opening their first school in August of 1814. Ellen O'Connell and Harriet Gardiner became its first faculty members, and they accepted both day and boarding female students. By December of that year, nine names were recorded in Nazareth Academy's registry, and within a year had increased to thirty-four.[105] The year of 1815 was to be a transformative one for the Nazareth community as the first sisters took their vows, including Mother Catherine.[106] By the fall of 1816, Nazareth was the home of fourteen sisters, ten of whom had professed annual vows.[107] In October of that year, Bishop Flaget mentioned in a letter that the sisters at Nazareth were growing in popularity, providing an education that attracted "more particularly the wealthy class of the district." Community historian Sr. Mary Ellen Doyle speculates that this description was possibly referring to the prosperous farmers in the area as well as professionals in Bardstown who could afford tuition.[108] The payment of tuition allowed for a number of poor orphans to be admitted free of charge, although the early years of the school consisted largely of boarding students, whose tuition helped keep the community financially stable.

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[102] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit*, 25.

[103] Fox, *Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 71.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Anna Blanche McGill, *The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky* (The Encyclopedia Press: New York, 1917), 24.

The mission of education presented its own challenges as women joining the community were from different backgrounds and consequently had varying levels of education. Of the seven sisters present by the beginning of 1814, only Catherine Spalding and Harriet Gardiner appear in sources to be well-versed academically and inclined towards teaching. David himself was limited by time and level of knowledge about American culture and elementary pedagogy; his earlier insistence on receiving sisters from Emmitsburg to help teach reflected his awareness of these shortcomings.[109] The answer to this dilemma arrived in the form of Ellen O'Connell, a Baltimore school mistress whom David had served as spiritual director before his departure to Bardstown. Ellen was the daughter of a widowed professor of language and rhetoric, whose dedication to his daughter's education ensured that she was already an experienced teacher by 1813, when she wrote to David concerning her desire to join his new community.[110] She arrived at St. Thomas in June 1814, and spent the summer helping to prepare for the reopening of the school, officially named Nazareth Academy, for its second year in August. The arrival of such a well-educated young woman gave the new Nazareth Academy a much higher chance of long-term success, and Ellen's experience and knowledge substantially improved the quality of the curriculum.

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[106] McGill, *The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky,* 26.

[107] UNDA: Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm. Letter from David to Bruté: St. Thomas Seminary, Sept. 13, 1816.

[108] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 75-77.

[109] UNDA: Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm. Letter from David to Bruté: St. Thomas Seminary, Sept. 7, 1813.

Although Catherine Spalding's leadership was essential to Nazareth's early success, she also had the benefit of being joined by other skilled women similarly committed to the community's future. 1818 saw the arrival of two women to Nazareth that would contribute to the community's mission significantly for the next sixty years. Charlotte and Elizabeth Gardiner were biological sisters to Harriet Gardiner, one of the earliest members of the fledgling group. Harriet was soon recognized for her resourcefulness and education and was elected to the first council in 1813 as Mother Catherine's assistant. Charlotte took the name of Sister Clare, and Elizabeth took the name Sister Frances; Frances would alternate terms as Mother with Catherine Spalding, although the possibility that Catherine serve that office permanently appears to have been seriously considered. Catherine's re-election to Mother Superior in August of 1816 indicated the respect she gained from the sisters in her role. Community records state that "All were desirous that she should rule the community during the remainder of her life," despite the term restrictions outlined by the Constitution.[111] David himself pressed Catherine to consider accepting a lifelong term.[112]

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[110] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 38-39.

That such a departure from the constitution was seriously considered so early in the community's history may have arisen from the idea that religious life in the United States must remain flexible and adapt to the particular needs of American Catholicism rather than adhere strictly to older European tradition. In this case, several other factors may have contributed to this consideration at Nazareth. David's correspondence with his fellow Sulpicians in Baltimore and Emmitsburg undoubtedly made him aware that Elizabeth Seton continued to be re-elected as Mother each term. Considering how closely David used Emmitsburg as a model for his own community, it is possible that he could have accepted their precedent of what would be Elizabeth's lifelong role. Additionally, even during his brief time at Emmitsburg, David developed a clear preference for certain sisters. His adoration of Rose White was so well-known that Elizabeth herself worried for a time that David intended to replace Elizabeth and appoint Rose as Mother instead, considering Rose a perfect model of obedience.[113] David thought highly of Catherine Spalding and her own obedience; knowing this, it is likely that he would seek to retain her as Mother, knowing that conflict was unlikely to arise between himself and Catherine, and David's influence would remain unthreatened as long as she remained Mother. On a practical level, Nazareth had also grown from the small group of impoverished women. In Catherine's first six years as leader of the community, twenty-one sisters had entered, with only two deciding to leave before taking their annual vows; all others subsequently renewed their vows.[114] This stability, as well as their expansion to a branch house in Bardstown, occurred under Catherine's leadership, and this gained her widespread respect. Catherine herself, however, remained in favor of upholding the Constitution and holding elections. Ultimately, David was persuaded – another indicator of Catherine's influence – and in August 1819 Agnes Higdon was elected to replace Catherine, who was retained as mistress of novices.

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[111] Fox, *The Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 98.

[112] SCNA: "Early Annals of Marie Menard," 18.

[113] O'Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton*, 287, 289, 296. In a letter to Sister Elizabeth Suttle, SCN, David writes of Rose, then Mother at Emmitsburg: "My dear Mother Rose who was elected for the second time, last July a year, is always the same humble, zealous, fervent soul. I have known her – the same tender charity, the same submission to superiors, diffidence of herself, but confidence in God and resignation to His Providence." SCNA: DLB 2, p. 12. From Bishop David at Loretto, September 10, 1834.

The election of a new mother superior brought about a period of transition that demonstrated the sisters' dedication to flexibility in order to ensure the success of their mission. Now separated by a greater distance from their superior, the sisters "would have to act without readily accessible advice or approval," which would in certain ways strengthen their overall freedom to make decisions within their vow of obedience.[115] The sisters continued to look for ways to expand their mission; after a brief and unsuccessful attempt to open a school about sixty miles away in Breckinridge County, the sisters founded a new school named St. Vincent's in Union County in western Kentucky in 1820. That December, Mother Agnes Higdon, Frances Gardiner, and Cecily O'Brien, accompanied by a priest, made the journey of several days on horseback. The winter traveling was perilous; community tradition tells that Frances Gardiner was literally frozen solid and had to be lifted from her horse and carried into a nearby house to recover.[116] When the sisters arrived, they found that the house intended for them remained occupied and consequently unavailable. Their innovative solution was to clean and occupy a henhouse instead. They moved quickly to buy land, have a log house built, and begin working the fields. This extraordinary set of circumstances was led by Mother Agnes, who at the time was only four months into her vows.

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[114] SCNA: "Early Annals of Marie Menard," 18.

[115] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 49.

The Sisters' Management of Finances

The sisters remaining at Nazareth had their own difficulties to resolve, though none necessitated occupying a hen house. The land on which the bishop's house, St. Thomas seminary, the sisters' residence, and their school stood had been given to them by a local Catholic named Thomas Howard, whose will indicated that upon his death his land would be split into two parcels, one of which would be ceded to Bishop Flaget. To Flaget's dismay, however, the half ceded to him was not the half that housed those buildings that he planned for the diocese officially to acquire once Howard died.[117] The sisters did not have any claim to the land where they resided themselves, and they lacked a voice in the ensuing legal discussions. As a result, this dispute was handled largely by the men involved, an indication of the sisters' temporal reliance on their male superiors. For their own security, the sisters learned from this event that that they must acquire land that they would have the ability to control and possess without issue, especially as they began to expand their mission and add new schools. The sisters were able to successfully incorporate their community in 1829 as the Nazareth Literary and Benevolent Institution, which secured their place in the local community.[118]

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[116] SCNA: "Early Annals of Marie Menard," 21.

[117] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit* 56-57; Fox, *The Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 101.

The sisters at Nazareth relied on a combination of prayer and practicality when faced with material difficulties such as the land dispute. There initially appeared to be no way for the sisters to acquire the amount of funds required for buying a plot large enough to suit their growing needs. However, in this case it appears providence did provide; new postulant Ellen O'Connor in July of 1821 brought with her a considerable inheritance. This windfall included three thousand dollars, "a negro with his wife and family," furniture, and material for church vestments. The money was used to buy a plot of land three miles north of Bardstown that would serve as the sisters' new residence and location of their boarding school.[119] This financial arrangement and the acquisition of new land was also largely handled by the bishops – although not without considerable obstacles that prevented David from obtaining the official deed until February of 1825.[120] Still, the sisters were undoubtedly grateful to arrive at their "New Nazareth" on June 11, 1822, where they would live a largely self-sufficient life. The sisters developed the land into a successful farm, and also built a larger building that would be the new location of Nazareth Academy.

Trials of a different sort plagued the sisters throughout 1824. Consumption took the lives of five sisters that year: Mother Agnes Higdon, Scholastica O'Connor, Columba

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[118] SCNA: Clippings, Volume 1, 1826-1849; Folder 1, p. 15. Notice of incorporation approved and dated December 29, 1829.

[119] SCNA: "Early Annals of Marie Menard," 22.

[120] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 58-60.

Tarlton, and Polly Beaven passed away at Nazareth, while Agatha Cooper died and was buried at St. Vincent's in Union County.[121] Catherine Spalding was quickly elected to complete Mother Agnes' term, taking on the task that Agnes had started of building a new, larger school to accommodate more students. It is unlikely that Catherine knew the extent to which Mother Agnes had already stretched the community's resources; five months after her death, David wrote to his friend Bruté and remarked that "I will miss her for a long time. She has, however, left more debts than I thought. We are somewhat burdened and reduced to expedients." Flaget was not quite so kind, and complained that the "good Sisters of Charity, through the bad administration of an imprudent mother, leave me almost [$4,000] to liquidate for them."[122] Poor record-keeping and linguistic difficulties exacerbated the debt. Mother Agnes appeared to keep no record of expenses, and her treasurer, Sister Eulalia Flaget, did not have sufficient proficiency in English. The fact that the extent of the debt was not known until after Mother Agnes' death, however, indicates the level of financial freedom that the sisters possessed. Neither Flaget nor David had requested to see receipts of lists of expenses accrued by the sisters; if they had, they would not have been uncomfortably surprised upon Mother Agnes' death. Nor does her lack of financial records appear to have persuaded David or Flaget to keep a closer eye on the sisters' expenses. When Catherine Spalding resumed her role as Mother, she continued to enjoy considerable latitude in initiating building projects and managing the community's money as she saw fit.

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[121] SCNA: "Early Annals of Marie Menard," 34-35, 40.

[122] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 69-70.

Despite the realities of their financial situation, the bishops were persuaded by Mother Catherine to continue the building project. David begged for donations from Scholastica O'Connell's lawyer in Baltimore, while Flaget went to the largest possible resource, the Grand Almoner of France, appealing to the "inexhaustible charity of our virtuous compatriots."[123] These attempts must have been successful, as a new brick chapel was erected in June of 1824. In his correspondence with Mother Rose White at Emmitsburg, David kept up a spirit of comparison between the two communities' growth: "You began with a fine house for yourselves, to which you tacked a miserable shed for your Lord, which I perceive to be still his sole lodging… We trust that our Lord after being decently lodged, will procure his Spouses the means of lodging themselves conveniently."[124] David also kept Bruté updated on the progress of their building projects, although he did not describe a complete building until a letter in August 1827, with dormitories, refectories, a recreation hall, classrooms, music rooms, and a Mother's room and treasurer's room. After several years of death and difficulty, the completion of these new projects likely raised the morale of the sisters and certainly helped attract additional students.

An important student demographic shift happened in 1825 that was likely essential to Nazareth's economic stability. A friend of Bishop Flaget, a Reverend M.

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[123] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 71.

[124] UNDA: Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm. Bishop David to Mother Rose White (Emmitsburg, Md.) 6/1824, p. 2. David's description of a "fine house" is misleading. In the community's earliest months, Elizabeth Seton and a small number of future sisters lived in a small hillside cabin dubbed "the White House." In July of 1811, John Dubois encouraged them to move into an old farmhouse in the valley, "the Stone House," less than two miles from the mountain chapel where the women attended Mass. Their arrival in their permanent dwelling, St. Joseph's House, was marked with a procession of the Blessed Sacrament, despite David's accusation of their lack of proper devotion in this letter. See O'Donnell, *Elizabeth Seton*, 259, 263, 278.

Martial, had opened a college in Louisiana that was forced to close in 1825.[125] To appease parents concerned about their sons' education, Martial recommended their transferring to St. Joseph's College in Bardstown. This establishment of "southern patronage" extended to Nazareth Academy as well. Wealthy southern families began sending their daughters to receive an education. To continue attracting students from wealthy families, the sisters continued to improve and expand their curriculum, especially due to the efforts of Sister Ellen, the wealthy widow from Baltimore who had received an extensive education herself as the daughter of a professor. By 1826, the curriculum included a wide variety of subjects common in eastern female academies, including reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar and composition, geography, history, French, pianoforte, drawing, and needlework; although David was initially reluctant, Mother Catherine also persuaded him to permit the sisters to add botany, natural philosophy, optics, and chemistry.[126]

A rigorous academic curriculum supplemented by finer arts became a fairly standard expectation at the many female academies and seminaries established between the American Revolution and the Civil War.[127] Nazareth's offerings of a wide variety of academic subjects along with other domestic or gentile skills closely resembled the curriculum of other antebellum female academies and seminaries, including Mount Holyoke Seminary and the Greenfield High School for Young Ladies in Massachusetts, the South Carolina Female Collegiate Institute in Columbia, and Brooklyn Female Academy in New York.[128] Instead of considering subjects like fine arts, music, needlepoint, and drawing to be inferior to traditional academic subjects, at Nazareth Academy and other schools for girls across the nation, these offerings were considered an important supplement and, particularly important in the South, a mark of gentility.[129] Although requirements varied by region and by institution, most girls started their education between the ages of twelve and sixteen.[130] This age range was typical at Nazareth, although the number of years a Nazareth student attended classes or boarded varied significantly between a single semester or several years. Daughters of wealthier families had more opportunities at Nazareth, as subjects beyond a basic foundation of reading, writing, arithmetic, and some arts incurred an additional expense.[131] Even the school's most basic offerings, however, ensured young Southern girls an opportunity to become as literate and educated as academy students in the Northeast.

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[125] Fox, *The Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 116. David notes the anticipation of new boarders from a New Orleans school closing in a letter to Rose White in June 1824. UNDA: Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm. OLB 2, p. 106.

[126] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit*, 76.

[127] In *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*, Mary Kelley suggests that historians may have underestimated the number of women's schools founded in the United States between 1790 and 1860. See also: Lynne Templeton Brickley, "Female Academies are Every Where Establishing: The Beginnings of Secondary Education for Women in the United States, 1790-1830" (qualifying paper, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1982).

Bishop Flaget encouraged the sisters to consider ways to engage with the community to make more families aware of the quality education offered at Nazareth academy. Consequently, in 1825, public examinations were held, which quickly became a yearly tradition.[132] Academic exhibitions or examinations open to the public were not limited to just Nazareth Academy or other Catholic schools. This practice was adopted widely throughout the country in other female academies as a way to showcase the efforts of both teachers and students.[133] At Nazareth, public examinations brought both local residents and distant parents of boarding students together. The more impressed parents became with what they observed in public examinations, the more likely they were to recommend Nazareth to other families they knew. Well-known community members attending public examinations and graduation helped boost the academy's prestige, one of the most notable being famous Kentucky stateman Henry Clay attending and speaking at the graduation ceremony in 1825.[134]

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[128] Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 71-75.

[129] Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak,* 69.

[130] Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 85.

[131] SCNA: Clippings, Volume 1, Folder 1, pages 1-16 (1827-1829).

The success of Nazareth Academy within its first decade of existence is one of many parts of the process of institutional growth of Catholicism in Kentucky. The institution's growth took place in the broader context of the diocese and beyond, as evidenced by the influx of students from Louisiana and the general sparseness of educational opportunities throughout the South. Clerical support also remained sparse, as Bardstown – like the rest of the country – lacked a sufficient number of well-trained priests to meet the needs of a growing Catholic Church. In the absence of ecclesiastical structures, this gap allowed an opportunity for women religious to play a vital role in supporting their faith and their region. The founding of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth demonstrate that women were interested in religious life and becoming involving in their diocese, despite the labor and hardships that came with such a commitment. The sisters were both educators and models of faith, and these dual roles gained them the respect of Protestant families sending their daughters to Nazareth Academy as well as local prelates and lay Catholics who saw these women performing important work for Catholicism. The sisters at Nazareth would become increasingly visible in the next decade as they continued to expand and create additional schools as a result of their proficient administration and self-management.

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[132] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit*, 77.

[133] Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 96.

[134] Accounts of public examinations, including Henry Clay's attendance, are found in: *Early Annals of Marie Menard*, 44-47; Schauinger's *Cathedrals in the Wilderness*, 239; and McGill's *The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky*, 120.

CHAPTER 3

THE IMPACT OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY IN EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, AND CATHOLIC-PROTESTANT RELATIONS IN BARDSTOWN AND CINCINNATI

Finances and Protestant-Catholic Relations in Bardstown

The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth's first decade in existence relied on a combination of clerical leadership and the efforts of the sisters themselves. In situating their early years in the context of the development of the diocese of Bardstown, the available sources favor a narrative that prominently features the roles of both John David and Bishop Flaget. The growth of the Nazareth community was, at least to a certain extent, tied to the growth of Catholicism in Kentucky more broadly by the 1820s. Catholicism continued to take root in the state, but institutional development also faced several challenges. A persistent priest shortage – not least those qualified to join the hierarchy – placed significant burdens upon those attempting to fulfill their duties faithfully, who often found themselves responsible for all the Catholics over a wide geographic area. Such a life was not very appealing and received little support; Father Whelan, one of the first priests in Kentucky, stayed in the region for two and a half years and left in 1791 for eastern cities with the mission to "dissuade priests from ever setting foot" west of the Appalachians.[135]

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[135] John Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith: Bringing Catholicism to the West in the Early Republic* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 58.

With the clergy in Bardstown lacking any strong institutional or financial support, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth were essential in their assistance in making frontier life more manageable. In the earliest years of the community, the sisters performed domestic labor like cooking, sewing, and laundry for priests and seminarians in addition to beginning their education mission. Although Nazareth Academy did not promote Catholic theology, its curriculum soon attracted boarders, and the availability of education helped improve the viability of Bardstown overall. The community's first decade illuminates the potential for upheaval as the diocese of Bardstown struggled to stabilize and support itself. The sisters faced challenges in raising funds, acquiring new members, expanding its buildings, and navigating relationships with each other and with their superiors. The experiences of David and Flaget in the early years of Bardstown make evident the hardship of life on the frontier as members of the hierarchy, and the amount of labor required to support and grow a fledgling diocese without the guarantee of financial or ecclesiastical support. Their dominance in the sources reflects their institutional authority and the challenge of capturing the sisters' role in building the Church and governing their own endeavors.

Father David fulfilled multiple roles in Bardstown. In addition to overseeing the sisters and serving as their spiritual advisor, he taught in the seminary and assisted the bishop in his many duties. Flaget continued to rely heavily on David for emotional support, often seeking reassurance that he was fulfilling his role adequately. And so, when word reached Bardstown that Bishop Carroll was considering recalling David to become bishop of Philadelphia, both men were alarmed. David's response to Carroll encapsulated his personality:

> How could you think of such a poor wretch to fill up an episcopal see? I had reason to hope that you knew me better…do not imagine, my dear Father, that this proceeds from humility. Alas! I am a total stranger to that virtue. I know but the theory of it. I have many times preached it to others, explained its degrees, pointed out the means, but never practiced it myself. But I clearly see my incapacity for such a charge.[136]

Lest we doubt David's candid description of his lack of humility, he also wrote to his Sulpician superiors that while it might be "advantageous" for him to be sent back to the seminary in Baltimore, such a change would "be the ruin of this diocese."[137] Flaget described his need of David in significantly more heartfelt terms. He wrote that not only was David "absolutely necessary" for the success of St. Thomas, but also warned that "to withdraw M. David from me is to pluck out my eyes, to cut off my hands," describing him as "the friend of my heart and affection."[138] Eventually, Carroll was persuaded to accept David and Flaget's wishes to keep the priest in Bardstown permanently, although as a result Carroll could not find a priest willing to accept the position of bishop of Philadelphia until 1820.

With David's commitment to stay in Bardstown clear, Flaget set an ambitious plan of building projects to promote Catholicism in the diocese. Lack of funding for such projects was a constant problem, and not just in Bardstown. Bishops' correspondence often lamented the state of their finances. Bishop John England of Charleston was confident that "My diocese is one of the largest, and perhaps poorest, in all

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[136] Columba Fox, SCN, *The Life of the Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David (1761-1841) Bishop of Bardstown and Founder of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth* (New York: The United States Catholic Historical Society, 1925), 80.

[137] Fox, *The Life of the Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 82.

[138] Fox, *The Life of the Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 83.

Christendom."[139] Bishop Flaget would have disagreed, however, being of the opinion that "I am the poorest of all the Bishops in the world."[140] A building project as large as the construction of a cathedral, which Flaget intended for Bardstown, required significant fundraising. In this case, the funds raised for the Bardstown Cathedral, the first cathedral to be built west of the Alleghenies, came overwhelmingly from Protestants. Flaget could not help but take note of this significant generosity: "The Protestants of Bardstown and vicinity have so urged me to undertake the work that I should have considered myself guilty of sin, had I not acceded to their solicitation; they subscribed almost entirely among themselves, nearly ten thousand dollars."[141] Although fears of anti-Catholicism were prevalent in the early nineteenth century, cooperation rather than hostility was the mark of Protestant-Catholic relationships in many regions of the South. Catholics shared many aspects of Southern culture with Protestants, not the least of which including their participation in the slave system. This allowed Protestants to support Catholic building projects such as the Bardstown cathedral out of civic pride, and many considered all religious denominations to be "mutually beneficial."[142] The funds donated by Protestants for the cathedral would be only one instance of interfaith cooperation in Kentucky, and Protestant financial support for various Catholic projects was common throughout the South more broadly.

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[139] Andrew H.M. Stern, *Southern Crucifix, Southern Cross: Catholic-Protestant Relations in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2012), 119.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Fox, *The Life of the Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 84.

[142] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 134.

Even with the help of Protestant generosity, construction on the cathedral finished slowly. Economic difficulties plagued the nation at the close of the War of 1812, exacerbated by the expiration of the national bank's charter in 1811. The community of sisters, however, continued to grow, and they planned building projects of their own to accommodate the growing number of women and students. David boasted that the school was "coming into favor" and that more students were arriving than could be comfortably lodged, and he planned an expansion for the dormitory area in 1816. During that year, fourteen women lived at Nazareth and thirty-one students boarded there; ten women had already taken their vows, and David expected the arrival of two more women in the near future.[143]

During the cathedral's construction, Flaget requested that Rome grant Bardstown the position of a coadjutor bishop to assist with his many duties in such a large diocese. His preference was, unsurprisingly, John David, who continued to be his close companion. When word of approval arrived in 1817, Flaget decided to move himself, David, and his seminarians from St. Thomas to the new cathedral; only the preparatory seminary and parish, and the sisters and their school, would be left.[144] This did not change David's role as ecclesiastical superior, but his presence as consultant would now be much less immediate. The bishops moved to Bardstown in August, but Flaget had a request for Catherine and the sisters: that they teach at a day school at the cathedral and add "the care of the linen, etc." at the cathedral to their expanding list of duties.[145] Although it was a risk to lose boarders at St. Thomas, as some would likely attend the day school at the cathedral instead, Catherine and her Council decided it was a prudent venture and began planning for its opening. In the community's early records, the opening of this new day school, named Bethlehem Academy, took place "shortly before the dedication of the Cathedral," and Polly Beavin and Mary Lynch were the sisters chosen to begin this first branch house outside of Nazareth.[146] At Nazareth, community life continued; although no longer in residence near the sisters, David frequently visited, and his interest in the sisters' affairs remained clear. Not long after moving to Bardstown, he insisted that "all my Daughters live in my heart, and I carry them every day to the throne of mercy when I ascend the holy Altar," the new geographic distance between them notwithstanding.[147]

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[143] UNDA: Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm. Letter from David to Brute: St. Thomas Seminary, Sept. 13, 1816.

[144] Mary Ellen Doyle, SCN, *Pioneer Spirit: Catherine Spalding, Sister of Charity of Nazareth* (University Press of Kentucky: Lexington, 2008), 49.

In this early stage of expansion, Nazareth's growth was supported by the acquisition of enslaved individuals and families brought with new sisters. Slavery at Nazareth would flourish in the following decades, becoming the foundation upon which the sisters were able to support themselves and expand into different regions. Enslaved labor was firmly integrated into Bardstown as a diocese, situating the region in a broader Southern context that helped Catholicism claim a cultural legitimacy and shared bond as masters with other Protestants. Clerics such as Flaget and David claimed authority over both the sisters at Nazareth and their slaves; although lacking ecclesiastical power, the sisters stepped into their role as mistresses over the slaves they acquired alongside new members. This role was not one inevitably forced upon them, but one they willingly chose and consequently relied on to further their success as a community.

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[145] Ibid.

[146] Fox, *The Life of the Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 86.

[147] Ibid.

Early Slavery in Bardstown

Slavery was an integral aspect to Catholic life in Kentucky, and the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth participated in this practice without any documentation of uncertainly or opposition in terms of the institution's morality. From its early years, slavery helped build the diocese of Bardstown, beginning with Bishop Flaget's inheritance of slaves from Thomas Howard; although not clearly substantiated in the records, slave labor is believed to have played a part in building the first cathedral in Bardstown.[148]

C. Walker Gollar, in his analysis of slavery in antebellum Kentucky, argues that lay Catholics not only accepted slave labor as a part of Southern culture, but also "essentially endorsed the institution of human bondage."[149] According to census records in 1810, half of the Catholic pioneers to central Kentucky owned slaves even though only a third of the general population did so; when tracking individual Catholics over decades, an even higher percentage emerges.[150] Between 1810 and 1860, the period in which the Sisters of Nazareth were founded and subsequently expanded, the ratio of slaves in

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[148] C. Walker Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky." *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (January 1998), 50.

[149] Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky." 42.

[150] Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky," 44.

Washington and Nelson counties (with Bardstown and Nazareth Academy both located in Nelson county) rose from twenty to twenty-five percent, with numbers higher in Catholic communities. By these numbers, more Catholics than non-Catholics owned slaves, and slaves comprised a larger portion of residents living on farms owned by Catholics than by the general population in the state.[151]

A larger picture of the practice of slavery in Kentucky is necessary in order to contextualize patterns of Catholic slaveholding in the state. Kentucky's climate and environment separated it from "cotton states" and even from Virginia. The absence of a system of primogeniture, an early influx of migrants from the east, and types of crops grown did not encourage the development of large plantations. The state's production of cereals, hemp, and tobacco was not conducive to slave labor, unlike cotton-growing regions. However, the number of slaves in Kentucky continued to increase even as their value to their masters did not, creating a problem peculiar to the state by the 1830s.[152]

The numbers concerning Catholicism and slavery in Kentucky can be partially explained by the economic standing of the Catholic families in Nelson county. Many had owned land in Maryland and purchased enslaved labor there before migrating to Kentucky in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[153] When Bishop Flaget and Father David left Maryland for Kentucky, they took with them a slave given by their Sulpician colleagues in Baltimore, ensuring the role enslaved labor would play in the development of Bardstown.[154] The diocese of Bardstown and its institutions grew from slaveholding wealth: Thomas Howard, a layman whose legacy to the diocese established the foundation for St. Thomas's Seminary, donated his house, his plantation, and his slaves to the bishop in his will.[155] Outside economic standing, the relationship between American Catholicism and the institution of slavery was complex. A combination of Catholicism's minority presence, a rise in anti-Catholic sentiment by the 1830s, and a general inclination to upholding social order all contributed to Catholics' active participation in the peculiar institution.[156] By slaveholding, Catholics provided evidence to Protestant Southerners that they were truly American.[157] The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth initially became slaveholders through their connections to the bishop and acquiring new members who brought their slaves. Later, they increased their number of enslaved by becoming active buyers and sellers in the domestic slave trade and also benefited from encouraging slave marriages that produced enslaved children.

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[151] Ibid.

[152] Wallace B. Turner, "Kentucky Slavery in the Last Antebellum Decade." *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 58, no. 4 (1960), "Kentucky Slavery," 292.

[153] Turner, "Kentucky Slavery," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 291. Both lay Catholic families and religious orders in Maryland profited immensely from the institution of slavery. As Randall Miller, historian of slavery and religion, points out: "From 1711 to 1838 the Jesuits of Maryland worked slaves on their several plantations, which by the 1830s consisted of six estates of almost twelve thousand acres and over one hundred slaves." See Miller's "Slaves and Southern Catholicism" in: John B Boles, ed. *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870*

(Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988). The Jesuits failed to properly manage their land and slaves, and began the transition to utilizing free labor in the 1830s.

[154] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 168.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Stern, *Southern Crucifix,* 153, 156, 158; Boles, *Masters & Slaves*, 129-130; Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky,"151-53.

[157] Parallels can be seen here between Southern Catholics' desire to prove themselves to be sufficiently "American" and the Baptists' decision to reduce women's participation in meetings after the American Revolution in order to assimilate to an increasingly male-dominated society. See: Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

Records from council meetings, comprised of sisters elected to leadership positions as well as the community's male superiors, indicate plans to purchase or sell slaves. Enslaved people also often arrived in the community with new members, who contributed their "property" to the broader community upon their arrival. One of the earliest members at Nazareth, Mary Gwynn, entered in 1814 and likely brought two slaves with her, named Abraham and Ann. They are mentioned in her will, composed in 1818, which bequeathed them to Bishop Flaget upon her death, for the express purpose of continuing their labors at Nazareth. Two women entering the community in 1820, Martha Gough and Scholastica O'Connor, also brought their enslaved with them. Martha, who was already older and in poor health when she arrived, died soon after, and left "a slave woman and her family" to the bishop as well. Scholastica brought an enslaved man, his wife, and children, who came with the provision that "his freedom be secured one year after her arrival at Nazareth," although it is unclear if that recommendation was followed.

The next clear record of additional slaves at Nazareth is in 1828, when a wealthy widow named Elizabeth Wescot hoped to live with the sisters without formally joining the community. In the arrangement with Elizabeth Wescot, the 1828 bill of sale for the Wescot property read: "The receipt whereof is here by acknowledged, sold, granted and confirmed, and by these presents do bargain, sell, and grant and convey to the said R. Rev. Benedict Joseph Flaget, a certain female slave, named Louise, and two negro boys, slaves, named, the one William, and the other Henry, to the use and behoove of the Rt. Rev. Benedict Joseph Flaget, his executors, and administrators and assigns forever, for the use of the Sister of Charity of Nazareth Kentucky."[158] The wording of this sale is particularly significant for its explicit admission that these three slaves were to be managed by and perform labor particularly for the sisters. The expansion of Nazareth Academy's building and the development of its farm, which played a large role in providing food for the sisters and students, would not have been possible without this additional labor provided by Louise, William and Henry. The enslaved population at Nazareth grew again the following year by another purchase, possibly to offset a debt owed to the bishop, of an enslaved couple named Daniel and Winny in April of 1829. This growth would increase significantly in the 1830s and 1840s, with a record of fifteen enslaved family with at least one child living at Nazareth before the outbreak of the Civil War. The sisters' growth cannot be understood without analysis of the contributions of these families.

Like the growth of the United States itself, the growth of the American Catholic Church cannot be explained without constant attention to the labor of enslaved people. The sisters' own labor, which they understood to serve the poor, was subsidized by the expropriation of labor from the country's poorest inhabitants. Although slavery would continue to expand in Nazareth, as it did throughout Kentucky in the antebellum era, those who were enslaved remained largely unremarked upon by the sisters, especially prior to 1830. This unwillingness to see any contradiction between the sisters' mission of benevolent work and their role as mistresses would characterize the dynamic of slavery at Nazareth, as the sisters became increasingly reliant on the labor their enslaved people provided while continuing to participate willingly in the system that dehumanized those same individuals.

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[158] UNDA, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm collection. Letter Book Vol. 22, p. 17: Copy of Articles of Agreement Between Catherine Spalding and Elizabeth Wescot. May 22, 1828.

Fundraising in Catholic Ohio

Bardstown's ongoing efforts to raise sufficient funds for Catholic institutions in the early nineteenth century were not unique. Every American diocese struggled with financial concerns in the early nineteenth century, and Cincinnati was no exception. Its Catholic population was composed largely of recent immigrants who had little financial success themselves. Some struggled to own a small plot of land to farm, while others worked in mines, quarries, or on canals, performing exhausting manual labor for little compensation.[159] German immigration in particular began to increase significantly in the 1820s; by 1840, German immigrants comprised approximately thirty percent of the population of the city of Cincinnati.[160] Fundraising was all the more difficult under such circumstances, although the city's German population would consistently organize in order to build several ethnic parishes by the end of the 1830s.[161] A lot was purchased on credit for seven hundred dollars on Sycamore between Sixth and Sevenths Streets, and the church was completed and renamed St. Peter in Chains Cathedral in December of 1822.[162] The next year brought no end to the poverty of the fledgling diocese. Bishop

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[159] Roger Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 17.

[160] Joseph M. White, "Cincinnati's German Catholic Life: A Heritage of Lay Participation." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 12, no. 3 (1994), 1.

[161] White, "Cincinnati's German Catholic Life," 6.

[162] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 17.

Fenwick decided to borrow three hundred dollars, without interest, from a friend in Cincinnati in order to travel to Europe and appeal for financial support. He indicated another intention, however, in letters to other prelates: resignation of his position, "to better hands and superior heads."[163]

The diocese's lack of revenue weighed significantly on Fenwick. He admitted in a letter that the only source of funding was the rent of pews in the chapel, thirty at most, which only produced about eighty dollars for the entire year.[164] As luck would have it, Pope Pius VII died while Fenwick was en route to Rome, but Fenwick secured an audience with the newly elected Leo XII on October 6, 1823, two days after his papal coronation. The new pope did not accept Fenwick's resignation, but did assist in his other requests: two young priests of the Propaganda to assist the bishop in his clerical duties, twelve-hundred dollars for traveling expenses, and other material assistance such as church utensils, sacred vessels, books, and linens estimated to be worth about one thousand dollars.[165] Just as significantly, the bishop left Rome with letters of recommendation to help solicit additional support from other parts of Europe. He was able to raise an additional ten thousand dollars on his tour.[166] Upon preparing to return to his diocese in October of 1824, Fenwick felt that he had sufficiently done his duty to provide for his flock.

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[163] Fortin, *Faith and Action,* 19.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid; Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 103-104.

[166] Fortin, *Faith and Action,* 19-20; Dichtl, 104.

Fenwick was inspired to action after returning to Cincinnati, where the number of faithful had continued to grow in his absence. Buoyed by his successful fundraiser, he met with his local clergy and began making plans for a larger place of worship, with St. Peter in Chains Cathedral already filled to capacity. Not all those who heard of the new building project were supportive. Stephen Badin, a popular but controversial frontier priest, warned that such an undertaking was a risky expense, and claimed that he "knew not of any worse business than that of building in our backwoods."[167] The bishop remained undeterred, however, and construction began in the spring of 1825. Although not fully completed, Mass was said for the first time in the church on June 29, 1826, with its formal dedication taking place in December. The celebration of Christmas Mass coincided with the announcement of a jubilee, to last two years in the diocese, declared by Pope Leo XII. Bishop Fenwick, accompanied by two priests, James Mullon and Nicholas Young, traveled frequently during this time to proclaim the jubilee to the expansive diocese. They distributed the sacraments to Catholics as well as promoted the Catholic faith in general to those they encountered, which brought about an estimated four hundred conversions.[168]

As the number of Catholics in the Cincinnati region and the rest of the diocese grew throughout the 1820s, Bishop Fenwick, like many other prelates, struggled to find the necessary institutional support. He petitioned both the Jesuits and Benedictines in

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[167] Fortin, *Faith and Action,* 23. As mentioned in chapter 2, Badin's critics characterized him as overzealous. Complaints against him included opposition to dancing, denial of the sacraments even to the sick, inappropriate excommunications, cruel penances, and forbidding confession to the Dominicans.

[168] Fortin, *Faith and Action,* 27.

England to send priests to support his diocese, but both groups politely declined, leaving only thirteen priests to assist Fenwick.[169] The bishop had more luck in his requests for women religious to visit the diocese, and hoped that they might settle permanently and open a school. The first sister recorded to arrive in the diocese was Sister St. Paul of the French Sisters of Mercy, who opened a school for girls at the cathedral in 1825.

Although unable to secure additional Sisters of Mercy to help her, Fenwick did reach an agreement with two French Collettine Poor Clare Sisters, Francoise Vindevoghel and Mary Victoria de Seilles, to establish their order within the diocese of Cincinnati in 1826. Around the same time, a Sister Adolphine Malingie from Ghent also joined them, and in the fall of that year the three sisters opened a school for girls, while also instructing a large class of poor children on Sundays.[170] However, this group was unable to establish deep roots in the community. By the summer of 1827, Sister Adolphine announced that she intended to leave her vocation and consequently her position at the school, and in September, Sister St. Paul suddenly died.[171] Her death left only the two French sisters to staff the school, as Francoise and Victoria had attempted but ultimately been unsuccessful in obtaining additional sisters from their order. Under the circumstances, they likely felt significantly isolated and overwhelmed; in April of 1828, the last two sisters left Cincinnati, leaving the brick school opposite the cathedral empty.

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[169] Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 13.

[170] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 20, 31.

[171] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 31; these early sisters in Cincinnati prior to the arrival of the Sisters of Charity in 1829 are also described in: Judith Metz, "The Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati: 1829-1852." *Vincentian Heritage Journal* 17, no. 3 (1996): 201-44.

The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and Kentucky Education

The 1820s brought a decade of overall growth to the sisters at Nazareth as they expanded their education mission. The experiences of the many children who received an education from the Sisters of Charity can be glimpsed through report cards and notes on individual students. The attention to detail on these documents indicates that the sisters as teachers often formed personal relationships with the children sent to them. Those who attended school as boarders and consistent day-students had the opportunity to see their long-term progress, as noted in several report cards. The sisters evaluated student progress twice a year, once at the end of the fall term and once at the end of the spring term. One example of the student-teacher relationships formed at Nazareth Academy is reflected in a report card belonging to Eliza Crozier for September to December 1826. Her evaluations reflect the sisters' interest in not just academic learning but also emotional development, with respect for children's own personalities. Under categories of "conduct, application, and proficiency," Eliza received detailed notes concerning her behavior in class as well as her mastery of a wide variety of subjects taught by the sisters. Reflecting a great deal of attention on the sisters' part, behavior was evaluated in the context of the school room itself, the study room, and recreation. The detailed language used in this report card demonstrates the fastidious nature of the Sisters of Charity as teachers. Various descriptions also demonstrate a personal knowledge of Eliza's progress, with notes such as "less giddy than before" for her classroom behavior and "agreeable" during recreation with other students.[172] For her "application" section, the sisters make a distinction between her in-class behavior, marked “attentive,” and her study room behavior, described as “tolerably assiduous.”[173] Selection of such specific language suggests that the sisters held their young students to a high standard while also giving considerable attention to allow them a detailed sense of each student’s improvements.

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[172] UNDA, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm. Clippings for Annals 1826-1849, p. 12

Report cards like Eliza’s also give a sense of the curriculum the sisters taught at Nazareth Academy. The wide variety of both academic and domestic subjects offered to students was only possible as a result of the sisters’ own education and domestic mastery. The academic subjects offered at Nazareth indicate the high quality of education that young girls received from the sisters, making the academy one of the most well-known and respected schools for girls in the region – one of the notable exceptions to the relatively basic schools in the antebellum South.[174] Eliza’s report card lists not just the standard reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also includes the more advanced categories of grammar, composition, rhetoric, natural philosophy, history, and geography. The sisters were dedicated to teaching young girls traditional feminine skills, knowing such skills would be essential after their educations were completed and they left Nazareth: plain sewing, ornamental needlework, embroidery, drawing and painting – on which Eliza was marked “much improved.”[175] The addition of French language and music added a cultural depth to the girls’ education not offered in many public skills at the time, particularly in rural areas. Two last categories, politeness and overall health and growth, suggest that the sisters at Nazareth were truly invested in developing the entire person, much like biological parents.

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[173] Ibid.

[174] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit*, 89-90;118.

[175] Ibid.

To evaluate all students consistently attending Nazareth on such a varied and detailed curriculum must have required a significant amount of time and attention on behalf of the sisters. Beyond the standard subjects and skills listed on her report card, Eliza also received personal notes on her overall progress. The document demonstrates the warmth of the sisters who compiled the evaluation: the young girl earned the high praise of "universal satisfaction" for the term. She is described as "less volatile and more emulous," indicating that she was likely marked for needing improvement in certain categories for past semesters. With a final note that Eliza "appeared much excited" to receive honors at the end of the term, this report card is thorough enough to present a detailed snapshot of a single student's personality and academic record. Although the detail of report cards likely varied – Eliza appears to be an especially bright student, which might have brought more attention to her work – the education of students at Nazareth was performed in the spirit of the Sisters of Charity mission, which required dedication and devotion. Those sisters who directed and taught at the academy developed personal bonds with their students, and helped those students receive an education that would benefit both the young girls themselves as well as the surrounding community when they graduated.

The strength of these personal connections the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth made as teachers was sometimes significant enough to endure even after a student completed their education and left the sisters' care. One of the most emotional demonstrations of the relationship between teachers and students at Nazareth can be found in a letter written by a former Nazareth student named Clara Bowen. Clara had been a student at the Nazareth Academy from 1847 to 1850. Writing two years after leaving Nazareth, it is clear that Clara's time there continued to remain significant to her. Having been delayed writing to Mother Catherine, Clara wrote, "Do not therefore suppose for an instant that my long silence has risen from any diminution of affection for [you], though my home is very dear to me and I have formed some strong attachments, my heart reverts to Nazareth and my cherished friends who loved me there."[176] One memory stands out in particular for this former student, which appears to be what compelled her to send this letter. Clara recounted a memory of falling ill and being confined to the infirmary for an extended period of time; she wrote that Mother Catherine sat by her bedside throughout the duration of her illness, and when Clara was considered out of danger and on her way to recovery, Mother Catherine's demeanor transformed.

Although Clara admitted she often had thought of Mother Catherine as "cold," at this moment of good news she threw her arms around Clara and gave her a kiss. Clara wrote that after that moment, she knew Mother Catherine loved her, and that moment of affection is what compelled Clara to write to her former caretaker. Although Clara wrote in the most detail about this specific moment in the infirmary, it is clear that she remembers her time at Nazareth in general with great fondness and gratitude. She described her time there as "my very happy school days," a happiness which she attributes clearly to her relationship with Mother Catherine in particular. She shared with Catherine that "your dear face has always claimed a prominent place" in her memories, and that despite the passing of time, “every word and act of kindness is treasured up” from her school days. A note from the archivist includes details on the original letter, which is described as “beautifully written on lovely note paper,” indicating the amount of time and care invested in a single letter. According to the Nazareth Academy Register, although Clara was only a student for three years, she decided to convert to Catholicism during her time with the sisters. All these small details, taken together, suggest that Clara’s experience at Nazareth changed her life, and that her memories stayed with her long after her departure. Her story gives insight into the genuinely personal and meaningful relationships that the Sisters of Charity formed with those that they served, whom they often grew to love.[177]

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[176] UNDA, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Microfilm. Letter of Clara Bowen to Mother Catherine Spalding: OLB Vol 1, p 88. Cincinnati, November 7, 1852.

Nazareth Academy’s success took place in the broader context of Southern education. As a region, the antebellum South, including the Upper South, significantly lacked established schools in comparison to the Northeast, and consequently, Catholic education held a disproportionate influence. Southern state constitutions rarely mentioned education and were similarly lacking in financial support for any type of public education, “crippling” the development of Southern public schools.[178] Kentucky was no exception. Although a law was passed in 1821 to aid the development of common schools, constituents and government officials alike remained reluctant to part with the necessary funds, delaying the endeavor for another three decades.[179] Southern culture also influenced the development of women's education in the region distinct from the Northeast. Unlike northern men, who feared the deterioration of professional segregation, "southern women's education was a mark of gentility that heightened their husbands' status, not threatened it."[180] Although this mentality allowed young women from wealthier families to pursue educational opportunities, it also structurally disadvantaged Southern women. Ridicule and disparagement of women pursuing higher education was common, and the wealthy women who did have access to colleges did not attend for the purpose of joining the workforce. Nazareth Academy benefited from this tradition of wealthy Southerners sending their daughters to boarding schools to be educated before pursuing their expected vocation of wives and mothers. The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth helped fill a large educational gap in Kentucky society, but in doing so upheld Southern hierarchies of class and gender.

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[177] UNDA, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Microfilm. Letter of Clara Bowen to Mother Catherine Spalding: OLB Vol 1, p 88. Cincinnati, November 7, 1852.

[178] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 70.

[179] Ellwood P. Cubberly, *Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Educational History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947), 102-103; 414-415.

The opportunities for Catholic education in the South significantly favored young girls as a result of the number of women religious-founded schools. Both men and women in religious life traditionally taught students of their own sex; for Southern girls, this tradition put them at a distinct educational advantage. Kentucky became the center of one of the most extensive Catholic school systems in the early nineteenth century, in large part due to many of their early priests having a background in education and their initiative taken to establish communities of women religious who could also teach.[181] By 1825, sixty Sisters of Charity of Nazareth ministered and educated at schools they established in Nazareth, Bardstown, St. Thomas, Union County, Scott County, and Vincennes, Indiana, and would later move into Tennessee as well.[182] Their reputation attracted the attention of wealthy Protestant families throughout the South, and in turn, educating the daughters of well-respected families continued to ensure that those families recommended the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth's schools to their friends. Most of these families were Protestant, but came to respect the sisters' work regardless, helping to foster good relationships between different denominations.

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[180] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 74.

[181] Fox, *The Life of the Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David*, 50; J. Herman Schauinger, *Cathedrals in the Wilderness* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1952), 71.

The Arrival of the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati

The topic of Catholic education was a nation-wide concern by 1830, although the process of institution-building varied by region. The first Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1829 was called in hopes of organizing the Catholic Church in the United States and providing more uniform guidance to its clergy, which remained relatively sparse. Bishop Fenwick not only attended the council but was also involved in forming the agenda. Among the issues addressed were uniformity in administration of the sacraments, the problems of trusteeism, Catholic publications, and unqualified or inappropriate priests.[183] One of the topics that proved most influential to lay Catholics nationwide, however, was the council's decrees on education: "The children of Catholic parents, especially the poor, have been exposed…to great danger of the loss of faith or the corruption of morals, on account of the lack of…[Catholic] teachers…and we judge it absolutely necessary that schools should be established."[184] Fenwick saw this need in his own diocese. Ohio had passed its first law requiring the establishment of public schools in 1825, and frequently used the facilities of local Protestant churches staffed with Protestant teachers.[185] Fenwick's early efforts to build a school and enlist the services of women religious had not paid off in the long run, and the question remained: Catholic education was necessary, but who could provide it, and with what funds?

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[182] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 84.

[183] For detailed information concerning the First Provincial Council, see: Peter Guilday, *A History of the Councils of Baltimore, 1791-1884* (New York: Arno Press, 1969). For an analysis of trusteeism and lay participation in early American Catholicism, see Patrick W. Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates: Ecclesiastical Democracy and the Tensions of Trusteeism* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1987); for a discussion of the development of Catholicism within the context of American culture and democratic government, see Jay Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York, 2002).

The answer for Cincinnati would be the Sisters of Charity, although securing their assistance took time. The Sisters of Charity had been one of Bishop Fenwick's first choices for teachers, and he requested their presence in Cincinnati for the first time in 1825. However, the community's superior, John Dubois, first required that Bishop Fenwick guarantee financial support, writing that they "must be sensible that before they can be sent to such a distance some permanent funds must be secured to ensure the permanency of such an establishment, and their travelling expenses to and from the place."[186] The bishop knew the diocese was too impoverished to do so, and was forced to wait. In May of 1829, Fenwick wrote a letter to the Motherhouse at Emmitsburg to again request sisters to help open an orphan asylum for girls, and this time he was able to promise more assistance: "– Mr. M.P. Cassilly and others have engaged to furnish you a good and comfortable house rent free, as long as you wish to occupy it & $200 in cash annually towards your support & to refund if required all expenses of your journey to this place."[187] The help of the laity also mattered. A group of Sisters of Charity stopped in Cincinnati in October of that year on their way to St. Louis, and were encouraged to stay by Patrick Reilly, a prominent local Catholic, who gave a donation to the sisters and expressed his desire to see members of their community stay in the area permanently.

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[184] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 37.

[185] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 37-38.

[186] Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, Motherhouse Archives. Mount Saint Joseph, Ohio (hereafter abbreviated SCC). "Documents Related to the Cincinnati Mission of the Sisters of Charity, 1825-1853," compiled and edited by Judith Metz, S.C., 2009 (hereafter abbreviated as "Research guide.") DuBois in Emmitsburg to Bishop Fenwick in Cincinnati. Mt. St. Mary's, Dec. 30, 1825. Research guide, 1.

While in Baltimore for the Provincial Council, Bishop Fenwick traveled to Emmitsburg to meet with the mother superior in person, and in a few weeks, he received word that the sisters had agreed to establish a mission in Cincinnati.[188] Council records note that the first Sisters of Charity to take up residence in Cincinnati were Fanny Jordan, Victoria Fitzgerald, Beatrice Tyler, and Albina Levy. The group left St. Joseph for their new mission on October 12, 1829.[189]

Having been called to Cincinnati in order to provide a much-needed school, the four sisters from Emmitsburg quickly re-opened the abandoned school building. They began caring for five orphaned girls and an additional six children as pupils of their new school, to be called St. Peter's for its affiliation with the cathedral. The rapid growth of St. Peter's as both a day school and an orphan asylum demonstrated that the Sisters of Charity provided a much-needed social service that directly involved them with

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[187] SCC: Bishop Fenwick in Cincinnati to Mother Augustine Decount, S.C., in Emmitsburg. Cincinnati, May 9, 1829. Research guide, 3.

[188] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 38-39.

[189] SCC: ASJPH Council Book, 1829-1852. Research guide, 6.

Cincinnati's citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. St. Peter's was the first permanently established free school in Ohio. Cincinnati's first public schools of Cincinnati were founded the next year, 1830.

The sisters' vow of poverty stipulated that they allocate all funds possible to care for their orphans. Financial records demonstrate prudent money management as well as self-sacrifice contributed to their success in keeping the school open. In November, soon after the first sisters arrived, the Motherhouse sent instructions stating that they were not to "receive in their houses a larger sum than $100 for the use of the establishments – but are to pay into the treasury of the house any sum over that appointed quantity of money - & are never to keep less than $25."[190] Maintaining a limited budget while also providing the space and materials necessary for a growing school and orphan asylum indicate the sisters' financial acumen and their ability to manage their funds with limited oversight from the Motherhouse and local bishop.

By establishing St. Peter's, the Sisters of Charity made themselves visible to the Cincinnati community, and this visibility had both benefits and risk. Schools established by both the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati could not have succeeded without Protestant support, given the relatively small number of Catholics in each area. In just its second year, St. Peter's had more Protestant than Catholic pupils, raising some Protestant suspicion.[191] By the end of the 1820s, Nazareth Academy was also predominantly Protestant, and the sisters implemented a policy that no

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[190] Ibid.

[191] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 42.

Protestant student could convert to Catholicism without clear permission from their parents.[192] To help allay Protestant suspicion of conversion, both communities' schools practiced public examinations and encouraged the local community to visit the schools for the sake of transparency. In Cincinnati, however, Catholic newspapers would play the most influential role in Protestant-Catholic relations. Although the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth were targeted by a Protestant newspaper briefly after their school in Scott County, such anti-Catholic critics were relatively uncommon in comparison to Cincinnati.[193] In Cincinnati, Catholic newspapers were not only a platform to defend Catholic theology but could also be used to promote the sisters' mission and institutions, and consequently became an important aspect of their fundraising campaigns.

St. Peter's, Anti-Catholicism, and Protestant-Catholic Relations in Cincinnati

The success that the Sisters of Charity achieved as educators drew attention to their presence and mission in Cincinnati. The sisters' outreach and dedication to education for all children gained much admiration from both Catholics and Protestants. Nevertheless, a growing Catholic population in the area occasionally drew criticism and warnings against "popery." To cultivate a sense of Catholic identity and to help inoculate against potential accusations by local Protestants, Bishop Fenwick expressed a desire for a local Catholic newspaper as early as 1829. Catholic newspapers have long been studied by historians, and were considered one of the most common and effective ways to defend against Protestant attacks; one historian characterizes their function as "the primary agency for Catholic defense."[194] Bishop Fenwick did not imagine the threat to Catholics in Cincinnati; in 1830, he was accused of treason because of his correspondence with and acceptance of funds from the Propaganda Fide in Rome. By the next year, the bishop was successful in establishing a diocesan newspaper. Beginning as an eight-page weekly, the *Catholic Telegraph* was the first Catholic paper west of the Alleghenies, the first to be owned and managed by a diocese, and the second Catholic paper in the entire country.[195]

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[192] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 78.

[193] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 65.

Catholic newspapers were a key component in making the work of the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati known to those outside the circle of St. Peter's. One of the earliest public mentions of the sisters' work at St. Peter's was a feature in a weekly publication in Hartford, Connecticut, *The Catholic Press*, in September of 1830, published for the explicit reason that, "We have felt the more anxious to give a passing tribute to this institution, from the fact of its being but partially known to our citizens, a circumstance somewhat singular in these times, when charitable associations occupy a conspicuous place in the weekly, monthly, and quarterly publications of the day."[196] The article praises the success of St. Peter's first year, during which the school had grown to include over one-hundred and fifty additional students, many of whom paid only a nominal fee. In addition to their academic education, the girls received instruction in domestic duties such as needlework and embroidery, reflecting the wide range of skills that the sisters themselves had acquired and continued to employ as part of their mission.

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[194] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 44.

[195] Ibid.

[196] SCC: *The Catholic Press,* Hartford Connecticut, Sept. 4, 1830. AMSJ A311 005, handwritten copy. Research guide, 13-15.

Like many other public sources reporting the work of the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati, this *Catholic Press* article emphasized the willingness of the sisters to care for all children, whether or not they came from Catholic families. Reassurances similar to that of, "No effort…is made to inculcate the doctrines of the Catholic Church among the Protestant children placed in the Asylum, unless by the consent of those by whom they are sent," were common anticipatory defenses to the hostilities of Protestant neighbors facing a growing Catholic presence in the Midwest.[197] Protestant papers often characterized the Catholic Church as a foreign and dangerous presence in American society. In 1831 the *Cincinnati Journal* wrote that the "increase in Papists in the United States is beyond belief to those who have not attended this subject," and that "immense funds have been placed at their disposal" in order to create proselytizing schemes under the façade of education.[198] The notion that sisters and all Catholic educators in the United States were operating under an ulterior motive to encourage or even coerce conversion to Catholicism was consistently employed to warn Protestant parents away from Catholic schools. Catholic newspapers offered one line of defense.

In a letter likely dated in early to mid-1830, Bishop Fenwick wrote to the French Association of the Propagation of the Faith reporting his success in bringing the Sisters of Charity to his diocese: "Their establishment, I hope, will prosper. They have already one hundred and six children in the school, and five orphans in the asylum."[199] The difficulties of four sisters managing the education of such a number of students must have been no small matter. Although records are unclear on the surrounding circumstances, it appears that a discussion took place in the early 1830s concerning whether or not a benevolent association of lay Catholic women might be formed with the purpose of either co-managing or taking over management entirely from the Sisters of Charity; the asylum was to be separately incorporated. As Sister Servant, or local superior, Fanny Jordan expressed her wishes in a letter to Mr. Cassilly,[200] who provided their housing and was an influential wealthy Catholic:

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[197] Ibid.

[198] Metz, "The Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati," 209.

> Respected Sir, last evening your note of Thursday was presented to us expressive of your wishes, in relation to the Asylum. We have always been impressed that the house was to be the Monument of your Charity to the homeless orphans while you were pleased that the Sisters of Charity should have the management and control of the helpless little ones. We are not aware of any Constitution that has been infringed in regard to the government of the house, as our immediate Superiors left that to the prudence, piety, and zeal of the Rt. Rev. Bishop of the Diocese [Fenwick], and his Clergy, they have been its governors. We seek no other involvement, than the consciousness of laboring for the glory of our Divine Master, the promotion of his holy religion, and the continuance of the good will of our liberal benefactor – with this expression respectfully tendered to you we wait your pleasure.

Fanny's letter expresses both the sisters' dedication to their vow of obedience as well as their ability to speak for themselves in their role as institutional managers. St.

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[199] SCC: From Fenwick to Abbe Rigagnon of the French Association for the Propagation of the Faith. [Annals IV, 532-34, quoted in V.F. O'Daniel, O.P., The Right Rev. Edward Dominic Fenwick, O.P., Founder of the Dominicans in the United States (Washington, D.C.: The Dominica, 1920, 371.] Research guide, 7.

[200] Little is known about Michael P. Cassilly, often abbreviated "M.P.," outside of his initial offer to provide lodging free of charge to the Sisters of Charity and his subsequent withdrawal of that offer, as described later in this chapter. In Fortin, *Faith and Action*, he is described only as a layman and "supporter of some local church activities and whose sons attended Mt. St. Mary's College in Emmitsburg." The parish of St. Raphael's Catholic Church in Springfield, Ohio, attributes the creation of their church in 1849 to a generous donation of the same Michael Cassilly.

Peter's was owned by the diocese, not by the sisters themselves, and this letter indicated that the sisters saw themselves as obedient instruments of others' will – whether it be God, the bishop, or Mr. Cassilly. As such, their priority was not necessarily how to maintain control over St. Peter's, but how to serve God and their mission in the most devout and efficient manner possible. Although seeking no glory of their own, this dedication to the service of those in need spoke for itself in the way that St. Peter's flourished under their management. This success may have been able to assuage whatever concerns arose over this question of management, as nothing appeared to come of it. No change in authority was made, and the school and asylum remained under ownership of the diocese and conducted by the sisters.[201]

Maintaining good relationships with those individuals and groups who were able to spread the word about the work done by the Sisters of Charity was a vital part of increasing community support for St. Peter's. Like many other citizens at the time, Cincinnatians relied on information from their local newspapers to keep them in touch with community life and to report on the most significant developments as the region continued to grow. The *Catholic Telegraph* soon became an essential aspect of support for St. Peter's school and asylum by reporting its growth and successes and spreading the word on fundraisers necessary to continue to provide for its students. In addition to helping to fund the school and the growing number of orphans, the *Telegraph* also demystified the work of the Sisters of Charity, which seems likely to have reduced worries about papist proselytizing.

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[201] SCC: Sister Fanny Jordan in Cincinnati to Mr. P. Cassilly, Esq., in Cincinnati. AMSJ A311 004. Saturday Morning August 28 [1830?]. Research guide, 13.

The sisters in Cincinnati were aware of Protestant suspicions and actively took their own steps to ensure that any criticism or accusation proved unfounded. As a demonstration of their inclusive education, the teachers encouraged parents and the general public to attend their end of year presentations, showcasing the talents of students from the youngest to oldest. Younger groups recited from their readers and writing from all age groups was on display throughout the rooms; the oldest group dutifully answered questions on topics ranging from arithmetic to geography.[202]

Catholic institutions run by sisters required consistent community support. Without any funding or subsidies provided by local or state governments, the Sisters of Charity were entirely responsible for their own fundraising and resource management, which became a full-time concern as the school and orphanage of St. Peter's continued to grow. The school's end of year exhibition served the dual purpose of alleviating fears of Catholic indoctrination by promoting transparency while also presenting evidence to the public that the Sisters of Charity were promoting the public good and deserved monetary support and general goodwill. One visitor to the academic exhibition had their observations published in the *Telegraph*: "All present appeared to be grateful, and many expressed their surprise, that an institution so highly useful to the community, was so partially known," reflecting the relative low profile of the order's work in its early years.[203] Also surprising to this attendant was that "the greater number of students were Protestants," with apparently no preference or special treatment of the Catholic students, which supported the idea that the Sisters "have done so much for the advancement of moral and religious education in our city."[204] By providing education to many children in the Cincinnati area, the sisters were able to improve Catholicism's reputation and in some cases help improve Protestant-Catholic relations.

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[202] SCC: *Catholic Telegraph,* July 28, 1832, Vol 1, No 41. Research guide, 19-21.

[203] Ibid.

By the end of 1831, the diocese of Cincinnati had grown considerably from its humble beginnings. In December of that year, Bishop Fenwick wrote to a London friend that his diocese was "flourishing," and reported that the region now benefited from twenty-four priests, several missionaries, twenty-two churches (and more congregations without their own church building), a seminary, a college, and the weekly publication of the *Catholic Telegraph*.[205] Notably, the description in this letter did not include mention of the arrival of the Sisters of Charity or their work at St. Peter's, despite the essential nature of their service. Not long after this letter, however, the sisters and the bishop shared a similar concern: the cholera outbreak in the summer of 1832. During just one month, a recorded 423 people in Cincinnati died from the disease, and a well-known contemporary physician estimated that four percent of the city's population died by the end of the outbreak. The epidemic raised the number of orphans in the care of the sisters at St. Peter's to thirty-four.[206]

Cholera was a concern in the 1830s throughout the country, and many Catholic religious orders became involved in nursing the sick in the affected regions. 1832 was a particularly virulent year for the disease. The Sisters of Charity sent eight sisters from Emmitsburg to Philadelphia that summer to assist as nurses throughout the city and were praised by Bishop Kenrick for their "heroic fortitude, with certain peril to their lives," in taking charge of the "pest-stricken patients."[207] Sisters of Charity were also sent to Baltimore, for the same purpose, where they immediately took charge of 270 orphans, most of whom had lost parents to the cholera outbreak.[208] In Baltimore, the Oblate Sisters of Providence responded to requests for help despite their community's charism consisting of the teaching of black women rather than nursing and service to the poor.[209] Unlike Philadelphia and Boston, which requested sisters during the escalation of the outbreak, Cincinnati had the advantage of already having sisters in place who were dedicated to serving the poor and sick. Despite the immense risk and labor involved in caring for cholera victims, Sisters of Charity council records indicate that in October of that year it was decided that "the Sisters should accept no donation of any sort for serving the Sick Cholera," perhaps so that they would not appear to profit from the community's misfortune.[210]

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[204] Ibid.

[205] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 45.

[206] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 46.

As the sisters in Cincinnati continued to nurse the sick, Bishop Fenwick's health declined, and he succumbed to cholera and died on September 27 at the age of sixty-four.

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[207] William Watson, "The Sisters of Charity, the 1832 Cholera Epidemic in Philadelphia and Duffy's Cut." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27, no. 4 (2009): 12.

[208] Judith Metz. "The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton's Sisters of Charity." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14, no. 1 (1996): 31.

[209] Diane Batts Morrow. "Outsiders Within: The Oblate Sisters of Providence in 1830s Church and Society." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 15, no. 2 (1997): 46-47.

[210] SCC: Council Book 1829-1832, ASHPH. Research guide, 22.

The sisters' mission in Cincinnati had begun as a result of his persistent requests, and it would continue to grow after his death. Although no sources from the sisters themselves comment on the bishop's death, it is likely that their preoccupation with and dedication to caring for those affected by the cholera epidemic superseded their concern for who the next bishop might be. The Sisters in Cincinnati were ultimately beholden to the authority of the Motherhouse in Emmitsburg, even as they became increasingly focused on Cincinnati's local needs through their benevolent work.

Cholera and Catholic Healthcare in Kentucky

Cholera outbreaks swept the country throughout the 1820s and 1830s, and the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth were brought into contact with the disease through their location and their dedication to nursing the sick. Vincennes, Indiana, was a particularly challenging mission for the sisters due to the frequent outbreaks of disease that swept through the outpost.[211] Cholera brought acute crises; the consumption that took the lives of five sisters in 1824 remained a chronic danger. Sister Harriet Gardiner, one of the four sent to teach at Vincennes, described the ups and downs of life on the frontier in a letter to her biological sister, Sister Clare Gardiner, who remained at Nazareth. The danger of epidemic illnesses is clear as Harriet worried that, "hardly can there be found one house, either in town or country, without some sick in it."[212] She reported that Sister Lucy and

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[211] Bishop Flaget requested the sisters open a school in Vincennes, Indiana, and four sisters were sent there in March of 1824. For a more detailed history of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth's presence in Vincennes, see: Ellin M. Kelly, "The Sisters of Charity in Vincennes, Indiana." *Vincentian Heritage Journal*, Vol. 27, Issue 1, Article 6 (Fall 2007): 113-131.

[212] UNDA, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth microfilm. Original Letter Book 2, p. 5. Original letter of Sister Harriet Gardiner to her sister, Sister Clare Gardiner. 9/27/1826: St. Clare/Vincennes Indiana.

Sister Josephine had both fallen seriously ill not long after their arrival, and only recently began to improve. In such conditions, awareness of her own mortality must have been inevitable: "I am the only one well, and I think every day that it will be my turn. I feel much like it at present."[213]

In spite of the illness ravaging the community around her, Sister Harriet still believed that "this…is the best place in the Union for a school."[214] Life in Vincennes had the benefit of a low cost of living, and Harriet observed that their pay, though hardly excessive, was able to go a long way due to the availability of farm land and reasonable market prices. Though only four sisters were sent to Vincennes, Harriet felt that this was a sufficient number. A brief but telling comment gives insight into the stresses that must have accompanied communal life: "If [a higher] number adds to your felicity, I rejoice with you, but often the reverse takes place."[215] Unfortunately, Harriet's separation from her biological and spiritual sisters at Nazareth was to be permanent. Her fears of being the next to fall ill proved to be prescient, and she died ten days after writing this letter.

Catholic healthcare and ministry to the sick emerged in the South as a result of the intersection of multiple regional factors. Beginning in the colonial era, southerners were subjected to various epidemics, initially smallpox and malaria and then, from the early nineteenth century, cholera and yellow fever. Although these diseases occurred throughout the country, the South's heat and mugginess could exacerbate the situation and make diseases more virulent than in the North.[216] Beyond the region's pre-disposed climate, state and local governments did not organize in a structurally effective manner to prevent and treat epidemics. No statewide board of health existed in the antebellum South; boards of health were created in some cities, but often only when a disease had already created an emergency and were not maintained after the crisis was alleviated. Even where they existed, health boards were disadvantaged by influential businesses who feared public awareness of epidemics would harm their commercial prospects.[217] In the absence of structural support, more pastoral forms of Catholic healthcare emerged, largely performed by women religious. As other historians of the South have demonstrated, the absence of uniform standards for doctors and nurses hindered professionalization in the region, but it also created space for others to practice, including clergy and women.[218]

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[213] Ibid.

[214] Ibid.

[215] Ibid.

In their experiences caring for the sick, the Sisters of Charity interacted directly with the public, which in many cases bolstered their image as a benevolent public face of Catholicism. Although attending to those affected by disease improved relationships between the sisters and the surrounding areas, miscommunication and conflict did have the potential to arise. Catherine Spalding's letters have largely been lost, but one of the few that remain addressed such an issue in Louisville, where the sisters had traveled temporarily in response to a cholera outbreak in 1834. The arrangement made with the city in advance was clear to Catherine: although the government of Louisville would pay for the sisters' expenses in return for their nursing and infirmary skills, this was only to accommodate their cost of living while serving the sick. When Catherine was notified that the city of Louisville's report listed their finances as wages, her sense of mission caused her to correct this perception by reaching out to the mayor. Her letter indicated that she believed the foundation of faith that motivated all the members of her community had been overlooked: "Gentlemen, be pleased to understand, that we are not hirelings - & if we are, in practice, the Servants of the poor, the sick & the orphan; - we are voluntarily so: But we look for our reward, in another & a better World."[219] It is clear from this statement that the sisters, no matter where they went, did not expect monetary compensation for the services they performed, even if they performed similar labor to those who received wages. Providing basic needs for the sisters when they traveled was a standard arrangement among many communities, as necessities needed to always be accounted for. Additional compensation, however, was forbidden by their vow of poverty, and all money received out of gratitude or fundraising was required to be put in the community's collective account. Thus, the Sisters of Charity saw themselves as a different class of labor than typical workers, regardless of similarities in the type of work performed.

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[216] David K. Patterson. "Disease Environments in the Antebellum South," in Ronald L. Numbers and Todd L. Savitt, eds., *Science and Medicine in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 152-165.

[217] David R. Goldfield, "The Business of Health Planning: Disease Prevention in the Old South," *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (November 1976), 559-562.

[218] Stern, *Southern* Crucifix, 46-51. See also: Ronald L. Numbers and Todd L. Savitt, eds., *Science and Medicine in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989) and Christopher J. Kauffman, *Ministry and Meaning: A Religious History of Catholic Health Care in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

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[219] Mary Ellen Doyle, SCN. *Catherine Spalding, SCN: A Life in Letters*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2017), 16-17.

Through their education and healthcare institutions, the Sisters of Charity came to embody the role of a public face of Catholicism in both Cincinnati and Nazareth.[220] By formulating their lives around teaching and nursing the sick, the sisters became intimately intertwined with their surrounding communities. This work and the relationships the sisters formed through it benefited the Catholic Church and was integral to its process of institutionalization in the 1820s and 1830s. Although the most significant growth was yet to come to American Catholicism beginning in the 1840s and subsequent waves of European immigration throughout the nineteenth century, sisters laid the foundation for a vast network of Catholic institutions. These institutions would provide Catholics throughout the country with a sense of identity and a way to continue the practice of their faith while also benefiting other denominations by providing important social services. By looking more closely at Nazareth and Cincinnati, a broader picture emerges concerning the importance of sisters' organization and administration. This organization was distinct from the benevolent work of Protestant women's associations as Catholic sisters committed their lives to vows that informed their individual and collective choices. The importance of the roles these vows played was increasingly evident in both communities in the 1830s and 1840s, when both growth and conflict required the sisters' careful consideration.

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[220] Bernadette McCauley. "Nuns' Stories: Writing the History of Women Religious in the United States." *American Catholic Studies* 125, no. 4 (2014): 67.

CHAPTER 4

SISTERS AND SUPERIORS: AN ANALYSIS OF AUTHORITATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES

The White Collar Controversy

The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth had grown considerably throughout the 1820s, but the following decade would truly test their ability to endure hardship. Difficulties came not only from circumstances outside of Nazareth, but even more from internal concerns that would culminate in deep divisions between sisters and their superiors. From 1829 to 1831, the number of sisters joining and leaving the community resulted in no significant increase in membership; no members received the habit in 1831, and only two women took their first vows.[221] The sisters' dedication to their institutions, however, did not waver. In 1832, they established a new school in Louisville, and soon after created the community's first orphan asylum in the city. The new school, Presentation Academy, and St. Vincent's orphan asylum served Louisville even through the devastating cholera outbreak that swept the region in 1833-1834. The community's greatest threat to unity, however, appeared was not in Louisville but Nazareth, where a conflict of authority threatened the sisters' hard-earned stability.

As Bishop of Bardstown, Benedict Flaget's ecclesiastical authority placed him at the top of the community's hierarchy.[222] Bishop Flaget was not involved in the day to day life of Nazareth as the ecclesiastical superior was supposed to be; in fact, Flaget was often required to leave his diocese for fundraising or other clerical obligations, in the United States and in Europe. Although not a constant presence at Nazareth, Bishop Flaget enjoyed a "right of visitation" with the sisters, which meant his presence was officially welcomed at any time, for any reason. In periods when he remained near Nazareth, he also served on the council as the primary authority in decision-making. For much of his tenure, the bishop found little fault with the decisions made by the sisters in their various capacities and missions. But this friendly relationship was tested in a few key disagreements, first over the sisters' style of dress, and then in a larger debate over the community's sense of identity and history. The conflict over dress may seem at first the smallest of moments, but it reveals the contours of formal and informal authority in the community.

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[221] Mary Ellen Doyle, SCN, *Pioneer Spirit: Catherine Spalding, Sister of Charity of Nazareth* (University Press of Kentucky: Lexington, 2008), 90.

[222] Upon his initial appointment of Bishop of Bardstown, Benedict Flaget was extremely reluctant to accept the title, and went to great lengths to avoid his consecration. He contemplated resignation several

The habit adopted by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth shortly after their first elections, along with their modified Vincentian rule, embodied their dedication to simple lives. Consisting of a plaited serge skirt, bodice, sleeves, a long cape, and a tightly-fitted cap, all in black, which the Sisters made either from wool or linsey-woolsey, the design did not include any extravagance. This style also represented the labor that sisters performed, as it was necessary for them to make the cloth and clothing themselves.

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times during his tenure, and in 1832, followed through with his plans. Consequently, Rome appointed Bishop David to replace him as the second Bishop of Bardstown, and he was consecrated to this position on August 25, 1832. David was considerably unhappy at his appointment, largely due to being over seventy years and in poor health at the time. He worked earnestly to persuade Flaget to rescind his resignation and was successful; thus, David submitted his own resignation just over six months later, on March 17, 1833. He retained his titular Bishop of Maurocastrum until his death in 1841. Flaget resumed his title of Bishop of Bardstown, and in 1841 the see was moved to Louisville with the completion of a new cathedral there. In 1850, Flaget died, and subsequent bishops retained the title Bishop of Louisville, until the city's elevation to archbishop in 1937.

Flaget's description, that they were "little different from the dress of sober persons of their sex," not "following worldly fashions," indicates that their garb did not stand out so far from the rest of society to call undue attention to the sisters, but still set them apart to a certain extent, acting as a visual reminder that these women were not following the most common path for their sex.[223]

As Nazareth's social institutions grew throughout the 1820s, the sisters discussed a change of habit involving the adoption of a new white collar to replace the previous black one. It is not clear in extant sources whether it was Catherine Spalding's idea to introduce this change, or whether it was a collective decision that Catherine approved and introduced to Bishop David, the community's superior. Regardless, David was willing to consider the proposal and ultimately sanctioned the change, permitting the sisters to begin constructing designs and adopting the white collar uniformly.[224] Considering David's close relationship with the sisters as their superior, there was likely little reason for Mother Catherine to expect any further concern over the issue. However, upon learning of the change, Bishop Flaget voiced a concern that bordered on direct opposition, and his ecclesiastical rank gave greater weight to his criticism than to David's approval. Catherine and the sisters then found themselves in the middle of an unexpected conflict, and Catherine worked quickly to defuse the situation.

Although the specific nature of Flaget's complaint is lost, Catherine's perspective on the matter remains in her letter to the bishop dated May 9, 1829. Her choice of language and the implications made in this letter demonstrate the tenuous power that sisters held when conflicts with superiors arose. Particularly as Mother, Catherine was acting in an appropriate capacity of her office by conveying her perspective on the situation to Flaget. However, the letter is not a direct defense of the decision to introduce the white collar, but rather a desire for clear communication and agreement between the community's two superiors. Without an exact sense of what both David and Flaget considered proper and virtuous, the sisters' vow of obedience risked being muddied, if unintentionally. For Catherine, whose letters consistently expressed a desire to act as a model of obedience and limit conflict in the community, miscommunication was particularly frustrating: "Oh! If I only could always know *immediately* from my *superior* what is disapproved in me & what he wishes me to correct…, how much lighter my burden!"[225] She also acknowledged that such uniform awareness of Nazareth's plans would be difficult, considering both bishops possessed multiple, demanding responsibilities in their roles: "If my Superiors could only always know things as they are with all their circumstances!" Without directly saying so, this plea implied that Catherine, the most direct manager of the sisters' affairs, did indeed have the capacity to "know things as they are" and was thus well-positioned to make the best decisions.[226] In no other section of the letter, however, did Catherine challenge her superiors' authority, nor did she directly advocate for the white collar.

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[223] Mitchell Edward Oxford, "Hot Over a Collar: Religious Authority and Sartorial Politics in the Early National Ohio Valley," *Early American Studies* 17, no. 4 (Fall 2019): (forthcoming).

[224] Doyle, *Pioneer* Spirit, 88.

Catherine's letter highlights the importance of obedience and the necessity of heeding the direction of one's superiors rather than relying on oneself as the best source of knowledge. She expressed this dedication in her belief that "I think that same God of mercy knows that I never wished to act in anything independently of any superior," but also did not rule out that her decision may not have been the correct course of action. Her admission that "I know and repeat that I am very capable of erring," alongside "I sometimes on those occasions yield too much to the feeling of nature," suggest that the humility required of women religious necessitated that they must always be open to correction by a superior, and that to protest openly such correction was to risk the label of disobedience. This necessity of correction, alongside Catherine's desire for clear direction (correction or otherwise) from her superiors, demonstrates the limited autonomy that sisters possessed. The reality of the expansion of Nazareth's mission to other locations and institutions in the 1820s was that not all decisions could be immediately brought to their superior for review, which did grant conditional power in particular to Mothers or Sister Superiors to act as they saw fit. However, the conditional nature of this power was made evident by exemplary events like the controversy over the white collar. Mother Catherine had even received initial approval from Bishop David, but still the duality of authority at Nazareth with Bishops Flaget and David operated in such a way that left her approval vulnerable to belated correction. Had Catherine pushed the issue beyond the sentiments expressed in this letter, she would have risked the respect of her superiors and her virtuous reputation.[227]

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[225] Ibid.

[226] Ibid.

Ultimately, Catherine put the fate of the white collar back in her superiors' hands, concluding that, "As to the collars I shall certainly await your joint answer before you will see another worn in the community." She did not explain why she believed the change to a white collar would benefit the community, but instead reminded the bishop of the need for a "joint" decision by her superiors. Although it is not clear in records how this "joint answer" was later reached by Flaget and David after Catherine's letter was delivered, the outcome was that the white collar was allowed to be kept. Despite her limited autonomy, Catherine was successful in the sense that her decision was accepted and not overruled. However, Flaget's acquiescence did not enhance Catherine's, or the sisters', power.

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[227] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 88-89.

Although the concern over the white collar was relatively brief, it raises several questions about the nature of obedience at Nazareth. Clarification of the nature of power dynamics between Bishops David and Flaget and the sisters is made more difficult by the relatively large gaps in written documentation of such disagreements. Catherine's letter remains the only source that offers insight into the sisters' perspective. The number of unknowns – most significantly, any discussion that was held between David and Flaget, and why the white collar was ultimately accepted by Flaget – certainly outweigh what can be found in the historical record. How to best understand the dynamic between superiors and the sisters with this largely one-sided perspective is still a topic of scholarly debate. One possibility is to frame Catherine's letter as an example of the understated, yet significant, power that sisters possessed in exercising their own affairs.[228] The respect that the sisters enjoyed from the surrounding Protestant and Catholic communities as competent educators likely did offer them considerable influence in managing their own affairs as they had proven their ability to run successful institutions like Nazareth Academy.

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[228] Oxford, "Hot Over a Collar," (forthcoming).

However, a clear connection between institutional success, local influence, and a change in relationship to a superior is difficult to prove. The idea that women religious purposefully employed submissive language to promote their own opinions without provoking the ire of their superiors implies two theoretical points: that their wishes or perspective consistently deviated from that of their superiors', and that their words cannot necessarily be taken at face value. Although sections of the letter vary between admitting a possibility of error on her part and Catherine's good intentions, her strongest sentiments speak unequivocally to her dedication to obedience: "I think that same God of mercy knows that I never wished to act in anything independently of any Superior…" as well as "…but it seems to me if I know my own heart, that my Superiors have only to say *I will* this or *I will it not* & I have no other desire than to do what *they will*," each express the heart of her purpose for writing. To argue that Catherine hoped for a different outcome other than the one expressed here – for her desire for both Flaget and David to clarify their position, so that she may obey that position – is inherently speculative. Mother Catherine, by capacity of her office and in light of Nazareth's recent success, could have been in a position at that time to more clearly explain or defend her choice to adopt the white collar to her superiors in hopes of persuading them both to accept her idea. Her refusal to exercise such a power, however, makes it difficult to discern if it was present or possible to exercise in the first place.

Trials of the 1830s at Nazareth

The 1830s at Nazareth were marked by a number of intracommunity conflicts that demonstrate how living in a harmonious spiritual community could be far easier in theory than in practice. Catherine Spalding's term as Mother came to an end in August and an election was held for a new council. Angela Spink was chosen to replace Catherine, having spent the prior year as her assistant. Soon after, in September, Mother Angela and her Council met to discuss the possibility of sending sisters to new locations, particularly White River, Indiana, and Louisville. It was agreed that a mission to White River would be postponed for the time being, but that Sister Barbara Spalding would lead a mission of three other sisters, one being Catherine Spalding, to Louisville.[229]

This plan did not come to pass; at some point after the decision was made, disagreement between unknown parties in the Council necessitated another meeting at the request of Bishop Flaget on October third, to "make a change in the last agreement, and after much talk without coming to any determination, at the request of one of the Officers, the Council adjourned with a grant of two days for further examination and deliberation." The reasons for this conflict and who requested further time for the decision, remain unclear. A resolution was reached at the October 5 meeting, which included Bishop David, Mother Angela, Sister France Gardiner as assistant, and Sisters Joanna Lewis and Anastasia Luckett. It was determined that for "the better good of the Company that Sister Catherine Spalding should go as Sister Superior if she is willing, with Sister Clare Gardiner and Sister Serena Carney and Sister Apollonia McGill."[230] With Catherine's history of leadership and experience building new institutions, she likely appeared the best person to create a school in Louisville. The length of deliberations in this decision, however, suggest that it was difficult to decide which sisters would be most valuable for any given task. The opinion of superiors, like Bishops Flaget and David, would have carried the most weight; if their wishes went against the decision of the sisters, conflict was always a possibility. In this case, the outcome was positive; Presentation Academy in Louisville officially opened on November 21, 1831.[231]

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[229] Barbara and Catherine Spalding had no biological relation; Catherine's only biological relation to join her at Nazareth was her sister, Ann.

The timing proved difficult, as incidents of cholera throughout Kentucky began that fall and exploded into an epidemic by the following spring. However, cholera was not the only trouble that would come to Nazareth in 1832. Soon, one of the most significant conflicts in the community's history would create lingering division, threatening both the unity of the community and the relationship between the sisters and their superiors.

Records indicate that as Mother, Angela Spink relied heavily on Sister Ellen O'Connell to direct Nazareth Academy. This dynamic is not surprising, given Ellen's experience and knowledge of education, which had allowed Nazareth Academy to grow into a successful school. Bishop David became suspicious of Ellen's "excessive influence" on Mother Angela; his suspicion grew when other sisters, who believed Ellen to be "too demanding" in her training of teachers, complained to Bishop David[232] about her teaching methods and some of her comments made in the presence of other sisters. Although no specifics of the content of Ellen's remarks exist in records, community history suggests that Ellen, known for her wit and sometimes cutting sense of humor, may have made a joke that intensely offended David. The community's annals preserve this memory of the conflict: "They think her too exacting, too severe, she is in the way. Innocent jests are repeated to clergymen and aggravated; even Bishop David, now old and feeble is incensed."[233] These reports set into motion a series of dramatic events that significantly affected the community's morale and mission for the following decade.

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[230] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 95-96.

[231] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 96.

[232] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 107.

Bishop David moved to have Sister Ellen dismissed from the community for her disobedience. Ellen was, objectively, one of the most valuable Sisters; she had long been the only sister with an extensive, formal education, and until her arrival, the education of sisters had fallen solely on Bishop David. Without Ellen's experience and the ability to train teachers, no school run by the SCNs could have existed. Aside from the sisters who complained about Ellen's methods and humor, she was one of the most well-loved and respected sisters of the community. News of David's desire to dismiss her likely saddened and distressed many at Nazareth. Sister Ellen chose to plead the case for her vows and her vocation to David, begging for any punishment that allowed her to stay a sister. Although he did eventually back off his demand for dismissal, he was firm in his demand that Ellen could no longer live at Nazareth, and the Council agreed.[234] Mother Angela, accepting the verdict of Ellen's departure, felt compelled to offer her resignation as Mother, believing that she could not properly perform her duties without the guidance she had come to rely on from Ellen. The community's annals record this series of dramatic events: "Mother Angela was an excellent woman, but she was unfit for her position, and she knew it. She was beloved by all, devoted to the Community. She asked to be removed from her office and was repeatedly refused. When the 25th of March came she refused to make her vows unless she was released. She made her vows immediately afterwards, the Council taking into consideration her real virtue and good motives."[235] In refusing to renew her vows unless her wishes were respected and her resignation accepted, this conflict demonstrates the potential for vows to be utilized in a way that allowed a sister to assert her own best judgment. In Mother Angela's case, her vow of obedience did not prevent her from choosing her own course despite disagreement with other council members.

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[233] SCNA: Annals of Marie Menard, 157.

[234] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 107.

David's reaction cost Nazareth Academy its most qualified teacher and left the community without a Mother. As superior, he possessed the authority to both dismiss and appoint; after removing Ellen and accepting Angela's resignation, he appointed her assistant, Frances Gardiner, to finish her term as Mother before an official election could be held in August. Since Ellen could no longer stay at Nazareth, she was presented with a choice: be transferred to the new Presentation Academy in Louisville, or help found the new mission in White River, Indiana. Ellen would not choose, having been nearly stripped of her vocation for perceived disobedience; as a result, the Council voted on her fate and sent both Ellen and Angela Spink to White River, with Barbara Spalding to act as their superior.[236] Faced with innumerable hardships in traveling to White River and a wilderness there with almost no financial or spiritual help, the mission was doomed to fail. Attempts to open and maintain a school in White River never got off the ground, and the mission was officially closed the following year in 1833. But Nazareth's interpersonal divisions were far from over.

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[235] SCNA: Annals of Marie Menard, 75.

[236] Ibid.

Bishop David's actions in this crisis, as the community's co-founder, ecclesiastical superior, and confessor, demonstrated the ever-present, singular authority that he possessed over those he frequently referred to as his "dear daughters." This power was not always readily apparent in day to day life at Nazareth, where daily routines filled with labor and spiritual exercises consumed most of the hours for both sisters and priests. Most smaller decisions were made by the Council without much trouble; the sisters operated with a level of autonomy that was respected by Bishops David and Flaget, as long as their opinions or desires were not directly contradicted. Sister Ellen's offense to Bishop David, however, stood as a stark reminder that obedience to superiors was required at all times, even outside their presence, which appeared to be the case with Sister Ellen's alleged comments. And punishment for such disobedience was harsh coming from the authoritarian David, as evidenced by his immediate demand for Sister Ellen's dismissal.

Bishop David's position as superior allowed him to exercise this power with little opposition, but his relationship with the Sisters of Charity was permanently altered as a result. We can see the change only imperfectly. Information about the prolonged conflict and tension between David and the sisters is given almost exclusively through his letters to one sister that he favored, Elizabeth Suttle, with whom he maintained a close relationship until his death. None of Sister Elizabeth's letters to David in return remain.

No letters or papers exist written by Ellen O'Connell, the sister who provoked David's wrath, and similar, no sources written by Mother Angela remain. Such a gap also leaves out details that would likely shed more light on Bishop David's relationship to the sisters and Nazareth from 1832 until his death in 1841. Nonetheless, throughout this decade of transition in leadership, David maintained an intimate correspondence particularly with Sister Elizabeth Suttle, who continued to seek his spiritual advice and emotional guidance until the year before his death. The earliest letter, dated only 1832, supports the narrative present in the community's annals concerning Mother Angela's resignation and Sister Ellen's White River fate. Throughout their correspondence, David presents an image of a Nazareth under the influence of evil, his "dear daughters" largely transformed into "ungrateful children" who had rejected his pious influence and good intentions. Over seventy years old, David was in declining health; however, his letters indicate that he resigned, first as the community's confessor and then as superior, mainly because he felt that his presence at Nazareth now caused unhappiness among the sisters rather than admiration. His last signature on the minutes from a Council meeting was dated February 19, 1833.

In his 1832 letter to Sister Elizabeth, David stated that despite his desire to rid himself of "the intolerable burden" of being confessor, a replacement had yet to be found, and thus his duties continued. However, he also stated that, "As to declining to be the superior of the Sisters, I never did. I have always expressed a desire of dying among them; but God only knows whether I will not be reduced to the necessity of seeking another asylum." At exactly what point, and why, David ultimately resigned as superior in early 1833 is not clear; however, this comment suggests that there may have been pressure from among the sisters, or the Council and its administrators, for him to resign given his increasing unpopularity in the wake of Sister Ellen's reassignment. His description of events expressed no regret concerning his decision:

> I have some very unnatural and ungrateful children around me. I have been obliged to remove Ellen from the Mother House in which her influence, as you well know, was pernicious. She had so perfectly possessed herself of Mother Angela's mind, that the latter could but see through her eyes, and was entirely governed by her. The evil proved incurable; Ellen was removed; Angela immediately proferred her resignation, and no authority, no reasoning, no persuasion in the world could induce her to retain office. I was forced to accept it, and to appoint, according to the Constitutions, a substitute till August. I appointed Sister Frances; everyone now appears satisfied, except a few, who remain for my trial and purification. God's will be done! We have sent Barbara, Ellen, Angela, and Sebastia to make the establishment of White River.[237]

This characterization of Ellen and Angela's relationship suggests that David was offended that Mother Angela sought the advice and direction of another sister rather than consulting her superior. It is possible his accusation of "pernicious judgment" resulted from Ellen and David disagreeing on how to best run Nazareth Academy or train new teachers, but as no significant derivations in policies or practices are known between the beginning of Mother Angela's term and the previous mothers' terms, it appears that the conflict was likely more personal. In late 1832, David was able to find a new confessor for the sisters in Rev. Ignatius Reynolds, but this substitution did not last as David had hoped. He wrote to Elizabeth in January of 1833 that Reynolds had fallen ill at Christmas, and consequently David resumed "the charge of the Sisters" for several weeks.[238] Despite the appointment of a new confessor, David's renewed reappearances at Nazareth remained a source of conflict for the sisters who now had multiple authority figures: "…in them it is a blind subserviency to the [ecclesiastical] superior who now governs them and who seems always to have considered the affection of my daughters for their old father as a diminution of that which he himself wishes to possess."[239] In September of that year, Bishop Flaget officially appointed Rev. Reynolds as the sisters' permanent confessor and superior. A letter by Bishop David to Martin John Spalding, undated but presumably written that fall, gave little explanation of this transition: "Circumstances, which I will not detail, have obliged me for the sake of peace and for my own rest to resign the superiorship of the Community," adding that he had been absent from the community for previous two months.[240]

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[237] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 3.

[238] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 4.

The Decline of Bishop David's Influence

David's letters describe the period from February 1833 to Reynolds's appointment in September as a time of struggle, doubt, and divided loyalties among the sisters. David's advice to Sister Elizabeth in a letter likely written in February or March of that year emphasized that it was important that she present herself as a model of union to those sisters who appeared happy, and he suggested that she "Continue to give the example of union with your superior, who is for your house the center of unity. I am sorry to hear that the Sisters do not show her the respect and submission they should."[241] This reference to Mother Frances suggests that the community's unity was threatened by these ongoing intracommunity tensions and personality clashes. However, David was not at Nazareth to witness the conflict firsthand. After his resignation, David received an invitation to live permanently with the nearby Sisters of Loretto, with whom he had developed a good relationship during his time at Nazareth. According to his letters, David did reside at Loretto temporarily, but only until the new bishops' residence, referred to often as "the White House," was completed near the cathedral in Bardstown.[242] Despite this distance from the sisters, David wrote to Elizabeth expressing his desire to be remembered well by them, stating "the Sisters of Nazareth will not cease to be dear to me as daughters to a loving father, and I hope they will reciprocate the same sentiments towards me."[243]

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[239] Fox, *The Life of the Right Reverend John Baptist Mary David,* 151.

[240] Ibid. Martin John Spalding would become the Bishop of Louisville in 1850 and the Archbishop of Baltimore in 1864. Spalding resided in Bardstown from 1826 to 1830, during which he attended St. Thomas seminary and taught at the adjoining St. Joseph College.

[241] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 5.

David was replaced by several clergymen in 1833 and 1834. According to the community's annals, Father Reynolds assumed the responsibilities of being superior in addition to being a professor at St. Joseph's College in Bardstown, traveling to Nazareth two or three times a week. His duties included giving instructions to the community once a week, which David had previously conducted. Father Charles De Luynes also assisted, acting as both "chaplain and confessor," in addition to teaching at St. Joseph's. He remained a consistent presence at Nazareth until his departure to join the Society of Jesus in 1841.[244] Father Elder was extraordinary confessor, visiting four times a year for his duties and offering instruction to the entire community at those times. However, David still remained a substitute for these duties when necessary due to illness or absence; the annals also note that he visited Nazareth "occasionally," which his letters also support.[245] In September of 1833, he wrote of having "succeeded at last in laying aside the burden of the confessional," which he presented as both a relief to himself as well as at least some sisters, according to his observation that "although some Sisters rejoice at it, yet it will produce more union in the community."[246]

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[242] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 12.

[243] Ibid.

[244] Early community histories indicate that Nazareth developed a close relationship with several Jesuits from the 1830s that spanned several decades. Anna Blanche McGill, in *The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth*, writes that these friendships began particularly when groups of Jesuits would visit St. Joseph's College in Bardstown (1832-1846) and St. Mary's College in Marion County (1848-1868). During these periods especially, it was common for various Jesuit priests to serve as both ordinary and extraordinary confessors to the sisters at Nazareth. McGill also states that the Jesuits gave the sisters' annual retreat in August for

By April of 1834, David was traveling frequently between his Bardstown residence and Nazareth, instructing the seminarians several times a week and the sisters once.[247] By his own account, he still enjoyed good relationships with several sisters whom he mentioned in his correspondence with Sister Elizabeth. Despite now lacking a formal position in Nazareth, he frequently emphasized in his letters that he still felt responsible for their souls: "If I have ceased to be their superior and to have the awful responsibility of their souls, I have not ceased to be their father and to entertain for them that love which I hope will unite me to them in the eternal kingdom of God."[248] However, David also expressed ambivalence concerning the separation and possible reunion:

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over forty years, and that their "Book of Meditations for the Religious Life" was frequently used and referenced in the community. For full history of Rev. De Luynes' formation and history with the Jesuits, see the United States Catholic Historical Society, *Historical Records and Studies,* Volume 10, on Reverend Charles Hyppolite De Luynes.

[245] *The Annals of Marie Menard,* 107.

[246] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 8.

[247] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 10.

[248] Ibid.

> As to returning to Nazareth as my place of residence, I know not how it will be. It was the place I always intended for my home, which I had established and for which I had faithfully and painfully labored for more than 20 years. It would be in many respects the most agreeable place for me in my old age and infirm state of health. But I would not be happy there if I thought that my residence there was productive of unhappiness for some of the community. But as I find peace and happiness in this life in being where God will have me to be, whatever may be my attraction to Nazareth, I will not move one step to go there, until I see clearly it is His holy will.[249]

Although David believed his role as "beloved father" remained in jeopardy because of the failures of other sisters to respect his authority rather than any fault of his own, his own acknowledgment that his presence at Nazareth caused unhappiness is a reflection of the sisters' own response to the conflict. Although no sources from other sisters discussing or reacting to this conflict exist, the aftermath of this chain of events provides insight into how the community was collectively affected. In the years 1833 and 1834, a total of eleven professed sisters decided to leave the community, six of those in the summer of 1833 alone. The dates of departure are scattered and not consistent with the annual renewal of vows, suggesting abrupt and likely unhappy departures.[250] Even several years later, the community's numbers continued to suffer: only one novice and no postulants are listed in 1838.[251] As Mother Angela used her refusal to renew her vows to assert her wishes to resign, so too did departing sisters assert their wills in their decision to leave the community entirely. Their specific motives remain unclear, but the decision to leave a life to which they had previously committed themselves to for years indicates significant distress at the community's situation and likely a belief that the unhappy atmosphere could not be improved. The lack of perpetual vows at Nazareth allowed the sisters to have the final choice regarding their willingness to commit to community life if that community was no longer serving their needs.

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[249] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 16.

[250] Mary Ellen Doyle. ""Contending Parties": Bishop John David and the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 29, no. 1 (2011): 27.

[251] Doyle, "Contending Parties," 30.

The most egregious problem, for David, remained Sister Angela Spink. His periodic well-wishes to the community, and his desire to be remembered fondly as the sisters' affectionate father, did not extend to everyone. In February of 1835, he accused Sister Angela of overall weakness and ineptitude in a letter to Sister Elizabeth, and stated that "her conduct at White River is a proof of it."[252] By August, his accusations had escalated from Sister Angela's failure of duty and lack of skills to a belief that she was a genuine enemy to the community: "The state of your community is truly deplorable…I think as well as you, that it would be an advantage for your community that S.A. should be removed. But it will only be removing the evil from one place to remove it to another. I pity the community that will have such a one, and this perhaps, is the reason that retards the change projected. O how much I was deceived when I called that woman to Nazareth."[253] Angela had been legitimately voted Mother by the Sisters and approved by both David and Flaget at the time of her election. In light of this propriety, David's characterization of Angela's "evil" nature demonstrates the severity of his response when he did receive the respect for his authority that he believed he deserved. Even though she had been elected properly and committed no violation of the rule, David's propensity for authority and control permanently marked her as never again to be one of his "dear daughters." There is no indication from other sources as to what in particular, after Angela's resignation, elicited such harsh judgment from David. Without other accounts, it is difficult to know whether any serious wrong had been committed.

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[252] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 18.

[253] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 20.

What is more certain is that Sister Angela's life was likely never the same after she and Sister Ellen stood at the center of such a conflict. After the failure of the White River mission, Angela was assigned to St. Vincent's school in Union County until at least 1839. She served there with Sister Elizabeth Suttle, the sister with whom David frequently corresponded and shared criticism of Sister Angela. Although only David's letters to Elizabeth remain, it is likely that Angela was a topic of her letters as well, possibly keeping David informed on her duties and behaviors despite his absence from the community. When Mother Catherine was reelected to office in 1838, she called Angela back to Nazareth, where she remained until 1848, when Mother Frances decided she should return once again to St. Vincent's.[254] Still, her troubles were not yet to end. Angela had begun her service as a Sister of Charity by helping first in manual labor to construct St. Vincent's and then being chosen as its first superior; she was trusted and loved enough by her community to be elected both Mother and trustee, ensuring her a place in Nazareth's decision-making process. By 1852, however, Council records indicate that Sister Angela continued to struggle in her spiritual life. In that year's annual renewal of vows, notes indicate an "unexplained confusion and incapacity," although she remained in the community.[255] Her choice to remain under such circumstances, when several other sisters who were less personally affected chose to leave, highlights the complexity of the commitment to a religious life. Although Sister Angela's reasons for remaining are unknown, some reason must have existed to make staying a more desirable choice than leaving, whether it be obedience, a belief in God's will, or her longtime friendships with other sisters.

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[254] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 191.

[255] Ibid.

The sisters who remained at Nazareth were committed to their community despite its problems. Their unhappiness likely played a role in David's decision to resign and reside elsewhere in Bardstown, but the sisters' daily schedules remained unchanged as all the work of their mission and domestic chores needed to be done as usual. The short tenure of Reverend Reynolds', David's initial replacement as superior, likely had little influence over the sisters; as his health declined, Reynolds was replaced by Reverend Joseph Haseltine on November 7.[256] Haseltine would provide to be a superior who exercised his authority in a significantly different manner than David. Rather than desiring the sisters' adoration and the ability to make unilateral decisions, Haseltine chose a collaborative approach and favored consulting extensively with the sisters, largely trusting their judgment concerning administrative affairs and community life in general. This approach undoubtedly helped the community slowly regain a sense of stability in the late 1830s and 1840s, but much credit must also be given to the sisters themselves. Throughout nearly a decade of distress, tensions, and resentments, the sisters who remained at Nazareth continued performing their duties regardless of circumstance.

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[256] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 22. His name is sometimes spelled "Hazeltine" in various records. Born to a Puritan family in New Hampshire, Haseltine converted and entered the Catholic Church on Christmas of 1818 before traveling to Kentucky at the request of Bishop Flaget, where he worked and studied in various capacities at St. Joseph's College. He was ordained at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Bardstown on November 8, 1835, where he was the last individual to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders from Bishop David.

Although the actions and temperament of a superior undoubtedly caused deep wounds for the community as a whole, sisters continued their dedication to each other and to their mission of education and service, and this dedication allowed the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth to persist.

A dedication to collaboration between superior and sisters would prove to benefit both Nazareth and Cincinnati under new leadership in the 1830s. After Bishop Fenwick's death in 1832 and a slight delay in appointment, the new bishop of Cincinnati, John Purcell, would soon establish a mutually beneficial working relationship with the Sisters of Charity in his diocese. Although Fenwick had proved instrumental in obtaining sisters for the area, Cincinnati's second bishop would become more actively involved in the mission itself and help facilitate the community's success. For the next decade, the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati would effectively manage their own affairs with support from both the Motherhouse in Emmitsburg and the newly-appointed Bishop Purcell.

Cincinnati Under Bishop John Purcell

On May 12, 1833, Pope Gregory XVI named Irish-born John Baptist Purcell the second Bishop of Cincinnati. Records indicate that complications arose around this choice, causing the appointment to be delayed until August at least in part due to protests from the Archbishop of Baltimore, James Whitfield.[257] Purcell was a diocesan priest who had studied at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg and St. Sulpice Seminary in Paris, where he was ordained. He returned to the Mount ten years later as a professor and then president of the college before becoming a naturalized citizen shortly before receiving his appointment to the bishopric. Although many improvements and developments took place under Fenwick, the newly appointed bishop also found himself responsible for a significant number of problems. Bishop Purcell's journal for the first six months of his appointment has been characterized as a record of "every possible defect" found in the diocese at the time. His complaints included inheriting six thousand dollars' of debt, seemingly endless requests for building repairs and new buildings, seminarians who enjoyed returning "home drunk at midnight," and a worrying lack of priests.[258] The Sisters of Charity were one of the few institutional supports that the new bishop had, and he quickly cultivated a collaborative relationship with them in an effort to mitigate the diocese's problems.

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[257] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 49. Rev. Frederick Rese was the Vicar General presiding over the diocese in the interim between Bishop Fenwick's death in September 1832 and the arrival of a new bishop in November 1833.

By 1833, community support for the sisters and their work in the asylum and school had grown enough that the parish of St. Peter's decided to form a benevolent organization with the purpose of maintaining the continuous care of orphans. The founders acknowledged that "the support of these little ones has hitherto depended on casual charity and the unceasing exertions of the excellent Sisters," and intended for the benevolent organization to alleviate some of the financial pressures placed upon the Sisters of Charity as they sought to expand their missions.[259] The initiation fee for St. Peter's Benevolent society was placed at fifty cents, with a monthly contribution of twenty-five cents; numerous fundraising fairs, plays, and other entertainments were planned to raise money for the orphans and students in the care of the sisters. Expenses for running the school and orphanage continued to increase, particularly as a severe outbreak of cholera spread in 1833 and 1834. In addition to visiting and caring for the sick, the sisters took in children whose parents had died in the epidemic. By the end of 1834, the sisters were responsible for the care of thirty-two orphaned children, and over a hundred day-students attending the pay school. A note of Bishop Purcell records that he estimated that 751 children in the school and 238 orphans total had been cared for in the institution's four years of existence.[260]

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[258] Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 51.

[259] SCC: *Catholic Telegraph* December 20, 1833, Vol. 3 No 2. Research guide, 35.

The formation of benevolent organizations run by lay Catholics to support Catholic-run institutions was common practice, but often it was the benevolent organization that allowed for the creation of such institutions, raising the necessary funds to begin providing services.[261] In Cincinnati, the work of the sisters had come first, then drawn enough notice to inspire the founding of a lay society. The school and orphanage continued to be run by the sisters themselves. In his journal, Bishop Purcell notes that the first meeting of the St. Peter's Benevolent society took place on "Epiphany Eve" in January of 1834. Almost immediately, however – and much to Purcell's frustration -- a controversy involving one of the most well-known benefactors of the Sisters of Charity emerged. The Cassilly family controversy would demonstrate that although the Sisters of

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[260] SCC: Letter from John B. David in Bardstown to Bishop Purcell in Cincinnati [UNDA II-4-e A.L.S. 1p. 8vo.] Dec. 9, 1833. Research guide, 35.

[261] This example can be seen in other Sisters of Charity missions, including Philadelphia and New York. Judith Metz, S.C. "The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton's Sisters of Charity." *The U.S. Catholic Historian,* Vol. 14, No. 1, Beyond the Walls: Women Religious in American Life (Winter, 1996), 27-29; Sister Marie de Lourdes Walsh, *The Sisters of Charity of New York, 1809-1959.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1960).

Charity had gained admiration from the Cincinnati community in their early years in the area, hostility from Protestants remained.

Mr. Cassilly appears in the sisters' early records as the generous provider of housing upon the women's arrival in Cincinnati, allowing them to take up residence in a home he purchased at no expense to them. According to Bishop Purcell's journal, Mr. Cassilly remained supportive of the sisters' mission and "had expressed to the late Bishop, & many others, an intention to purchase & make a present of a suitable house for an Orphan Asylum" in order to support the growing number of children in the sisters' care.[262] The situation went awry after Mr. Cassily's intention to provide this gift was published in "the Catholic Papers" along with other acknowledgments of gifts and funds donated to the sisters, ostensibly to promote further community support. This public acknowledgement appears to have deeply upset Mr. Cassilly, who was "so much offended at his donations being published prematurely in the Cath[olic] Papers that he withdrew the grant and instituted, before my arrival, a suit, and menaced to dispossess the Sisters."[263] Purcell spoke highly of Cassily's character, and remarked that "he has strong faith – comes regularly to church, sincerely intends, I believe, to do something generous for the distressed," but concluded that "he is persecuted at home," and blamed the source of this controversy squarely on Mr. Cassilly's Protestant wife.[264]

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[262] SCC: Bishop Purcell's Journal. Research guide, 36.

[263] Ibid.

[264] Ibid.

Marriages between Catholics and Protestants in the first half of the nineteenth century were generally disapproved by Catholic clergy, who much preferred that the Protestant partner convert to Catholicism rather than acquire a dispensation from the bishop to perform an interfaith marriage.[265] But Protestant-Catholic marriages still occurred, especially in areas with smaller Catholic populations. The Cassillys were not considered a successful case. Bishop Purcell accused Mrs. Cassilly of being "a bigoted and bitter Protestant," who was often upset at her husband for "reluctantly granting her articles of costly dress etc.," and accused him of "squandering 5000 Doll[ars] on Lazy nuns."[266] Mrs. Cassilly's opposition to her husband's support of the Sisters of Charity is a notable example of criticism of the sisters' presence, despite the women's efforts and that of Catholic newspapers and clergy. Far from seeking to avoid conflict, Purcell grew frustrated at what he perceived as Catholics' insufficient assertiveness. "Bigots growing fierce in their opposition to Popery — why do not Catholics awake? – Such apathy in the ranks of our own Clergy is inconceivable – I know that prayer & Study & visiting the Sick is more meritorious and Commendable, but we must descend sometimes into the Plain & fight the Philistines with their own arms."[267]

The conflict with Mr. Cassilly forced the sisters move out of the residence he had provided. The task of finding a new property fell to an unhappy Bishop Purcell. The sisters were involved in the process of selecting a new location, and he commented in his journal that it was "so hard to Suit them."[268] Although frustrating to Bishop Purcell, his willingness to allow the sisters to dictate their requirements for a new property indicated that he respected the sisters' ability to govern themselves and their institutions as they saw fit. His journal entry from February 19 recorded the final decision and terms of sale. The sisters were to move to a new location on Sixth Street, in agreement that the bishop would pay Dr. John S. Gano "1000 Doll[ars] in 14 day, 1500 in 6 months & 1500 in 12 months from Day of Sale." Purcell favored the location and was pleased because it enabled the sisters to move their school into a house, while keeping the orphans in a different part of the building. Yet he remained bitter that Mr. Cassilly's change of heart had forced his hand: "Many now, and especially Cassilly himself, tell me I c[oul]d get property much cheaper – perhaps so – but why did he, unhappy man, place me under the necessity of Making such a bargain – why retract a gift? And threaten repeatedly and insultingly to turn Sisters & orphans out of doors?"[269] The conflict stood as a stark reminder that the sisters' service to the city did not prevent difficult circumstances nor unwelcome attitudes to their presence.

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[265] Catherine O'Donnell, "John Carroll and the Origins of an American Catholic Church, 1783–1815." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2011): 118.

[266] Ibid.

[267] SCC: Bishop Purcell's journal continued, Jan 24, 1834. Research guide, 38-39.

Serving Local Needs Under Motherhouse Authority

Considering the important work the Sisters of Charity were performing in Cincinnati, Bishop Purcell was likely aware that it was to his benefit to ensure that the sisters were sufficiently provided for. Valued for their labor at a time when the institutional church remained poor and decentralized, sisters of various communities were frequently requested by surrounding priests and bishops who had little time or money to care for their parishioners. Demonstrating the value the sisters were providing through their labor to support the diocese's overall growth, Purcell in 1834 requested that Emmitsburg once again to send additional sisters, this time for the purpose of creating a "pay school" to help generate revenue for the orphan asylum. John Hickey, superior of the Sisters of Charity, had to exercise prudence in order to ensure the future wellbeing of the community; he politely but firmly told Purcell that he was unable to meet his request, adding that "In fact, we have broken up our Washington pay-school, and our little council is much opposed to any more pay schools."[270]

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[268] SCC: Bishop Purcell's journal continued, February 15, 1834. Research guide, 38-39.

[269] SCC: Bishop Purcell's journal continued, February 20, 1834. Research guide, 38-39.

Hickey's answer reflected more than his own judgment of the matter. The Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg had a tradition of self-governance and collaboration with their male superiors. As in other communities, because the sisters' labor was of significant value, they often had the ability to decide for themselves whether sisters should be sent from the Motherhouse to assist with a mission elsewhere. The community's council, comprising elected sisters as well as male superiors, allowed for discussions to take place concerning which opportunities would most benefit the collective good. Hickey's refusal to Purcell came not from his individual judgment but from a collective decision that honored the community's structure of governance.

The value of sisters' labor is evident in the number of requests Hickey and other superiors at Emmitsburg received from other priests throughout the United States, hoping to secure at least a few Sisters of Charity to serve their local needs. Hickey himself was well aware of this value and the difficulties of weighing the risks and benefits in each request he received: "If we had competent Sisters we c[oul]d monopolize the half of the high & low schools of the US – but alas! We have a difficult task to keep the present wheels going."[271] Training sisters to proficiency in teaching and the care of orphans, as well as experience in administrative duties, required time. This education was rigorous to ensure that women interested in joining the community were truly capable of a lifetime of service. Many were not, and labor remained scarce. Hickey described the rigorous vetting process to Purcell, explaining that "We have passed a constitutional regulation, from which we cannot depart; that no novice can quit the Mother-House for the mission before 15 months stay in the novitiate at home. And in three years from this time, the novitiate to be made in the Mother H[ouse] will be 2 years and 3 months."[272] The adoption of this practice demonstrates the sisters' conscious commitment to self-governance (albeit within the framework of guidance from a male superior), as well as their flexibility in adapting to different circumstances. The long-term success of the Sisters of Charity depended on their ability to ensure quality of training rather than just acquiring additional women to join the community. Their reputation depended on the success of their endeavors, and each endeavor required prudence and careful planning.

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[270] SCC: Rev. John Hickey, S.S., in Emmitsburg to Bishop John B. Purcell in Cincinnati. ACA, page 45. June 15, 1834. Research guide, 29.

In both Cincinnati and Nazareth, superiors and sisters mutually benefitted from their relationship with the other as long as communication and respect remained clear. Nazareth's tumultuous events of the 1830s demonstrated the potential for this clerical-sister relationship to go wrong, with devastating consequences. Although individual tensions between particular sisters and a superior were an inevitable aspect of community life, the advantage superiors enjoyed in terms of influence and power could damage the community collectively and go beyond personal clashes into creating significant obstacles for the sisters' mission. At Nazareth, these obstacles took several years to overcome, though the sisters' commitment to their community remained throughout the extended conflict. In Cincinnati, the Sisters of Charity continued their mission under a new bishop who quickly demonstrated that he was invested in the sisters' success – recognizing it as integral to his own success as bishop. The 1840s would bring a new set of challenges for each community as they faced clerical plans, changes in leadership, plans to expand, and maintain their dedication to service under these changing circumstances.

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[271] SCC: Letter from Rev. John Hickey, S.S., in Emmitsburg to Bishop John B. Purcell in Cincinnati. [AMSJ A311 007]. January 28, 1835. Research guide, 53-54.

[272] SCC: Letter from Rev. Hickey in Emmitsburg to Bishop Purcell in Cincinnati. [AMSJ A311 008]. May 20, 1835. Research guide, 56.

CHAPTER 5

THE POLITICS OF AUTHORITY, UNIONS, AND SLAVERY: UNDERSTANDING SISTERS' POWER AND CONSTRAINTS

Several geographic and agricultural factors contributed to Cincinnati's steady growth in the 1820s and 1830s. Favorable economic conditions following the War of 1812 produced an artificially high demand for American grain and cotton products in European markets, leading to greater investment in land in the Ohio Valley that could meet these market demands.[273] Ohio was one of the nation's largest corn producers, and this in turn created two of the state's largest industries: hogs and whiskey. Cincinnati established its first pork packing house in 1818 and had forty-eight of them by the 1840s, with over twelve hundred men working in "disassembly" lines.[274] In addition to processing pigs and corn, the city also grew successful industries producing lumber, glass, iron casting, cloth, and breweries. The diverse array of industries and employment possibilities sparked significant growth for Cincinnati in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The city's population grew from 16,230 in 1826 to 70,409 in 1844, increasing even more to 161,044 in 1860.[275] Much of this growth from the 1840s onward was the result of the arrival of European immigrants, particularly Germans, who were predominantly Catholic. By the 1850s, more than forty percent of Cincinnati's population had been born outside the United States, the highest percentage of any of the ten largest cities in the country.[276]

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[273] Andrew R.L. Cayton, *The Frontier Republic: Ideology and Politics in the Ohio Country, 1780-1825* (Kent and London: Kent State University Press, 1986), 114-115.

[274] Andrew R.L. Cayton, *Ohio: The History of a People* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 22.

[275] Cayton, *Ohio*, 23.

German immigration to Ohio, and the United States in general in the antebellum period, was fueled by changing European economic and social conditions in the early nineteenth century. Often lower-middle class, German artisans and farmers increasingly displaced by the Industrial Revolution pursued immigration to the United States to gain a fresh start and settled in urban areas in higher numbers than the farming German immigrants arriving in the eighteenth century.[277] Cincinnati's German Catholics began organizing more purposefully in 1824 with the arrival of Father Frederic Rese, a Hanoverian educated at the Urban College of the Propaganda in Rome. Upon his arrival in the city, he met extensively with the local German Catholics and successfully implemented the first German language Mass at St. Peter in Chains Cathedral.[278] When John Purcell became Bishop of Cincinnati in 1833, he recognized the importance of German Catholic presence in the diocese, and approved the construction of ten churches to serve primarily German locations from 1834 to 1860.[279] As the Sisters of Charity established their presence in Cincinnati throughout the 1830s, their mission to serve the poor and those in need developed in this broader context of immigration, ethnicity, and Catholic institutionalization.

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[276] Cayton, *Ohio*, 124.

[277] James M. Bergquist. "German Communities in American Cities: An Interpretation of the Nineteenth-Century Experience." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 4, no. 1 (1984): 11.

[278] Joseph M. White, "Cincinnati's German Catholic Life: A Heritage of Lay Participation." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 12, no. 3 (1994), 6.

[279] Ibid. The ten German parishes include: Holy Trinity Church in 1834, St. Mary's Church in 1842, St. John the Baptist in 1845, St. Joseph's in 1846, St. Paul's and St. Michael's both in 1848, St. Augustine in 1857, St. Francis Seraph and the Church of the Immaculate Conception both in 1859, and St. Anthony's in 1860.

By 1837, the Sisters of Charity had become increasingly well-known in Cincinnati through their work at St. Peter's. Purcell expressed his gratitude frequently in letters he sent to Emmitsburg. In June of 1837, he wrote to Mother Rose: "The Catholics of the City & the Parents of the Scholars are delighted with them. Everything at the Asylum is just as it ought to be & we have only to beg of God, with humility & fervor, that this happy condition of the Asylum may continue, until our allotted task in life is at an end!"[280] The bishop's enthusiasm was clear in a report sent the same year to the Propagation of the Faith, outlining the diocese's overall progress since his tenure began in 1833. Purcell informed the Propaganda of an increase in the number of priests, an increase in number and quality of church buildings, the success of St. Peter's orphan asylum for girls and its support from the St. Peter's benevolent society, and the creation that year of an orphan asylum for boys supported by the St. Stanislaus society.[281] By the end of 1838, twenty-four new orphans had been received at St. Peter's with twenty other orphans either reunited with their families or adopted, which left a remaining thirty-four orphans along with six boarding students to be cared for.[282]

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[280] SCC: Letter from Bishop Purcell to Mother Rose White in Emmitsburg. Cincinnati, June 17, 1837. Research guide, 73-74.

[281] SCC: Bishop John Purcell in Cincinnati (1837?) to the President of the Association of the Propagation of the Faith of Lyons, France. Research guide, 78. Archivist note: Property on 6th street between Western Row and John Streets was purchased for the German male orphan asylum which was founded January 27, 1837. It later became St. Aloysius Orphan Asylum. The Sisters of Charity conducted St. Aloysius from 1842-1845. In 1844, the St. Aloysius Male Orphan Society purchased property on 4th street between Western Row and George Streets, near St. Peter's girls' orphan asylum. St. Aloysius was destroyed by fire on October 15, 1851. 3 of the 132 children living there at the time perished in the flames

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[282] SCC: *The Catholic Telegraph,* January 10, 1839, Vol VIII, No 2. January 6, 1839. Research guide, 82-83.

The Catholic press in Cincinnati provided a forum for Catholics to both build their own community in the area and defend themselves against any Protestant accusations. The creation of the *Catholic Telegraph* in 1831 made Cincinnati home to one of the earliest Catholic newspapers in the country. The city gained another weekly Catholic paper in 1837 with the establishment of *Der Wahrheits-Freund*. The first German language Catholic newspaper in the United States, *Der Wahrheits-Freund* was published by the St. Aloysius Orphan Society with proceeds from the paper's sales used to support the orphanage.[283] Catholic papers, especially non-English language publications, constituted one example of how immigrants arriving in Cincinnati were often determined to maintain their own traditions and institutions even in the face of pressure to assimilate.

Catholics asserted their right to send children to parochial schools instead of Protestant public schools, speak and worship in German and other native languages, and protested temperance in favor of frequenting beer gardens.[284] The Sisters of Charity were a part of this flourishing ethnic culture while at the same time attempting to foster positive relationships with Cincinnati's Protestants. St. Aloysius' was created to serve German Catholic orphans, but St. Peter's continued to accept children in the orphanage and day school from any denomination. One sister in Cincinnati wrote in 1836 that one of their fundraisers, a "fair" in which donated items were sold by the sisters with proceeds to benefit St. Peter's, attributed the fundraiser's success to Protestants being

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[283] White, "Cincinnati's German Catholic Life," 12. The Sisters of Charity managed St. Aloysius from 1842-1845.

[284] Cayton, *Ohio*, 142-143.

"quite liberal on such occasions, & in truth the Protestant young ladies are the principal promoters of it."[285] The sisters relied on donations and other financial support from both Catholics and Protestants to continue their services.

The *Catholic Telegraph*'s description of daily life and larger events at the asylum, the school, and financial details allow for a sense of how the sisters successfully managed their institutions. Starting in 1838, the *Telegraph* began to publish a list of expenditures in December to enumerate how funds were being allocated. Such lists varied slightly but consisted almost exclusively of essentials, such as groceries, coal, stationery, marketing, shoes, sundries, and building updates such as new pipes or repaired windows, and medicine.[286] These lists could also demonstrate the generosity of the community, such as a note on a $170.13 charge for flour and meal, stating, "This bill would be much greater were it not for the liberality of Mr. H.B. Funk, who supplies the institution much lower than the usual price."[287] The sisters also benefited from the generosity of a local doctor, listed as S. Bonner, who saw the orphans without charge and often paid the price for prescriptions himself; in 1838, for example, the cost for medical care was only five dollars.

The sisters benefited from Catholic print culture as well as from direct donations. The *Telegraph* sent committee members to tour the asylum on occasion and write an article describing the conditions. Such articles were unfailingly positive, describing "the little busy feet of so many artless, healthy, children, with their neat white aprons, and well washed hands and faces," and singing various hymns during their recreation time.[288] Praise for the conditions and care of the orphan was implicitly directed towards the sisters and was often in line with standard expectations of femininity and women's roles for the time. One *Telegraph* article emphasized the organization and cleanliness of the orphanage and pronounced that each room was "a lesson for the thrifty housewife." Referring to the sisters' work as "housekeeping," the article noted that "every bonnet, slate, pencil, book, and copy-book, and map is in its proper place," including the numbered beds and shelves for the orphans' personal belongings.[289] These descriptions helped promote the image that although unmarried, the Sisters of Charity performed labor not unlike Catholic mothers. Such an image de-emphasized the differences in vocations and made the sisters appear less as celibate women dedicated to God and more as substitute mothers with skills similar to other women at the time.

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[285] SCC: Letter from Sister Beatrice Tyler in Cincinnati to Sister Mary de Sales Tyler, S.C., in Albany, New York. ASJPH 7-10-3 #105. Page 63. St. Peter's asylum, Cincinnati, January 10 [probably 1836]. Research guide, 63.

[286] SCC: *The Catholic Telegraph,* January 10, 1839, Vol VIII, No 2. January 6, 1839. Research guide, 82-83.

[287] Ibid.

Collaborative Leadership: Purcell and the Sisters of Charity

As Cincinnati continued to develop as a diocese, collaboration between Bishop Purcell and the sisters continued and deepened, even as miscommunications and disagreements did not disappear. Purcell often petitioned the Motherhouse for additional sisters to assist at St. Peter's, and he could be particular about his wishes. The repeated requests caused administrative shuffling at the Motherhouse as they attempted to accommodate the request. An example appears in council's notes from an 1842 meeting:

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[288] SCC: *Catholic Telegraph,* January 9, 1841, Vol X, No 2. Research guide, 93-94.

[289] Ibid.

> The Council has appointed Sister Generosa [Guerier] and Sister Lawrence [Fahnstock] to be sent to him – since then we have heard that they intend commencing an Orphan Asylum – Then it was agreed to send Sister Germana [Moore] also – and Sister Seraphina [McNulty] was appointed Sr. Svt. For the new asylum and Sister Germana and Genevieve [Dodthage] to be with her – and Sister Mary Lawrence to take the place of Sister Irene [Jarboe] in the pay School, & Sister Irene to be Sr. Svt. For St. Peter's Orphan asylum.[290]

The rearranging of multiple sisters to suit different needs indicates two significant points: first, that different Sisters of Charity possessed their own particular skills or areas of strength, and second, that the Motherhouse put a great deal of thought into how to make the best decision possible for their own community and for Bishop Purcell's diocese. However, the Bishop of Cincinnati continued to use his influence to persuade the governing council in Emmitsburg to comply with his wishes when he felt further, or different, action would be of benefit to his diocese. The new sisters left for Cincinnati on August 23 of that year, and helped establish St. Aloysius, an orphan asylum for boys. The new asylum was located nearby but kept separate from St. Peter's, in accordance with the tradition of Catholic teachers educating those of their own sex. As the council debated which sisters should be sent where, Purcell wrote to offer his opinion and express his concern over the potential for new appointments. He stated that if Sister Seraphina were to be replaced that "the loss would be very great," and he was also concerned that Sister Irene would be difficult to replace as head teacher, as her students had grown so advanced.[291] The letter also, however, indicates that Bishop Purcell had consulted with the sisters himself about the change in agreement, and that they all believed that no sister had the qualifications to replace Sister Irene.

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[290] SCC: Council Book 1829-1852. ASJPH. Research guide, 101.

[291] SCC: Bishop Purcell to Mother Xavier Clark in Emmitsburg. Cincinnati, August 25, 1842. Research guide, 102-104.

The letter also demonstrates sisters' ability to set limits or conditions on requests made of them, both for their own well-being and to ensure the ongoing success of the entire community. The Council at the Motherhouse suggested that Sister Seraphina was the most suitable candidate for Sister Servant of the new St. Aloysius, but she would not accept the position unless three conditions were met: that no committee be appointed for her to oversee or to direct her, that the boys would not attend school under the church but instead be taught separately by a male instructor, and that a larger house soon be provided for the boys to reside in.[292] Purcell described these conditions as "prudent" and praised Seraphina for her obedience, a clear indication that he believed the sisters were fully capable of exercising good judgment without coercion. Rather than wielding his own authority, in the same letter Purcell instead deferred clearly to Seraphina's opinion and acknowledged she had better knowledge of the situation: "I did, I confess, think that the little orphan boys could continue to frequent the school to which they now go, as this w[oul]d lighten the labour of the sisters, but I am sensible that this would be liable to many inconveniences and that the arrangement suggested by the Sister is infinitely preferable."[293] He also mentioned – and agreed to - Sister Seraphina's suggestion that their annual retreat be delayed until such administrative matters were settled; even in spiritual matters, Bishop Purcell heeded the sisters' perceptions and acted accordingly, rather than directing them towards his own wishes.

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[292] Ibid.

[293] Ibid.

Thus, despite his position of authority, Purcell consistently recognized that the sisters were in the best position to make decisions concerning the institutions that they ran. His collaborative spirit provided a new context for understanding obedience, one that did not assume that the superior should make unilateral decisions, but instead emphasized deference on both sides to the collective good.

This spirit of collaboration between the bishop and the Sisters of Charity was vital to the success of St. Peter's in the 1840s. Managing the increasing number of orphans required the sisters to be both efficient and creative in their service. At the beginning of 1844, the *Catholic Telegraph* reported that seventy orphans currently lived at the asylum, with thirty-two of those having arrived in 1843 alone.[294] Growth continued throughout 1844 to the point that the sisters could no longer accommodate new requests. In September, the *Telegraph* issued a notice "to prevent the pain of a refusal" since the asylum was currently filled to capacity with eighty-six children; fifteen application files were submitted that week that had to be turned away.[295] When Emmitsburg received news from Bishop Purcell that St. Peter's was operating under such high demand, arrangements were made to bring in a new sister servant whose experience in various missions would be valuable in managing a larger institution: Margaret George.

Sister Margaret's arrival in 1845 marked the beginning of a significant transition for the Sisters of Charity serving in Cincinnati. During this same period of growth in Cincinnati, from the mid-1830s to the mid-1840s, Nazareth was experiencing its own transition as the community attempted to re-unify after its multitude of conflicts. The weakening of community harmony during the 1830s demonstrates the importance of maintaining strong interpersonal relationships in apostolic community life. Positive relationships and friendships between sisters, and a mutual respect between sisters and their superiors, was not a superfluous bonus to a successful community, but rather the foundation of one. Cincinnati would face this concern in the late 1840s, when their community harmony was threatened, but Nazareth experienced many similar concerns first. How each community negotiated these divisions and emerged successfully offers insight into the vital role relationships played in allowing sisters successfully to serve those in need.

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[294] SCC: *The Catholic Telegraph,* January 6, 1844, Vol XIII, No 1. Research guide, 117-118.

[295] SCC: *Catholic Telegraph,* September 7, 1844, Vol XIII, No 36. Research guide, 121.

Recovery from Community Conflict at Nazareth

The year 1838 brought much-needed signs of life to Nazareth's community. In August, Mother Catherine was re-elected, and her experience and good reputation likely restored faith in the sisters' leadership. Upon her return to office, she began to move towards a process of reconciliation with Bishop David by dining with him at his residence in Bardstown, and inviting him to visit Nazareth after their upcoming annual retreat.[296] Soon after this meeting, however, Catherine fell significantly ill with "congestive fever," or malaria; various letters indicate that she appeared no longer on the brink of death by the end of September, but did not appear significantly healthy until December. Even this recovery was short-lived, as her chills and headaches returned in April. Despite Catherine's fragile health, conditions improved overall at Nazareth. In a letter from late autumn of 1838, David noted that the sisters had care of about one-hundred and thirty boarders, and that "Satan has been trying to interrupt the good work, but I hope his attempts shall be defeated."[297] The growth at Nazareth and Catherine's dedication to reestablishing a good relationship with the bishop persuaded him to become a more common presence. By spring of 1839, Catherine requested that David resume his instruction of the novices, and then the whole community; later that year, he began to preach at Sunday Mass, despite his advanced age.

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[296] Mary Ellen Doyle, SCN, *Pioneer Spirit: Catherine Spalding, Sister of Charity of Nazareth* (University Press of Kentucky: Lexington, 2008), 115.

Catherine's actions brought David and Nazareth closer than they had been since his resignation in 1833. Despite this improvement, David and his "dear daughters" appeared to accept David's separate residence, and no sister was sent to care for David in his Bardstown residence. Community historian Mary Ellen Doyle speculated in her biography of Catherine Spalding as to why this distance remained; David or the sisters might have not desired such a change late in his life for a variety of reasons. For one, Bishop Flaget was residing in France at this time, but expected to return, and David might have not wanted to abandon their shared residence for Flaget's sake. David was also being cared for there by a Sister of Loretto, a situation he may have preferred, considering the severity of his conflict with Nazareth. Overall, Doyle argues that, "Most of all, [Catherine] may have felt that a quick return could revive old tensions, that a gradual pace was best for restoring old affections without implying or encouraging a restoration of old authority."[298] Such an analysis reaffirms David's tendency towards authoritarian leadership and the extent to which his anger over Sisters Ellen and Angela, among others, was still remembered at Nazareth, preventing a warm homecoming.

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[297] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 116.
[298] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 117.

The friendship between Joseph Haseltine, Nazareth's new superior, and Bishop David also likely helped to work towards resolving the longstanding conflict. Haseltine proved to be a competent and well-liked superior. Haseltine had been David's former student of philosophy at St. Joseph's, and he often went to visit the bishop in his "solitude" at Bardstown. As superior, Haseltine possessed the foresight and organizational skills to create and maintain a registry of sisters and students that included dates of entrances, exits, and deaths. For students, the registry often included the activities of students after their graduations, including any jobs or marriage. For sisters, Haseltine kept a record of taking the habit and professing vows; he also included where each sister was assigned to work at various points throughout her life. This project was maintained after his death in 1862 and offers remarkable details into the individuals who made up the Nazareth community in addition to a thorough record of size over time. Despite David's remarks about his lack of connection with Nazareth and the sisters, resentment for Haseltine's position and growing popularity do not appear in his letters. The two priests knew each other well from Haseltine's years at St. Joseph's, and David performing his ordination kept the two connected even as they worked in different capacities.

The last letter preserved from Bishop David to Elizabeth Suttle is dated February 17, 1840. Its content is similar to several others written in recent years: his declining health, his desire to write more to other sisters, to convey his well-wishes to the community in general, and requests for prayers. It is possible that this was one of the last letters David would write, as his health, which had long been declining, worsened that spring. On April 14, 1841, David had a stroke, fell, and dislocated his shoulder. From that point, his mental capacity was weakened, and he often spoke nostalgically of his "home" and "dear daughters."[299] The narrative of David's dramatic homecoming has been recorded in the community's annals and condensed in Doyle's biography of Catherine Spalding. Catherine was told of David's condition and is said to have gone to him immediately, promising to return him to Nazareth so that he could be cared for by the sisters there. The next day, ten slaves dressed in formal clothing brought David a "curtained litter" to carry him from Bardstown; tradition states that David was heard to say "O thank God! I have come to die among my daughters!" His death was not quite upon him yet, and for the next eight weeks, pairs of sisters rotated to give him constant care. On June 4, he reached his eightieth birthday, and the next day, Bishop Flaget administered the last sacraments; on July 12, Catherine saw his condition and dismissed classes so that the sisters could sit and keep vigil at his bedside. His end is recorded in dramatic fashion in the community's early annals: "In a final effort to bless them, Bishop David raised his hand, then dropped it in death."[300]

With David's passing, a new era at Nazareth began. He had been an eyewitness to the very formation of the community and all of its subsequent struggles and triumphs. His homecoming upon his deathbed was made all the more dramatic for the many years of conflict and tension with Nazareth that preceded it. Throughout such troubles,

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[299] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 133.

[300] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 134. For a full account of David's decline and death, see Doyle, particularly pages 132-135; Fox's biography of David, pages 186-190; and *The Annals of Marie Menard,* 174-179.

Catherine and David maintained a mutual respect for each other; David had been pleased from the beginning with his "little mother," and no record exists of any conflict between the two. Catherine appears to have treated David as the beloved father that he desired to be to all of Nazareth, and most importantly, heeded his wish for frequent consultation and obedience. In evidence of this reverence, after David's death, she moved a picture of the Madonna and Child from his room to her office. Before she left office for the last time, she wrote on the back of the picture: "This picture hung many years in the room of our venerable Father & founder Bishop David. I now beg as a favor that it may always hang in the room of the Mother Supr. As a remembrance of his many virtues & his zeal for the Spiritual & temporal good of Nazareth." Sealing her obedience for eternity, Catherine requested to be buried "at Bishop David's feet," where her grave remains today.[301]

Clerical Plans to Union Nazareth and Emmitsburg

Catherine's many years of holding the office of Mother, and often acting as Sister Superior away from Nazareth during years when she was not, were remarkably absent any conflict involving her personally. By all existing records, she was greatly beloved by her sisters and never incurred any direct reprimand or criticism of her behavior from her superiors. As evidenced particularly by Catherine's attempt to reconcile Nazareth and Bishop David, and consequently arranging for his removal from Bardstown for the sisters to care for him on his deathbed, she was dedicated to her role as a reconciler and unifier. Only a few months later, however, Catherine risked her reputation by deciding speak openly against a decision by Bishop Flaget that would drastically alter Nazareth's future.

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[301] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 134-135.

A member of the Order of St. Sulpice, Flaget belonged to an order whose mission was primarily the education of priests. The involvement of Sulpician priests in the United States with the creation and direction of communities of women religious, like the Sisters of Charity, was not related to the orders' original purpose. Sulpician superiors had become concerned that too many of their order's members had strayed from their charism: the education of priests. Instead, in the United States, Sulpicians in both Maryland and Kentucky had become increasingly involved in the direction of women religious communities. A plan was initiated by Sulpician leaders in France to remove all Sulpicians in the United States from these positions within communities of women religious and to replace the leadership of all Sisters of Charity in the United States with superiors from the Congregation of the Mission, or Vincentians. The replacement appeared logical to those clergymen formulating the arrangement; since the Sisters of Charity drew their charism from St. Vincent de Paul and had adopted the Vincentian rule to modify for their communities, that community was now considered the best fit for leading the Sisters of Charity mission in the United States, just as they led the Daughters of Charity in France.

Upon learning of this transition plan, Flaget sought an ally who would allow the bishop to comply with this direction from his Sulpician superiors and remove himself as superior of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. That ally was Louis Deluol, fellow Sulpician and current superior of the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg. Deluol began formulating his own plan for the future of the Emmitsburg community in the early 1840s in anticipation of his retirement. He, like his superiors in France, hoped that the Vincentian Congregation of the Mission, could be persuaded to take over as superiors.

Flaget saw this as an opportunity to make his own exit smoother; if the Nazareth community could first join with the Emmitsburg community, then Deluol would be able to facilitate a second union to the Daughters of Charity in France. Merging the two Sisters of Charity communities in the United States would require two clear changes to the Nazareth community: a change from the white cap worn in Kentucky to the black worn in Emmitsburg, and the removal of Nazareth's local superior, so that they would recognize only the superior of Emmitsburg.[302] The practical reasons for this union cannot be denied. Nazareth had undergone a decade of upheaval and instability; financial troubles from lack of tuition payments, departures of several members, and five recent deaths all suggested that a change of leadership might be necessary to preserve the community's future.[303]

Catherine Spalding, however, saw this potential union not as a solution to the recent instability but instead as a risk that could endanger any chance Nazareth had to regain its footing. The community had been established as diocesan from its foundation, and this plan significantly to alter the structure of authority had the potential to "break with its past history and commit to a very uncertain, unpredictable future."[304] The first sign of Flaget initiating action towards a union was in April of 1841, when he either "proposed or ordered" a change from Nazareth's white cap to a black cap, which was the color worn at Emmitsburg.[305] Catherine wrote a letter dated April 17 to the bishop using similar language to her letter more than a decade prior concerning Flaget's displeasure with the sisters' change in dress. She emphasized her obedience to her superiors' wishes and apologized for any error in judgment on her part. In introducing her reason for writing, Catherine made clear that "I feel now as I did at first. I can only say to the best of my power I will endeavor to comply with your orders."[306] She further deferred to her superiors on the matter:

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[302] Doyle, *A Life in Letters,* 42.

[303] Ibid.

[304] Doyle, *A Life in Letters,* 42.

[305] Ibid.

> If you believe that Almighty God will be more glorified by our wearing a black cap instead of a white one – I hope you will do me the justice to believe that I attach no importance to those little articles of our clothes – If we have worn the white head dress for these 25 years, we have done so by the decision of the Council & that of our Reverend founder & 1st Supr & one among the reasons that then decided this was, that white was the color worn by the Sisters since the days of St. Vincent.

This, however, is the only section of the letter that constituted an explanation or defense of the status quo. Catherine appeared to remove herself from the situation entirely by pointing out that this was a decision that had been made collectively in the past. Similar to her letter asking for clarification on the collar in 1829, the content of both of these letters do not indicate that Catherine preferred one option over the other; she certainly was not advocating for a specific outcome in either case. In her 1829 letter, her clearest sentiment was, "I have no other desire than to do what they will."[307] The 1841 letter demonstrated a similar reticence with the phrase "But this matters not – white or black is the same to me. & for anything further I forbear to make any remark."[308]

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[306] Doyle, *A Life in Letters,* 40.

[307] Doyle, *A Life in Letters*, 12.

[308] Doyle, *A Life in Letters,* 40.

Catherine's dedication to obedience makes it difficult to discern through her letters the extent to which she agreed with her superiors. In this letter, it is unclear whether she was attempting to express her dedication to Flaget's idea of the black cap, or whether she was perhaps apologizing for not have anticipated this change in advance. Although it is difficult to discern how Flaget made his desires clear to Catherine and the sisters, even the suggestion of a change may have made Catherine feel as though the initial decision to adopt the white cap had been incorrect or undesirable to the bishop all the while. Whatever the case, Catherine made several iterations of apologies in her letter.[309]

Between Catherine's letter in April and her next in June, Flaget remained in contact with Deluol, hoping to move the plan along without consulting the sisters. He continued to focus on the issue of the habit worn by the sisters at Nazareth, and became more determined to end the wearing of the white cap after writing in June that recent visiting priests were "almost scandalized by the elegance of the round white bonnet."[310] Flaget thus ordered a change to the black cap as worn at Emmitsburg, to be effective in August. Beyond the question of habit, however, was Flaget's concern about what authority he could take in this situation both as bishop and as an ecclesiastical superior of Nazareth.[311] It was not clear how such a merger between two communities, separated by distance and with distinct governance structures, would proceed with proper authorization.

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[309] Phrases of Catherine's letter that suggest an apology or remorse include: "I do most sincerely & humbly on my knees, beg your pardon for the same"; "…still it may be wrong & I of course endeavor to correct it entirely"; "I have written more lengthily than I intended & perhaps I have not expressed myself as I should."

[310] Doyle, *A Life in Letters,* 49.

[311] Ibid.

The Sisters' Collective Opposition to Union Plans

When Flaget ordered the switch to the black cap to be made effective in August, Catherine became concerned that a plan involving the Emmitsburg community was afront. The change in habit was technically small, but she realized its significance. To adopt the black cap at this time would be to align Nazareth clearly with Emmitsburg, indicating a shared future despite their respective histories. Catherine opposed such a drastic change to the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth but knew that she had to proceed carefully if she were publicly to voice her opposition. She sought the advice of her old friend Father Stephen Badin, hoping that the priest's support her opinions might deflect any potential criticism from Flaget. Badin came to Nazareth in May of 1841 to meet with the Sisters, and summarized his "observations" in a letter on June 1 to Flaget: first, the sisters were happy and desired to be left under their present constitution; second, the bishop is acknowledged by the community as the "first superior" but as he is so busy, a secondary superior was necessary (initially Father David, presently Father Joseph Haseltine); and last, a notable change in cap would elicit "public remark and probably ridicule."[312] Flaget appears to have brought these issues to Reverend Deluol's attention. He wrote to the Emmitsburg superior asking for advice about the cap, and also concerning the appointment of superiors by the bishop. Significantly, in that same letter, he mentioned that the sisters were "entirely unaware of what I am writing to you." As a bishop, Flaget believed this secrecy was entirely appropriate and well within his authority.

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[312] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 140-141.

No existing records indicate a clear announcement from Flaget conveying his plans to the sisters. However, a substantial letter written by Catherine Spalding in July of that year clearly stated opposition to Flaget's intention and offers significant insight into this "crisis of independence" with its effect on life at Nazareth. It is the longest extant letter written by Catherine, later signed unanimously by all present sisters. The overall tone of the letter is set with its introductory paragraph, where Catherine wrote: "And now, most beloved and venerated Father; it is with sentiments of the deepest respect, and true filial regard, together with a profound regret, that we have come to the conclusion to lay before you…"[313] This ambiguous sentiment reflects the complicated nature of disagreements between sisters and their superiors. Vowed to obedience, there existed no predetermined formula to ensure that sisters who disagreed with a clear directive did not have their obedience called into question, or even risk of expulsion from the community. Stating their opposition to Flaget was not the position in which the sisters wanted to find themselves. Feeling as though they were faced with no other choice, however, Catherine's letter on behalf of the community expressed their reasons for the disagreement with both reverence and regret.

One strategy Catherine employed in her letter was to highlight the growth and achievements of the community and emphasize the good their labor had brought about for Catholicism in Kentucky. She reminded Flaget of their humble beginnings where the early sisters "zealously and cheerfully" performed essential manual labor like spinning, weaving, sewing, and cooking, first for the seminary and then the college and cathedral as well.[314] In addition to providing both local and out-of-state girls with an advanced education, the letter pointed out that education was not the only beneficial outcome of Nazareth Academy and their branch schools, as "you know far better than we do, the immense weight of prejudice which has been removed by Nazareth's humble efforts."[315] The sisters at Nazareth were essential to the growth of Catholicism in Kentucky and for reducing sentiments of anti-Catholicism by their work that benefited the region as a whole. It was not uncommon for students to convert during their time at Nazareth Academy, and the sisters assisted in instruction and preparations for baptisms and first communions throughout the region. The reminders to Bishop Flaget of the community's successes was certainly intended to minimize attention to the recent difficulties.

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[313] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 44.

Catherine emphasized the importance of the rule and constitution that had been originally adopted by Nazareth throughout her letter. Flaget had been the individual responsible for obtaining a copy of the Vincentian rule from France, and consequently any changes to the original could bring into question its validity. By the very nature of their purpose, the rule in a religious community provided a sense of continuity and shared experience that was meant to both structure daily life and to ensure that the community's particular charism remained the foundation of its mission. Union with Emmitsburg would require adoption of their own slightly modified rule. Catherine emphasized the necessity for stability in their rule: "…we were always left under the firm conviction that they were sacred, and never to be liable to any change."[316] The established rule was not the only precedent on which Catherine drew to support her point. The question of the extent to which the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg and in Nazareth should be connected to each other had already been significantly discussed and ultimately decided decades previously. Several clergy members had been involved in the debate, including Bishop David, Simon Bruté, and Bishop Carroll. Knowing the close friendship that David and Flaget had maintained throughout David's life, Catherine reminded the bishop of his late confidante's wishes, that David had "expressed it to us as his decided opinion, that it was much better, both for our happiness and spiritual good, that we should exist always…a separate and distinct body."[317] For Flaget to proceed with his plan to create the union, he would have to contradict directly an established precedent which he had played an active role in establishing.

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[314] Doyle, *A Life in Letters,* 45.

[315] Ibid.

Catherine addressed the practical concerns of the union as well. The most significant change, if the union were to take place, would be the removal of Nazareth's "local superior," whose responsibility was to be closely involved in the sisters' daily lives. The structure of authority at Nazareth varied from that at Emmitsburg, where ecclesiastical superiors did not involve the local prelate. At Nazareth, the Bishop of Bardstown was recognized as "first superior," but his wide range of responsibilities to the entire diocese prevented him from being a consistent presence to the sisters. To ensure that the sisters received the necessary spiritual and material guidance, a local superior was appointed to remain at Nazareth and help ensure its efficient management. This position had originally been filled by Bishop David, followed by Ignatius Reynolds and then, at the time of the union crisis, Joseph Haseltine. If joined with the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Nazareth would eliminate their local superior and, possibly, reduce or eliminate the bishop's role as well. This prospect deeply unsettled the sisters. In her letter, Catherine emphasized the importance of having superiors familiar with the sisters and their daily life: "We cordially wish, and urge, frequent visits from you, and that those visits should be such a length as to enable you to be intimately and personally acquainted with the general interests and business of the house, and with each individual in particular."[318] If a union with Emmitsburg were completed, local authority would greatly diminish, if not be entirely removed. The distance between the two communities would make communication difficult, and the sisters at Nazareth would still require a priest to perform the sacraments for them, both of which could cause confusion over whom the sisters were expected to take direction from.

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[316] Doyle, *A Life in Letters,* 44.

[317] Ibid.

According to community tradition, Catherine assembled the sisters after writing the letter and invited all who wished to sign before leaving the room. Originally, twenty-eight signed the letter, which is likely all who were then present at Nazareth ; later additions included the signatures of the sisters in Louisville, Lexington, and Union County.[319] Although the primary purpose of the letter was clearly to make Flaget aware of the community's collective opposition to his plan, it also reiterated the sisters' ultimate obedience to the bishop's final decision. Flaget did not immediately abandon his plan upon receiving Catherine's letter, and wrote another letter to Emmitsburg on July 20.

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[318] Doyle, *A Life in Letters,* 47.

[319] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 144.

But, after a few weeks, he conceded to the sisters' wishes. Ultimately, no union was to take place; Nazareth remained independent.

The Growth of Slavery at Nazareth: The Question of Enslaved Sacramentality

The 1830s were a tumultuous decade at Nazareth as the community was forced to navigate the volatile relationship with David while striving to maintain the spirit of their mission and internal unity. But this period was also characterized by another significant development that would impact every facet of community life: a marked increase in the number of people enslaved at Nazareth and the sisters' branch missions. Within their relative organizational autonomy, the sisters at Nazareth constantly negotiated the boundary that would allow them to help as many people in need as possible while simultaneously protecting their long-term stability. The use of slave labor was perhaps the most important factor in this balance. Slave labor allowed the sisters to both help more people, by freeing them from various domestic tasks and manual labor, and also contributed to long-term economic stability, as a profitable investment. The sisters' status as slaveholders improved their status in the broader region as it demonstrated their commitment to Southern culture, minimizing the impact of denominational differences.[320]

Census records from 1830 list 13 total enslaved, and that number increased to 27 enslaved in 1840. According to Nazareth's community archival records, an undated list of the slaves living at Nazareth listed fourteen men and twelve women, in addition to the children born to all twelve women. All of the children's birth dates are listed; less than half include death dates. Those with death dates were overwhelmingly those who had died as infants or young children, although specific causes are not listed. The 1840 census lists thirty-nine white women from age 19 through 69 years old, demonstrating that the slaves' presence was significant compared to the number of women living at Nazareth. By 1850, the number of slaves owned by the sisters increased to forty. Community annals state that thirty enslaved persons were freed at the time of emancipation, which included children.[321]

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[320] Stern, *Southern Crucifix*, 156, 158; Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky," 51-52.

The vast amount and variety of labor that the enslaved performed at the Nazareth Motherhouse and at the community's branch missions is evident from descriptions in letters between sisters as well as council meeting minutes. Slaves performed agricultural labor including care of the farm animals, working the fields, and harvesting crops.[322] They also completed a wide variety of domestic tasks, including sewing, laundry, cooking meals, serving the sisters and students, and general cleaning. When the sisters traveled by horseback or carriage, enslaved men accompanied them and drove them. Other references indicate that slaves were used to run errands to repair items, purchase items at markets or general stores, or exchange items with nearby families.[323] Although it is not clear from letters or meeting minutes, the tasks assigned to the enslaved appear to be primarily assigned by sex, with women and girls employed in domestic tasks and men and boys most likely to perform more intense physical labor in the fields.[324] Many of these tasks overlap with the work sisters were assigned to, bringing the free and enslaved into close physical, if not emotional, proximity.

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[321] SCNA: Slavery at Nazareth collection. Contains census records for 1840 an 1850 as well as the undated list of slave families. An additional index compiled by the sisters of all the enslaved at Nazareth is included in the collection. The slave owner for the sisters in the 1840 census is listed as Catharine Spalding (Mother Catherine), and the 1850 census lists E. Gardiner (Mother Frances), the respective officeholder for those dates.

[322] The slavery collection at the Nazareth Archives mentions that slaves doing fieldwork were under the control of an overseer but does not include any information on that individual or individuals.

[323] SCNA: Early Annals of Marie Menard, 109-110; DLB 2, pp. 10-11; General Council minutes for January 22, 1844; OLB 1, p. 126.

The question of how Catholicism influenced Catholic slaveholders and their enslaved presents fewer clear answers than the question of identifying the types of labor the enslaved performed. Catholic slaveholders in Kentucky preferred to buy and sell slaves from other Catholics whenever possible, and records of slave sales and purchase at Nazareth reflect this practice. One of the clearest examples includes the instructions in an 1836 arrangement to sell a young enslaved girl named Matilda "to a Catholic who will not send her down the River."[325] This preference developed at least in part as a result of clerical guidance to Catholic slaveholders encouraging them to permit, and sometimes encourage, the enslaved to regularly receive the sacraments. Two prominent Kentucky priests outside of Nazareth, Fathers Badin and Nerinckx, had from the region's early days encouraged not only slaves receiving the sacraments, but also receiving catechism instruction to learn the faith.[326] Parish records indicate that baptism was the sacrament most consistently performed on the enslaved persons owned by Catholic slaveholders.

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[324] Certain references demonstrate that this was not a rigid division of labor by sex. "Aunt Mary," for example, is often mentioned in her care for the chickens and collecting eggs. Enslaved children are often mentioned in letters to be present both on the farm in general as well as inside for domestic tasks. Only enslaved men are listed as drivers of carriages or wagons.

[325] SCNA: Minutes of General Council meeting on April 19, 1836.

[326] Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky," 49; Miller in Boles, *Masters & Slaves*, 130.

As Randall Miller, historian of Catholicism and slavery, has argued, baptism required very little effort on behalf of the master: "Indeed, slave baptisms were common among both Catholics and Protestants partly because baptisms did not interrupt plantation rhythms and they did allow masters to believe that they were fulfilling their religious obligations to slaves."[327]

The sisters and priests at Nazareth followed this practice of allowing their enslaved access to the sacraments and encouraged them to live together after marriage and have children. Council minutes reflect that families were not to be separated. Families of enslaved men and women certainly did grow at Nazareth, particularly in the 1840s and 1850s; as one letter in 1848 describes it, "Our family of darkies keeps on the increase."[328] At least thirteen marriages are recorded at the community before the Civil War; all appear to have produced at least one child, with some as many as thirteen, although it was not uncommon for a number to die in infancy or as young children.[329] Although it can be argued that encouraging enslaved families and keeping these families together must be less cruel than the alternative of prohibiting such relationships, the policy also significantly benefited the sisters and their community. Encouragement of the formation of enslaved marriages and families inevitably resulted in additional slaves for Nazareth at no additional cost.

Acknowledgment of this effect of encouraging slaves to embrace the Catholic faith and receive the sacraments raises the question what role religion might truly have played in the lives of enslaved Catholics owned by Catholic slaveholders. Despite any "spiritual equality" that may have existed through the sacraments, historians have pointed out that enslaved Catholics "certainly were not honored in this world as children of God."[330] Miller has speculated what conditions may have made slaves owned by Catholics appear to be fond of their masters or amenable to Catholicism, pointing out that "If mixed with good treatment, and if the slaves were socially and culturally isolated, the master's religious instruction and preaching elicited sympathetic responses."[331] At Nazareth, like other Catholic slaveholding families, the expectation was that slaves would be Catholic. No clear alternative existed, and in such a coercive system, it is difficult for historians to discern what Catholicism may have meant to slaves in their personal lives. No records from enslaved individuals themselves at Nazareth exist; like the rest of their lives, slave spirituality can only be viewed in extant sources through the lens of the sisters who controlled their fates.

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[327] Miller in Boles, *Masters & Slaves*, 131.

[328] SCNA: OLB 46, p. 6.

[329] SCNA: Index of Slave Families

Glimpses of Catholic practice in the lives of the enslaved can be found in the sisters' letters. Through these brief comments, the underlying coercive nature of "being Catholic" as a slave appears subtly but is present regardless. One sister remarked that "I believe Matilda intends to put off her christening until Easter," which suggests a certain amount of choice involved in regards to when sacraments are received, but could also imply a reluctance on Matilda's end to receive the sacrament at all.[332] This expectation that all slaves must receive the sacraments at some point is demonstrated again in one of Mother Catherine's letters when she asked "Has [Martha] made her first Communion yet?" She then goes on to point out that another slave, Emily, has made both her communion and confirmation.[333] Checking on the spiritual status at other branch missions could be either a form of caring or monitoring; to the sisters, caring and monitoring may well have been the same. Sisters could continue to be involved in varying amounts in enslaved families through this combination of caring and monitoring. When an enslaved woman named Jane gave birth to her eighth child, the sisters' attempted to "persuade" her to name the child Paul, as he was born on his feast day.[334] Records reflect that the child was named William Pius, and thus the sisters were not successful; however, this brief conflict does indicate that it was not as important to Jane to mark the feast of St. Paul in this particular way, although little else can be said about how she understood the role of faith in her life. Taken together, these brief mentions illuminate that using the sacraments as a measure of how benign a master might be to be complicated at best. Without more insight into the slaves' feelings and experiences themselves, little is left visible to historians except the significant power that the sisters had over the enslaved at Nazareth, no matter how much they may have felt they cared for the slaves.

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[330] Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky," 61.

[331] Miller in Boles, *Masters & Slaves*, 134.

[332] SCNA: OLB I, p. 126.

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[333] SCNA: Letters of Mother Catherine Spalding, December 12, 1847, to Sister Claudia Elliott in Nashville.

[334] SCNA: OLB 46, p. 6.

The Intimacies of Domestic Slavery

Beyond demographic information and sacramental records, the sisters' letters to each other provide insight into how they understood their relationships to the enslaved at Nazareth and the labor they performed for the community.[335] These letters from sisters allow historians to better understand how slavery operated "invisibly" within the community at Nazareth, despite its constant presence. Even though sisters likely interacted with certain slaves every day, these letters suggest that they still did not see them as distinct, individual people. In these letters, the immense amount of labor that the enslaved contributed to the community is evident: "We have a drove of young [slaves] here. Teresa is in the girls' refectory – Vic in their infirmary, Puss in the Sisters' refectory and Amy in their infirmary. Little Fanny lives with the sisters in town. Nase and Wesley help in the kitchen." In addition to demonstrating the great variety of tasks assigned to the enslaved, such a description also implies that slaves were not isolated but rather interwoven into the daily life of the sisters. Despite how physically present slaves were throughout the sisters' missions, however, these women remained largely blind not only to the importance of their labor but also their individuality. In the same letter above describing where a number of slaves had been assigned to work, that sister concludes her letter by saying "Those are about all those I know the names of," which indicates an undeniable indifference to their presence. Similarly, another sister writes, "Now Sister Claudia I would like to tell you all about the [slaves], but I know so little about them myself. I even do not know which from t'other." The proximity of sisters and those they enslaved suggests a level of intimacy that comes from shared domestic life; available evidence, however, presents a different dynamic. The sisters' power derived from their whiteness allowed them to view the slaves at Nazareth to be largely interchangeable and consequently removed from the other relationships formed between sisters, priests, and the many laypeople served by their benevolence work.

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[335] It is important to note here that there are no records from the slaves themselves, which is a broader methodological problem in the study of American slavery. Consequently, the perspective remains unfortunately one-sided, and it is important for historians to account for this in their arguments and analysis.

Both cruelty and kindness are found throughout the sisters' correspondences when discussing the enslaved of the community. Sometimes, both are found within the same letter. In an 1845 letter from Mother Frances Gardiner, an unclear sentiment emerges: "And our Matilda has lately lost both her children – a good thing, you know, for them."[336] What good could be found in what appears to be the death of two children is not specified in the letter. Mother Frances also wrote, however, of giving gifts at least occasionally to enslaved children at Nazareth: "Tell Isabella that I sent Ellen, Rachel, little Sue, and Aunt Mary a present as I promised, and when I meet with an opportunity, I'll think of her and Martha."[337] Mothers Catherine and Frances both mention Martha and Isabel and ask after them multiple times in correspondence; in addition to wishing them well, they often include warnings to "be a good girl," with one letter mentioning that Martha's former master and mistress "would be very sorry to hear Martha was a bad girl."[338] Such an emphasis on young enslaved girls in particular to be "good" demonstrates the scrutiny even young children must have been under at Nazareth.

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[336] SCNA: Letters of Mother Frances Gardiner, August 14, 1845, to Sister Claudia Elliott in Nashville.

[337] Ibid.

The promise of gifts was likely present alongside fear of punishment, although no letters detail what a punishment might entail for a disobedient slave. One enslaved girl referred to as "Little Fanny" is described as "a smart child," but "Mary Ann's Emily" in the same letter is called "about as smart as a cow with a broken leg."[339] The juxtaposition in multiple letters of seeming examples of kindness alternating with outright expressions of warnings or even cruelty are jarring, but also indicative of how slavery operated within the Nazareth community. Beneath a benevolent exterior, the culture of human bondage and the absolute cruelty integral to its continuation is still evident when examining sisters as mistresses. Although baptisms and weddings of the enslaved were celebrated, and although examples of kindnesses can be found scattered within available sources, little significant evidence suggests that sisters were distinct from other mistresses in the region.

What Historians Can Learn from Poisoned Buttermilk

The complexities of kindness and cruelty are startlingly illuminated in one dramatic event in Nazareth's history. On May 15, 1848, Sister Ann Spalding, Mother Catherine's biological sister, was allegedly poisoned by a young enslaved woman and ultimately died. According to the community's Lexington Annals, Sister Ann "cared for and protected" the young girl and that "jealousy prompted this child to put poison in buttermilk."[340] Although Sister Ann was the only fatality, records indicate that another Sister Ambrosia had also received a dose and became seriously ill until she eventually recovered. The narrative states that before her death, Sister Ann discovered who had made her ill, and asked that the girl be "protected" once again, by concealing her identity and perhaps trying to sell her quietly. The sisters have a receipt for a coroner that indicates this death was indeed suspicious and suggests remarkable circumstances, although the receipt itself does not confirm the poisoning. Sister Ann's obituaries are vaguely worded, including phrases like "lingering illness" and "death perhaps hastened by over-exertion." The Council Minutes from meetings immediately after this event indicate two things: that a slave girl named Mary was to be sold from Lexington at the next opportunity, and another slave, named Agnes, was sent to Lexington at the same time, presumably to replace Mary. It is likely that this Mary was the individual allegedly involved with Sister Ann's death, although it is not possible to verify the details of this incident or find clear evidence of guilt.

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[338] SCNA: multiple letters include variations of "be a good girl," including Mother Catherine's letter from December 12, 1847; Mother Frances Gardiner's undated letter found in DLB I, p. 205; and Mother Frances Gardiner's undated letter found in DLB I, p. 199.

[339] SCNA: Letter from Mother Frances Gardiner to Sister Claudia Elliott, likely in 1850.

Based on extant genealogical records, it is not possible to state with certainty who "Mary" was among the enslaved at Nazareth. The name was common both as a legal name among Nazareth's record and often used as a nickname; lack of specific age also contributes to the confusion, as descriptions of the event do not specify how young the "girl" was, or if she might actually have been a young woman. There is no formal bill of sale remaining from this time as there are in other cases of the council deciding to sell a slave, so there is no information available to corroborate her name or age. Without a bill of sale, historians are unable to identify the buyers, trace Mary's location, or provide any details concerning her life after she was sold from Nazareth. How such a sale might have been negotiated under such serious circumstances only raises additional questions. The fear of slaves plotting to poison their masters was widespread in the antebellum South; to purchase a slave who was believed to have committed such an act would have constituted significant risk for the purchaser. The alternative is to consider whether the bishop or sisters withheld this information from the purchaser, which may have legally constituted as fraud. Without further documented details, "Mary's" allegedly crime raises more questions than can be confidently answered.

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[340] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 168.

As a case study, however, several points of significance can be drawn concerning how chattel slavery functioned within religious communities and how the topic is analyzed by historians. Sisters are often portrayed in community histories and academic sources as "benevolent mistresses," with an emphasis on the enslaved being considered members of the community's "family" and the enslaved individuals' ability to receive the sacraments. Catholic slaveowners consistently attempted to purchase and sell slaves with other Catholics whenever possible, a pattern that is reflected in Nazareth's records. However, the practice of Catholicism by the enslaved within religious communities gives little information about the types of dynamics occurring between the sisters and the slaves whose labor allowed these communities to succeed and provide services to so many others.

Through the community's own sources, it is clear that at least some slaves at Nazareth did not regard their mistresses as benevolent, and may have felt explicit hostility, resentment, or hatred towards the sisters. These brief glimpses into slaves' lives through their actions left in community records challenge the narrative of "mild and gentle" slavery in Kentucky, unlike the practices of the Deep South, which Catholic slaveholders in Kentucky looked down upon.[341] In addition to the alleged poisoning incident, early records also suggest a young enslaved boy repeatedly attempted to escape the community. Ben, described as "about twelve years of age" and "forever in some mischief," went so far in one of his attempts to escape that when he lost a shoe running away in the middle of winter, he continued on regardless; when he was eventually found, the foot was "so badly frosted that it was feared all the flesh would fall off and it had to be nursed through all the remaining winter." Rather than a sign of "mischief" or "reckless temper," it is clear that Ben decided the repeated risk of running away, even in the cold with risk of severe frost bite, was preferable to his current enslaved life at Nazareth. The sisters decided to sell Ben rather than risk further escapes, and noted only the inconvenience of "being without meat a long time" as a result of his absence.[342] Although Ben's motive for running away is unknown, his choices reflect the sisters' concern for their enslaved only in terms of how it affected their own work and quality of life.

There is only one documented case of manumission in Nazareth's history: a man in his late forties named Luke.[343] The reason behind Mother Catherine's choice to manumit him in 1840 remains unknown. A community historian speculates that his conduct might have been exemplary to earn his freedom, or to allow Luke to be closer to his wife, who may have lived somewhere else – but it is impossible to be sure.[344] Other purchases in the 1830s demonstrate the significance economic investment the sisters and council made in human bondage. In 1835, 700 dollars were spent for "two Negro girls"; in 1836, another council minutes entry states that a black woman and her two children were purchased for 550 dollars.[345] The 550 dollar purchase timing was likely purposeful, as just the previous month, the sisters sold a young slave woman named Matilda for the same amount, with the stipulation that she must be sold to a Catholic who will not "send her down the river."[346] Although there is no record of the sale being completed, the council allotted 800 dollars for an enslaved man if recommended by a local priest.[347] Taken together, the funds expended for the purpose of maintaining and growing slavery at Nazareth demonstrate a significant investment. As managers of their own finances, the sisters' decisions concerning the value of slaves and their participation in the domestic slave trade reflected the nature of slavery in their worldview: a financial asset rather than an exploitive system.

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[341] Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky," 53.

[342] SCNA: "Early Annals of Marie Menard," 109-110.

[343] SCNA: Original grant of manumission in OLB XXIII, p. 38.

Slavery from the sisters' perspective constituted an economic reality rather than a moral debate. An excerpt from Mother Catherine's journal written in 1840 provides insight into the financial decision-making process concerning several recent purchases: "We also, in the course of the year bought 5 Negro men, 2 women, 2 boys and, 2 girls. The price of property was very high throughout the country and Nazareth paid a high price for what was purchased. The prices of hire were also very high, and the Council decided it was better to buy servants for the farm, etc., than pay so much for hire and then often get bad ones."[348] This entry from Mother Catherine is significant for several reasons. First, it suggests a lack of any conversation about the morality of slavery; the ownership of human beings as "property" is a presumed necessity to maintaining the community's upkeep. In the context of the sisters' vow of poverty, their decision to invest their limited funds on purchasing slaves demonstrates the value they ascribed to the enslaved at Nazareth and their endorsement of the chattel system. Second, it demonstrates that the sisters' organizational choices were based primarily on pragmatism, and that this pragmatism was an essential dynamic that allowed for the community's long-term success. Although the sisters' mission was based on providing various services to those in need, this concept of benevolence and mercy did have distinct limits in order to preserve the community's future. If the sisters took in too many boarding students than they could house and feed, the entire system could fail; in the same way, the sisters could only care for so many orphans at the orphanage or sick patients at the infirmary without overextending themselves. Slavery was integral to maintaining this system, and the sisters could not significantly expand institutionally, as they did in the 1830s through the outbreak of the Civil War, without expanding their ownership of enslaved individuals.

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[344] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit*, 121.

[345] SCNA: Minutes of General Council, January 25, 1835 and May 2, 1836, respectively.

[346] SCNA: Minutes of General Council, April 19, 1836.

[347] SCNA: Minutes of General Council, January 21, 1839.

The relationship between slavery and benevolent work is a difficult one. When religious communities founded on charity enslave people, the contradictions and complexities are stark. The variety of sources that address or mention slavery in this single community offer a picture that presents a multifaceted system, comprising both coldness and warmth, care and monitoring, unquestioned authority and small mercies. Religious life and benevolent work may appear inherently contradictory to slavery and the practice of human bondage, but the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth demonstrate that this was not the case. In fact, slavery was the foundation upon which the sisters' success was built. That the sisters could live with and see certain slaves every single day, and yet still be unable to recall some of their names within their letters, is perhaps the most telling. The Nazareth community was full of trials in the 1830s, and many relationships were strained or even ended as a result of the ongoing conflicts. Throughout such upheaval, the presence of the enslaved was a constant, sustaining the immense amount of labor needed to ensure the community's mission would continue. And until word of the Emancipation Proclamation reached Mother Frances, and she told "the entire family" that the government had freed them, the enslaved had no choice but to remain that constant variable in a community founded with the intention to "be good."

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[348] SCNA: Journal of Mother Catherine Spalding, 1840.

CHAPTER 6

DISOBEDIENCE AND THE FOUNDING OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF CINCINNATI

Sister Margaret George's History of Leadership

By 1845, the Sisters of Charity had grown significantly as a community, establishing numerous institutions in their name and staffed by the sisters from Emmitsburg. Their increasing geographic distance from the Motherhouse reflected Catholicism's overall growth throughout the United States. As more dioceses were established, more bishops sought to improve their Catholic population's quality of life through social services and spiritual assistance. The more widespread the Sisters of Charity became, however, the more potential developed for tensions to arise between the Motherhouse's decisions and local needs where the sisters served. This tension between local needs and community authority, combined with Sulpician superiors' plans to shift their authority to the Vincentians, created a dramatic conflict in Cincinnati in the late 1840s. While Catherine Spalding and the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth had been successful at avoiding Flaget's proposed union with Emmitsburg, the Sisters of Charity were largely unaware of the ongoing clerical plans and consequently not given the opportunity to prevent their own union with the French Daughters of Charity. One branch house in particular, Cincinnati, had significant concerns over the advisability of this union, and consequently sparked a conflict of obedience and authority that eventually led to their permanent separation from the Motherhouse.

Cincinnati had grown into a flourishing branch mission by this time, and as St. Peter's school and orphan asylum continued to grow, the governing council at Emmitsburg decided to send one of their most experienced sisters, Margaret George, to be the new Sister Servant. Sister Margaret George was selected for her extensive experience as a teacher and school administrator, having served in such capacities for the Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg, New York City, Boston, Richmond, Virginia and Frederick, Maryland. Her service drew praise from other sisters as well as priests that she had served under. While Margaret was working at the Sisters of Charity orphanage in New York, Mother Elizabeth Seton wrote to a friend praising her dedication and character: "It delights me so that you love my little Margaret. It is a heart that is truly made to be loved and I am sure will not disappoint you…She is swift with her pen and always delighted to help anyone, much less one as loved as you are."[349] Decades later, upon her arrival in Cincinnati in February of 1845, George was recognized as one of the few remaining members with ties to the earliest days of Mother Seton and the mission founded at Emmitsburg. Her background made her a valuable leader respected for her experience and dedication to charity.

Upon Margaret's arrival in Cincinnati, Reverend John McElroy, the priest she had served under during her time in Virginia, wrote to Bishop John Purcell: "I congratulate you on the acquisition you have in Sr. Margaret…She is gifted with many more qualities which are seldom found in the same person – most pure in her intentions and in all her acts."[350] During her many years of traveling and assisting in the establishment of new Sisters of Charity institutions, Sister Margaret had experienced varying degrees of anti-Catholicism, and her journal offers insight into the potential for difficulty and hostility that sisters could encounter in antebellum America, even though their services were also highly in demand. Protestants in Richmond in particular found the increased Catholic presence suspicious, and in 1836, Sister Margaret lamented that she found Richmond to be a "most anti-Catholic city." The local community mistrusted the Catholic faith despite the services that the sisters had provided since their arrival.[351] Her exasperation was clear in her journal: "Alas!!! Never in any period of my life have I felt myself so completely isolated & a stranger far from friends & home & all but one courage my soul, a moment more & eternity will open."[352] Even after expressing this frustration, however, Sister Margaret's writings reflect her dedication to move on and focus on her work. Rather than become discouraged, she reminded herself that "a virtuous and an enlightened mind cannot be the permanent abode of sorrow…There are duties to perform, rewards to enjoy; & hopes to indulge on earth."[353] Her years in Richmond were trying times, filled with anti-Catholic ridicule. She did not experience in Cincinnati the same degree of hostility, but her arrival coincided with the beginning of significant structural changes within the Sisters of Charity.

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[349] Judith Metz, S.C., and Virginia Wiltse, *Sister Margaret Cecilia George: A Biography* (Mount St. Joseph, Ohio: Sisters of Charity, 1989), 22.

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[350] Judith Metz, S.C., "The Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati: 1829-1852." *Vincentian Heritage Journal*, Vol. 17, Issue 3, Article 4 (Fall 1996), 226.

[351] SCC: Box 3, Folder 7, page 5 of Mother Margaret George. Richmond, 1834-1850.

[352] Ibid.

[353] Ibid.

In 1845, bishops in dioceses where Sisters of Charity served were notified by Emmitsburg that sisters were now limited to care for girls only; this directive was initiated by Louis Deluol, the ecclesiastical superior, as he continued his plan to transfer the authority of Emmitsburg to the Vincentians, who followed this stricter practice in France.[354] The most outspoken critic of this announcement was Bishop John Hughes of New York City. The Sisters of Charity sent three sisters from Emmitsburg to New York to take over the direction of an orphan asylum, and soon St. Patrick Asylum became the first of several institutions managed by the sisters to care for and educate poor children in the diocese. By the early 1840s, there were over sixty sisters staffing ten institutions throughout the city. If the sisters could no longer care for any male children, many of those establishments would be in danger of closing.[355] Without another group readily available to take over care of young boys in need, he saw this directive from Emmitsburg to be significantly detrimental to his diocese and attempted to challenge it.

A lengthy correspondence between Hughes and Deluol ensued. Ultimately, the sisters were given a choice: return to Emmitsburg or remain in New York as a new diocesan community. The latter choice would sever the community's ties with the Motherhouse and place it under the authority of the local bishop. Of the sixty sisters in the area, thirty-three chose to remain in New York and found a new community, electing Elizabeth Boyle as their first mother superior in 1846.[356] Although there was no immediate outcry in Cincinnati over the disallowance of care for boys, the New York split would prove to be a foreshadowing of events soon to take place there, with Margaret George at the center.

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[354] Judith Metz, S.C., "The Founding Circle of Elizabeth Seton's Sisters of Charity." *The U.S. Catholic Historian,* Vol. 14, No. 1, Beyond the Walls: Women Religious in American Life (Winter, 1996), 32.

[355] Ibid.

[356] Ibid.

Scheming and Turbulent: The Cincinnati Separation

This process of separation in Cincinnati sheds light on the contingencies of obedience in religious communities, where sisters could be admired for their faith and good works in one situation only to have those same leadership qualities used against them when circumstances changed. Margaret George's life presents a variety of circumstances: her strong connection to Emmitsburg and its rule as adopted by Elizabeth Seton, becoming an experienced manager of schools and orphanages even in anti-Catholic areas, being labeled a "scheming and turbulent" woman who had the validity of her vocation threatened, and finally being elected to Mother of a new community. Personalities of the individuals involved, the importance of the community's rule, the sisters' connections to the regions they served, and the influence of clerical authority, were all forces at work in Cincinnati that came together to create a crisis. Out of this crisis emerged a thriving diocesan community that continued the Vincentian mission of serving the poor. Historians can use case studies like the one presented here in Cincinnati in order to evaluate the potential for positive outcomes even for "disobedient" sisters: dissent and schism might endanger a religious community, but such conflicts might also ultimately render a new fruit.

As members of an apostolic community, Margaret George and all women in the Sisters of Charity annually professed their dedication to poverty, chastity, and obedience.

The number of references to obedience in Sister Margaret's writings indicates that it was both essential and challenging to maintain this vow. Her reflections on obedience in her journal are often written directly, without room for argument or exception, such as her belief that "obedience is the philosophical stone which changes whatever it touches into gold."[357] Obedience did not necessarily guarantee happiness, but for Sister Margaret, earthly happiness was never the goal. Instead, her Catholic beliefs considered suffering on earth as the only way to sanctification, with the ultimate reward of eternal happiness after death. God's will could only manifest through obedience. Likewise, the Sisters of Charity could not exist as a community without a constant dedication to following the will of one's superiors, which could include the ecclesiastical superior, a Sister Servant, or the Council, depending on the circumstances.

Sister Margaret's dedication to growing in virtue is evident in her writing of "spiritual resolutions," her lists of areas she believed she needed to improve. Her intentions include "never to complain of anyone or anything except when really necessary to," as well as her desire to be granted the fortitude to "bear with all in silence & peace."[358] Such a steadfast commitment was unlikely to be deterred without the utmost consideration. One line simply marked "Superiors" indicated that she was aware of the necessity of seeking guidance and submitting to the wills of those above her.[359] Beyond these frequent spiritual inventories, Sister Margaret's reflections also contain insight into her experience living in religious communities. Her observation that

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[357] Ibid.

[358] SCC: Box 3, Folder 7, page 16 of Mother Margaret George. Richmond, 1834-1850.

[359] Ibid.

"murmurs in a Community are the source of divisions & are more than a plague," demonstrated her repudiation of gossip. She recognized the need for sisters to remain united rather than be concerned with superficial interests or complaints.[360] Not long after her arrival in Cincinnati in 1845, however, Sister Margaret would find herself accused of spreading lies, losing the spirit of her vocation, and splitting her community. These accusations began as changes in the structure of the Sisters of Charity and their clerical direction were put into motion.

At Emmitsburg, Deluol was undeterred by New York's separation, and continued with his plan to unite the Sisters of Charity in the United States with the Daughters of Charity in France. Due to the relative secrecy of Deluol's plan, reinforced by his ecclesiastical authority, the exact sequence of events is unclear in existing records. However, the final steps of the process are visible, and the union was ultimately approved by the Vincentian superiors in July 1849.[361] Significantly, Deluol chose to seek Vincentian approval first, rather than ask the sisters' views. The announcement of the union was not made to the sisters until Deluol wrote and distributed a circular document later in 1849. The circular acknowledges this hierarchical process, noting that "their Very Rev. Superior in his wisdom thought it well to keep from them such information till initiatives had been taken in obtaining the opinion and approval of the bishops most interested."[362] He justified this exercise of authority by writing that "his project was of a delicate nature…therefore, he kept the project a secret to himself for about three years, during which he consulted God."[363] In the case of the plan to form a union with the French Daughters of Charity, the decisions made at the higher level of clerical leaders like Deluol led to confusion among the sisters at Cincinnati and Emmitsburg.

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[360] SCC: Box 3, Folder 7, page 12 of Mother Margaret George. Richmond, 1834-1850.

[361] Metz and Wiltse, *Sister Margaret Cecilia George*, 64.

[362] Metz, "The Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati," 233.

The Establishment of Vincentian Superiors: Étienne and Maller

The ensuing haphazard attempts to notify the various Sisters of Charity communities throughout the United States of the union highlighted the complexities of the relationship between women religious and their superiors. Vowed to obedience, there was little recourse for sisters who disagreed with the decision of a superior, and this was complicated by the appointment of a new and unfamiliar superior when the union was finalized: Mariano Maller, C.M. Maller had previously served as rector of the Philadelphia seminary from 1840 until 1845, when Bishop Francis Kenrick appointed him vicar-general of the diocese. When he received his new appointment as superior of the American Sisters of Charity in 1850, he had little experience with the direction of women religious, or the particular history of the Sisters of Charity.[364] Despite his unfamiliarity, the sisters throughout their various posts were expected by their vow of obedience to accept him as their new superior. The news spread slowly from Emmitsburg, and sisters away from the Motherhouse remained largely unaware that Deluol had officially concluded his duties as Superior of the Sisters of Charity on

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[363] Ibid.

[364] Richard J. Janet, *In Missouri's Wilds: St. Mary's of the Barrens and the American Catholic Church, 1818 to 2016* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2017), 93.

September 21, 1849 and left for France as Mariano Maller began his journey to the United States.

In his farewell circular to the sisters, Deluol wrote that Maller had assured him in their correspondences that "nothing will be changed in the usual order of things."[365] This statement was intended to reassure the sisters that the change in leadership would not disrupt their day to day duties. Upon his arrival in the United states, Maller met with a small group of sisters at Emmitsburg to describe their new rule. According to Maller's account, the rule and news of official union was met with "perfect unanimity" by the sisters at Emmitsburg. In a letter to his General Superior, Maller described their reception of him as one of "universal joy."[366] However, issues quickly arose in early November, when all Sisters of Charity in the United States received a letter from Reverend Étienne welcoming them to the new congregation. Alongside the welcome came the acknowledgment that the union required that the American sisters change: "Your union with the Motherhouse, my very dear sisters, requires that you become Daughters of Charity…because all observe the same rules, the same practices, the same customs as the Motherhouse. For you are not ignorant that the accomplishment of this wish of your hearts will require you many sacrifices, by your being obliged to renounce old habits, and adopt new ones."[367] The proclamation of change was clear, but the specific changes that a new rule might necessitate was not. Consequently, early indications of confusion among the sisters came at the time for the women to renew their vows, which took place on March 25, 1850.

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[365] SCC: Circular, Rev. Deluol in Emmitsburg to all Sisters of Charity Houses in the United States. Baltimore, September 7,1849. Research guide, 160-163.

[366] SCC: Letter from Rev. Mariano Maller to Rev. John Etienne, CM in Paris. [Vincentian Archives in Paris, Photostat from St. John's University, letter 164]. November 3, 1849. Research guide, 165-166.

[367] Metz and Wiltse, *Sister Margaret Cecilia George*, 69.

Some Sisters of Charity in various locations appeared unsure whether the new union would alter their vows. This uncertainty prompted another circular from Maller. No changes in the vows of poverty of chastity were anticipated, but the vow of obedience became a source of concern: to whom exactly were the sisters vowing their obedience? To address this, Maller wrote: "That [vow] of Obedience is also the same person of the Superior being changed," which indicated Reverend Étienne in Paris would hold the ultimate authority previously held by Deluol. However, the letter also acknowledged the difficulty of maintaining authority overseas: "On account of his being at so great a distance there will be some one to represent him in this country. At this moment your most unworthy Servant has been appointed by our Superior General. Further arrangements will be made."[368] This statement made the singular authority of Father Maller clear. Beyond this, there was little clarification of his role and relationship to the Vincentian hierarchy. No specifics were given regarding the "further arrangements" for the sisters. The letter also reaffirmed that Étienne Hall, the Mother Superior elected in 1845, would remain as the Mother of all Sisters of Charity, with no change to her role. Overall, the letter downplayed any changes as a result of the leadership transition. Any sister who had not made her annual vows in March was encouraged to do so quickly in light of the letter's reassurances.

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[368] SCC: Letter from Rev. Maller to Sisters of Charity. Sister Judith Metz includes, "Note: only the last paragraph of this letter is in Father Maller's hand." April, likely 1850. Research guide, 176.

Specific consequences of the new rule continued to appear unclear to some sisters, particularly those in Cincinnati. In May of 1850, Reverend Maller traveled to Cincinnati to meet with the Sisters of Charity and Archbishop Purcell. His visit was intended to assure them that their fears over changes in vows, dress, and mission were misplaced. Overall, he conveyed that nothing significant would change in the sisters' daily lives. His reassurances were quickly unsettled, however. That fall, Étienne as the Vincentian Superior General outlined a variety of changes that would be required of the American sisters in order to bring their practices in conformity with the Daughters of Charity in Europe.[369] The habit in particular was called into question. Maller remarked in a letter that "there was much talk among the sisters" concerning their new dress, which indicated its significance.[370] Sister Margaret George in particular hesitated to adopt the new European-style habit; she was described as the only sister servant who had not accepted the new habit as their rule. Maller implied that her issue concerning the habit and the union more broadly to be a result of pride and lack of virtue rather than a legitimate concern in relation to the order's history and mission.[371] He described her as "very much lacking in the spirit…deems herself too important on account of her age" and continued to dismiss her opposition. The issue was significant enough that Cincinnati was the last community to report the renewal of their vows.[372]

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[369] Metz, "The Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati," 235.

[370] SCC: Letter from Rev. Maller to Rev. Etienne in Paris, December 31, 1850. Research guide, 189-190.

[371] Ibid.

[372] Ibid.

The confusion over the vows was the first issue that led Reverend Maller to criticize the Cincinnati community, and Margaret George specifically. In a letter dated the same month as his circular to the sisters concerning their vows, Maller also wrote to his Vincentian superior, Reverend Jean-Baptiste Étienne. He complained about the sisters in Cincinnati being reluctant to take their vows while no other community had hesitated. Placing singular blame on Sister Margaret, he wrote that "the Sister Servant is at the bottom of the whole affair. She is opposed to the Union and fears to be dismissed from the Company."[373] However, the problem was not simply Sister Margaret's individual disobedience concerning the union. The influence Maller perceived her wielding over the other sisters in Cincinnati presented an even more significant threat in his eyes. He accused her of not only "exciting the other sisters" but also their confessor. Bishop Purcell was accused of being "the dupe of the Sister Servant," led astray by her negative influence.[374] In spite of such harsh accusations, Maller noted that only two of the nine sisters in Cincinnati, including Margaret George, had delayed or refused to take their vows as a result of the union. Maller's frustration arose not only from what he believed to be Sister Margaret's disobedience, but likely also from her decision to seek a local prelate, which indicated her ties to Cincinnati might have grown stronger than her ties to the broader Sisters of Charity community, which now appeared increasingly unfamiliar to her.

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[373] SCC: Letter from Rev. Maller in Philadelphia to Rev. Etienne in Paris: April 14, 1850. Research guide, pp. 177-178.

[374] Ibid.

Margaret George and the Dangers of Disobedience

Sister Margaret's opposition to union with the French Daughters drew immediate criticism of her character and virtue from her superiors. Her established history with Elizabeth Seton and the Sisters of Charity, her reputation as a bold pioneer of the Catholic faith, and the dedication to obedience that she stressed in her personal writings, offered no protection from Maller's harsh judgment. In his letter to Reverend Étienne, Maller wrote, "The Sister Servant of that house always been considered scheming or rather as turbulent," in stark contrast to Sister Margaret's positive recognition that she had often received from the clergy at her various mission posts.[375] Maller did not hesitate to use the authority bestowed upon him from his new appointment as Superior General of the sisters. His letters made clear that Sister Margaret's opposition to the recent changes would not be tolerated. Maller was aware of her influence as a long-standing leader and autonomy as a Sister Servant. He mentioned that "if that poor sister does not return to a sense of her duty, I shall change her to another house and also change her duty," implying that her lack of obedience called into question her ability to carry on her necessary tasks. Maller also concluded this report to his superior with the pointed remark, "I presume that you wish me to continue to administer the provinces as I think best."[376] This declaration made his position and opinion the default authority on the conflict with Sister Margaret. Absent an intervention from Vincentian superiors, Sister Margaret's defiance lacked clerical support from the community's authorities, with Purcell as a significant but also a local, non-Vincentian supporter. Within the community structure, she faced criticism that made her position tenuous at best.

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[375] Ibid.

[376] Ibid.

Perhaps, then, what frustrated Maller even more than the complications related to Margaret George was the support she gained from Bishop John Purcell. The bishop had established a strong relationship with the Sisters of Charity since his appointment in 1833.[377] The confusion over changes regarding the union of communities prompted Bishop Purcell to discuss the situation with other clergy members. These discussions gave voice to the concerns of the sisters and demonstrated his trust in their faith. Purcell described the concerns of the sisters and their intentions in a letter to Archbishop Samuel Eccleston in March of 1850. The letter emphasized their loyalty to the community and their faith. Purcell particularly defended Sister Margaret's history and dedication to her vocation. Without naming her specifically, he wrote that "all their past fidelity, in one instance, for the long term of 38 years, fully proves, they would rather have died than relinquish the one, or in ought violate the others." Regarding the importance of the sisters as a community, Purcell described them as "an honor to the church in any age of her eventful history."[378] This clear show of support for the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati from Purcell testified to their character as pious women. With this praise, Purcell used his authority to counter many of the criticisms made by Maller. Purcell's frequency of interaction and length of his relationship with the sisters demonstrated his dedication and respect for the sisters' ability to conduct their affairs virtuously.

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[377] In 1850, Cincinnati was designated as a Metropolitan See, or archdiocese; consequently, John Purcell was elevated from the title of bishop to archbishop.

[378] SCC: Letter from Bishop Purcell in Cincinnati to Archbishop Samuel Eccleston, in Baltimore. March 26, 1850. Research guide, 173-175.

In addition to its praise, Purcell's same letter outlined his specific concerns over the question of authority. He did not call the validity of vows of obedience into question. However, he voiced concern about the current circumstances around the vow. Proper knowledge was considered necessary to make a genuine commitment to the vow. Purcell supported the informed autonomy of individual sisters and their chosen dedication to their community. His letter argued that "they should not have been called upon to make such vows as they have never made before, without their consent having been previously asked and obtained."[379] This lack of clarity made it difficult for the sisters to thoroughly understand their new commitment. A new superior might make decisions for the sisters without completely understanding their situation. Purcell criticized the concept of distant leadership most specifically: "…and thereby oblige yourselves to that to which you were never bound before, viz: to have your Superior thousands of miles from you and to be ready, at his word, to go thousands of miles from where you are now!"[380] Sisters' dedication to their local communities left them wary of accepting the Superior General in Paris as the final authority. This localism allowed for a flexibility that the sisters feared was jeopardized under the new rule, which had been written to serve the conditions of Europe. To the Sisters of Charity, vows were not to be taken in any abstract sense. They were intended to reflect a specific commitment that each sister had the chance to evaluate before deciding to make the necessary sacrifices. With the change in spiritual directors, the knowledge and familiarity between those committed to obedience and those in authority was absent, creating an opportunity for conflict.

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[379] Ibid.

[380] Ibid.

The final attempt that the Cincinnati branch made to resolve the situation with Emmitsburg took the form of another letter from Archbishop Purcell to Reverend Maller in late 1851. Purcell continued to act as the sisters' mouthpiece in voicing their concerns; his clerical position offered him a level of protection and influence that sisters simply lacked. Although relaying problems through Purcell was likely the surest way to ensure such issues were heard, the existing record is also a reminder that Sister Margaret's and other sisters' futures continued to rely on clerical support and approval. His 1851 letter demonstrated that concern remained regarding the application of their new rule. Purcell asked Maller why it had not been disclosed to the sisters that their superior had the right to require their change of habit, even after he had previously reassured them that no change of dress was required. In response, Maller stated only that "he did not advise them that way because he was not asked," and gave an ambiguous opinion concerning whether refusing to wear the new habit was a sin, mortal or otherwise.[381] Maller continued to position himself only as Étienne's messenger rather than an active player in these negotiations. His letters downplayed his own influence with the sisters and also Étienne himself. The lack of clear spiritual guidance from Maller further compelled Margaret George to approach Archbishop Purcell. In religious communities, authority was predicated upon a relationship where sisters received spiritual guidance, and the state of the sisters' souls was believed to be of primary importance to their superiors. Without this spiritual guidance from Maller, the propriety of his authority was further called into question. Together, Archbishop Purcell and Sister Margaret considered whether it was morally wise to continue to heed Emmitsburg's authority and what alternatives might exist.

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[381] SCC: Letter from Rev. Maller in Emmitsburg to Archbishop Purcell: December 22, 1851. Research guide, 199.

Maller first acknowledged the sisters in Cincinnati's decision to formally end their connection to the Sisters of Charity Motherhouse in a letter to Étienne on March 14, 1852. He became frustrated that "efforts are being made to make it to appear as though they were persecuted by Superiors and that it is an act of charity to protect them," rather than an act of disobedience.[382] Maller's frustration was exacerbated by the fact that Cincinnati was not the only community to take such bold action. His letter pointed out that a similar situation had recently occurred with sisters in nearby Nazareth, Kentucky. Bishop Richard Miles of the neighboring diocese of Nashville had also offered the "defecting" sisters his ecclesiastical "protection."[383] These two situations were enough for Maller to fear an emerging pattern. Clearly alarmed by the potential for more conflicts, he affirmed the centrality of authority in Catholicism. Maller's anxieties concerning the idea that conflict begets conflict demonstrate the significant potential for tension and hostilities when different levels of clerical authority disagree. Individual disobedience was a danger, but not nearly as great a danger as the potential for that individual to lead others astray when endowed with authority. Maller reported to Étienne that the sisters had decided to function as an independent diocesan community. As archbishop, Purcell supported their decision and agreed to be their new superior.

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[382] SCC: Letter from Rev. Maller in Emmitsburg to Rev. Etienne in Paris. March 14, 1852. Research guide, 204-205.

[383] Ibid.

The loose ends surrounding Cincinnati's departure from the larger Sisters of Charity community were not easily tied, and questions remained concerning the logistics of the transference of authority. As their new superior, Archbishop Purcell appeared unsure how to proceed with vows. Ultimately, six sisters supported the decision to consider Purcell their new superior while the seven remaining did not commit to such a change.[384] Maller's next letter, dated August 2, 1852, suggested that Purcell was unsure whether either group of sisters would be required to dispense their vows. Maller gave only the brief answer of "I have no power to dispense in the vows of the Sisters of Charity. I also have to say that I do not know of any other authority to release them except the Supr. Gn. & the Pope."[385] This statement gave clear indication that Maller believed the Vincentian authority was still binding, regardless of their desire to form a diocesan community. Most persistently addressed in his letter, however, was the characterization of Margaret George as deceptive and traitorous to the Sisters of Charity.

Maller had previous characterized Purcell as Sister Margaret's "dupe," and he continued with this belief in his August 1852 letter. He insisted that Purcell must not know the extent to which Sister Margaret went out of her way to convince other sisters that the union as agreed upon at Emmitsburg would be detrimental to the sisters in Cincinnati. He writes, "I do not think, Most Rev. Sir, that you are aware of all that Sister M. has said and written, both before and after the separation, to induce our poor sisters to abandon their community." Maller formed this opinion after allegedly having heard from one sister that "Sister Margaret had promised to receive her at any time with open arms (her own words)." A second allegation followed that Sister Margaret had been encouraging another sister at Emmitsburg to leave the Motherhouse to join the diocesan order in Cincinnati.[386] For Maller, Sister Margaret's acts of disobedience only stood to create more disobedience. The superior worried that "this sort of standing invitation may become a great cause of temptation to our weak minded sisters, whenever they become dissatisfied with any thing in their present vocation."[387] Maller acknowledged that he no longer had the authority to reprimand or punish Sister Margaret. However, he encouraged Purcell to do so, still believing that her disobedience should not go without penalty.

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[384] Judith Metz, S.C., "By What Authority? The Founding of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati." *Vincentian Heritage Journal* 20, no. 1 (1999): 103.

[385] SCC: Letter from Rev. Maller in Emmitsburg to Archbishop Purcell, August 2, 1852. Research guide, 218.

Lacking other sources that directly discuss the Cincinnati situation, the preservation of Maller's letters allowed his perspective to go largely unchallenged, making it difficult to discern the validity of his statements. Several possibilities arise in questioning this limited perspective: Maller may have purposely altered or left out certain details to bolster his case; he may have been unaware of certain events; or have been provided false information or misleading accusations against Margaret George from others. However, one letter written by Sister Margaret to Archbishop Purcell does offer significant insight into the individual whose actions and virtue were called into question by Maller's letters. Her letter is a reminder of the personal nature of this crisis, and that although Margaret George had endured many hardships in her life, she was still deeply affected by Maller's accusations. From the content of Sister Margaret's letter, it appears that she was familiar with what Maller had written to Purcell concerning her conduct. She remarked that "as usual he wrote in his own unique manner" before addressing his accusations.[388] She defended herself against Maller's claims of "enticing" or leading astray faithful sisters. Sister Margaret wrote adamantly that "this accusation exists only in his fertile imagination, in no instance directly or indirectly did I ever do this." She emphasized that both sisters Maller named had come to her of their own volition, and that she had been "astonished" by it.[389]

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[386] Ibid.

[387] Ibid.

In the rest of her response, Sister Margaret's personal feelings become even more evident. Although most of the conflict had taken place in clerical correspondence, this letter serves as a reminder of how difficult the entire event must have been for a woman of such great faith. She wrote that "I should not let it trouble me, tho' I confess it did at first trouble me a little while, false accusations are among those things I can least brook, yet our dear Lord's example came to my mind & subdued my feelings."[390] Sister Margaret's letter also addressed the importance of individual conscience. She reminded Archbishop Purcell that "assertions are not proofs." All others involved in this situation could only speculate at Sister Margaret's intentions as she chose to oppose the union. But as her lifetime of spiritual discipline had taught her, "as long as I can safely put my hand to my heart & feel my innocence," she knew she was honoring her vows and fulfilling her vocation to serve God. Although brief, such a defense hints at the inner turmoil the entire situation likely caused her. From Maller's hostile reactions, it is clear that Sister Margaret had little to nothing to gain for voicing her concerns about the union. Her decision to seek the support of Archbishop Purcell for the effort to form a diocesan community was a significant risk.[391] Today she is admired by many as a leader, but her actions came with a great price during her lifetime.

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[388] SCC: Letter from Sister Margaret George to Archbishop Purcell, August 18, 1852. Research guide, 219-220.

[389] Ibid.

[390] Ibid.

Margaret George and Catherine Spalding: Same Vow, Different Outcomes

Contrasting the experiences of Catherine Spalding and Margaret George as leaders of their communities during times of leadership transition presents significantly different outcomes despite similar circumstances. Individual personalities can only account for part of these results; broader patterns of circumstances can be examined in each community in order to identify certain factors that can advantage or disadvantage sisters attempting to negotiate a conflict of interest between the community and their superior. This process of negotiation, and the variety of outcomes than can result, demonstrate that obedience did not have a fixed definition, but was situational between multiple locations and circumstances. Although the taking of vows suggests a clear direction for individual choices and behavior, the complexity of Nazareth's and Cincinnati's crises of union indicate that obedience was a much more nuanced concept than simply following the wishes of one's superiors. As a result of this nuance, Catherine Spalding was described as "wise," while Margaret George was accused of being "scheming and turbulent," despite the reality that both sisters disagreed with their superior's visions for their community and attempted to take action on the community's behalf to advocate for the sisters' vision instead.

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[391] Ibid.

What factors contributed to Catherine's success and the maintenance of her favorable reputation? Mother Catherine shared several qualities and experiences with Sister Margaret. Although Sister Margaret had not founded her own community like Mother Catherine, Sister Margaret was one of the earliest Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg, and she experienced firsthand the ways in which Elizabeth Seton governed her community and envisioned its future. Each woman was recognized as successful and efficient administrators of the institutions they were involved with. Mother Catherine was the driving force behind multiple schools, and in her own words, was most invested in the orphanage in Louisville whose creation had been her wish. Sister Margaret had consistently served on her community's council and had experience in multiple missions and institutions; her assignment to St. Peter's in Cincinnati in 1845 filled a specific request for an experienced Sister Servant able to manage a large number of students and orphans. Each woman was deeply committed to her community and provided a model of leadership distinctly lacking in reproach from either sisters or superiors, and yet only Sister Margaret drew criticism during her community's crisis.

Familiarity and history between the sisters and their superiors shaped the ways in which these conflicts were negotiated. The two clergy members who overall supported the sisters' wishes, Benedict Flaget and John Purcell, each had a long history with the sisters. Over those years, they had seen the capabilities and talents of these women and had grown to trust their judgment. This mutual trust and reliance allowed the sisters a certain amount of autonomy in governing their own affairs and having a voice in situations that directly affected them. This was not the case with Mariano Maller, who was largely an outsider to the Sisters of Charity tradition. He was likely unfamiliar with Elizabeth Seton's own beliefs concerning the self-governance of sisters. Removed from the personal relationship that Flaget and Purcell had with the sisters, Maller was free to exercise his authority as a superior and expected that his wishes would be obeyed. Flaget and Deluol both believed it natural and appropriate that their affairs were conducted in secret; it is not surprising that Maller expected this type of unilateral authority. Regardless of circumstances, superiors possessed the advantage of this power; though they did not always exercise this advantage – Flaget did, ultimately, concede – it was always a potential option for how superiors could handle themselves during conflicts. Maller chose to exercise his authority in this concrete manner, and as a result, Sister Margaret risked being characterized as disobedient.

Communication played a key role in each process of union, and communication between sisters and superiors often greatly benefited sisters' ability to participate in important community decisions. Although superiors possessed the option of unilateral decision making, this was far from the only option; some superiors favored collaboration and transparency with sisters and avoiding making decisions without their input on relevant topics. During his attempts to plan with Deluol, Flaget made the sisters' aware of his intentions while the process was still underway. This allowed her the opportunity to discuss the plan with the sisters and form a collective opinion before anything had been officially decided. Her input could then be considered by Flaget to be a form of counsel rather than an opposition. Adding to this advantage was the fact that every sister at Nazareth signed their names to Catherine's letter, presenting a united front. If there had been division or conflict amongst the sisters on how to proceed, Flaget might have continued to believe the benefits of union with Emmitsburg would outweigh any risks.

Without a unanimous opinion, the community may also have faced the possibility of defections from those who disagreed with the outcome, whether or not the union was completed. This was certainly a concern within the community at the time, as the mid- to late 1830s at Nazareth saw several professed sisters leave the community as a result of the conflict instigated by David. That the sisters' wishes ultimately prevailed in Nazareth's "crisis of independence" presents a challenge to traditional understandings of obedience. As in many other contexts of religious life, the Nazareth's sisters' choices in deciding their course of action were limited. Had Flaget succeeded in his plan, it is likely that little could have been done to stop him, and Catherine's letter would have been fruitless, rather than being upheld as a symbol of the sisters' voice and autonomy. However, since Flaget acquiesced, their statement of opposition can be presented in a positive light. That his wishes ultimately played the largest role in determining the community's future demonstrate the extent of his power, which included his ability to change his mind as he saw fit.

Flaget's own authority may have played a role in his decision to abandon his plan and allow the sisters to remain unchanged in their community. Compared to the issue of Emmitsburg's union with France, it is possible that Catherine Spalding had an easier case to make – or at least the advantage of some precedent. Nazareth had always been independent and established through the diocese of Bardstown. The decision from its founding to remain separate from Emmitsburg had been deliberate. Flaget and David themselves had made cases for why this separation was wise; thus, they would have had to contradict themselves to follow Flaget's plans. This was not the case at Emmitsburg in the plan to union with the Daughters of Charity, where there was widespread clerical support. In this light, even though Catherine was ultimately successful in her persuasion, decisions previously made by David and Flaget still significantly influenced the outcome of this crisis. Although the sisters were able to maintain the community as they desired, there is still a level of passivity in the role they played throughout. The same cannot be said for Sister Margaret in Cincinnati. Her actions went beyond writing a letter, and consequently she undertook a more significant risk.

That risk did ultimately bear fruit and produce a new, successful community, despite the initial backlash that Sister Margaret's choices brought to her reputation. Nazareth's independence crisis of 1842, and Cincinnati's of 1850, marked the beginning of a new era for each community. Between 1844 and 1850, forty-three women entered the Nazareth community, and building projects continued to add a new bakehouse, washhouse, wardrobe space, and additional room for sisters and students.[392] The community's unity would again be tested over conflict between its Nashville branch and the Motherhouse, with the difficult decision made for Nashville to separate completely in June 1851.[393] Nonetheless, throughout the rest of the century, schools run by the SCNs were opened in the Northeast, Midwest, and South, hospitals and orphanages often following.[394] The community became truly global in 1947, creating missions in India, Nepal, and Belize. In 1920, the sisters created Nazareth College in Louisville, which grew into present-day Spalding University. The story begun in 1812 continues.

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[392] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 182-183.

[393] This community would eventually be known as the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. For their community history and further details of this schism, see: Sister Julia Gilmore, SCL, *We Came North: A History of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth* (Abbey Press: St. Meinrad, Indiana, 1961); Sister Mary Buckner, SCL, *History of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas* (Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Co.: Kansas City, MO, 1898); Sister Julia Gilmore, SCL, *Come North! The Life-Story of Mother Xavier Ross, Valiant Pioneer and Foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth* (York: McMullen Books, Inc, 1951). An account of the split is also described in Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit*, 183-190.

The Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati continued to grow following their separation from Emmitsburg and their first vows as a diocesan community in 1852. Sister Margaret George became Mother Margaret George, and she was re-elected as Mother each term until her death in 1868. Soon after the founding, the sisters created St. Vincent's orphan asylum for boys as well as Cincinnati's first hospital, St. John's, which would prove vital during the Civil War. Their education mission continued with Mt. St. Vincent's Academy in 1854, which would later become Seton High School, still open today. In 1920, the sisters created Mt. St. Joseph's University in Delhi, Ohio, also still presently in existence. With their separation histories, both communities are part of the Sisters of Charity Federation, comprised of twelve other communities with histories connected in some way to the Vincentian tradition that inspired service to the poor in the United States.

The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati are the center of this story, and all the women mentioned within it – as well as many that were present, but unnamed – are part of a legacy far larger than this project. Sisters' labor and leadership left a material and spiritual legacy still visible today in their communities and those that they continue to serve. Their stories offer historians a lens through which to view the contexts that these communities were founded in, and how the sisters' work affected broader systems of labor, gender, social services, and the development of

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[394] Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit,* 217.

American Catholicism. Catholicism could not have grown into its influential size and scope in the United States by the twentieth century and beyond without the dedication and commitment to service that these two communities, and many more to come after them, provided in the early decades of American Catholicism.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: WOMEN RELIGIOUS AND THE METHODOLOGY OF WOMEN'S HISTORY

The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati are two of the oldest communities of apostolic women religious in the United States. Each was founded without any formal affiliation with a European community, and each of these communities in its own way successfully challenged attempts made by their clerical superiors to re-orient the communities' organization and merge with the Daughters of Charity in France. From the early to mid-nineteenth century, the Catholic communities in Kentucky and Ohio grew to become more organized, structured, and financially supported within their dioceses, and much of this growth could not have occurred without the institution-building and Catholic influence of the Sisters of Charity. Through focusing on the events and relationships that comprised both Nazareth and Cincinnati, the microcosm that emerges provides valuable insight into gender roles, free and enslaved labor, the development of education, and the ways in which Protestants and Catholics interacted within the country's social and political systems. A focus on these broader patterns and the importance of contextualization in historical analysis, however, also poses a perennial historical issue: the loss of women's personal voices and insight on their own experiences.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg wrote of "a female world" in early America defined not by "an isolated and oppressed subcategory in male society," but instead by shared experiences and mutual affections that remained fairly constant despite the rapid changes taking place in society at that time.[395] The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and Cincinnati fit this description clearly. Though certainly not all sisters were close friends as Smith-Rosenberg describes, some of them were; and regardless of personal friendships, all sisters in a community participated in a shared experience through the commitment to their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Sisters ate, slept, worked, prayed, and enjoyed leisure time together. When they were separated by distance, as each community expanded and opened new branches in different regions, they wrote to each other frequently, and these letters reflect the importance of these relationships between sisters. The feelings of affection and friendship are clear in many of these letters and offer a more personal perspective on religious life.

In examining a woman such as Catherine Spalding, the most obvious record of her leadership are the many successes she helped create, including schools, a hospital, and an orphanage. Perhaps just as important to understanding her role in Nazareth's history, however, is a wistful remark to a sister in another location: "I wish I could give you gumelastic [sic] legs or some kind with which you could step even back to Nazareth for I assure you, I never did miss one so much in my life, & if the thing were to do over again, I believe I would not consent to it."[396]

Mother Catherine's heartfelt sentiment encapsulates several aspects of being a sister in the early United States: the need to put the collective good above individual wishes, the impact of geographic distance, and the emotional bonds formed between women sharing the same faith and the same mission. These expressions of love and affection are far from rare; another sister, later to become Mother at Nazareth, wrote in 1840: "Last night I had a kind, affectionate letter from Mother Frances, she is truly a sincere friend. Like Sister Emily I love her especially, because she has been invariably kind to those whom I love, proof of regard, which I value far more than that shown to myself."[397] These personal experiences and the importance of intimate relationships can get lost in analytical arguments concerning what role sisters played within society, how their interactions with superiors impacted their lives, and what their choices can tell historians about white women in the antebellum era.

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[395] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg. "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." *Signs* 1, no. 1 (1975), 9-10.

[396] Mary Ellen Doyle, SCN. *Catherine Spalding, SCN: A Life in Letters* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2017), 54.

There is a second reason sisters' voices can go silent: the lopsided nature of extant sources, particularly sources related to intracommunity conflicts. Although the 1830s at Nazareth provide crucial insight into how conflicts with superiors were handled, and what consequences sisters could face, the perspectives available to historians are severely limited. Information about the prolonged conflict and tension is given almost exclusively through John David's letters to Sister Elizabeth Suttle; none of Sister Elizabeth's letters to David in return remain. No letters or papers exist written by Ellen O'Connell, the sister who appears to have provoked David's wrath; similarly, no records remain of Mother Angela Spink, whom David referred to as "evil." Evidence of her spiritual struggles following the conflict and her resignation are known only through brief mentions in the council minute records. There is a similar paucity of sources from

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[397] SCNA: Mother Columba Carroll's diary, p. 247. Columba was Mother of the SCNs from 1862-1868 and 1874-1878; previous to her terms as Mother, she was Headmistress of Nazareth Academy.

Cincinnati's crisis of authority and ultimate separation from their Motherhouse at Emmitsburg. Sister Margaret George, disdained as "scheming and turbulent" by Mariano Maller, is discussed in correspondences among Maller, his superior Jean-Baptiste Étienne, and Archbishop Purcell. Only one letter written by her hand contains her own thoughts and feelings concerning this difficult transition.

The reality of this source base and its inherent limits, while frustrating, should not deter historians from further study; women's historians have created a field dedicated to teasing out women's voices from sources and contexts even where none appear to exist. Joan Scott has made the case for gender as an analytic category and for the importance of "constructing women as historical subjects."[398] In the sisters' personal correspondences and occasionally their own journals, rich evidence of women's expressions, ideas, and actions, can be discovered. Historians have emphasized what type of work sisters performed, the number of institutions they founded, how their lives differ from other groups of women in the same time period, and how integral these communities are to understanding the growth of American Catholicism. What these questions and arguments cannot answer, however, is a fundamental question: What did it mean to these women to live a vowed life, and how did they understand their own experiences?

Though not all sisters explicitly reflected on their interior thoughts, their prayer lives, or how they understood their vocation, some did, and even those who did not often made brief remarks in letters, offering some insight into their daily lives. Understanding these personal experiences should be as important to historians as topics considered more traditionally of significance. Women's history - particularly concerning contexts in which a male perspective has historically dominated the narrative, as in the case of the Catholic Church – "asserts 'personal, subjective experience' matters as much as 'public and political activities,' indeed that the former influence the latter."[399] In both Nazareth and Cincinnati, amidst teaching, serving the sick and poor, daily domestic work, attending Mass and regular prayer, the sisters understood their vocation both in terms of physical labor and spiritual devotion. The former was often externally visible to all, including historians, while spiritual devotion and personal meaning have remained more elusive. However, sisters reflecting on the nature of their vocation indicate both a self-awareness of their life as well as how others may have perceived such a life:

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[398] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 17-18.

> This morning the subject of my meditation was on the Benefits of a Religious Vocation. My God, what thanks do I not owe Three, for having called me to this holy and happy life. Those who know it, term it monotonous, but where can be tedium or monotony when we are laboring for Thee and are cheered by Thy Grace and heavenly visitations. What beautiful variety in our exercises and avocations, and how sweetly sounds the call to prayer, at regular intervals.[400]

This excerpt from Mother Columba Carroll's diary offers a personal perspective of how she understood the life she chose, and what benefits she believed that it offered her in comparison to other potential paths as a nineteenth-century woman. She also describes a combination of variety and regularity in the religious life that often is not remarked upon by historians. Understanding a community's rule, their daily schedule, and how they managed their institutions provides a picture of what types of work and other duties were required of sisters; it may also lead scholars to assume such a life must have been endlessly repetitive. From Mother Columba's perspective, however, even the repetitive nature of their daily schedules was enjoyable for its higher purpose. The "beautiful variety" also suggests that uniformity within a religious community did not eliminate the opportunity for personal choice and expression. This is a single reflection from a single sister, but all sisters faced the challenge of conforming to the uniform expectations of life in their community while remaining distinct individuals.

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[399] Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 20.

[400] SCNA: Mother Columba Carroll's diary, p. 296.

Attempting to understand further this balance, this lifelong process of negotiation for sisters, can provide an important perspective to be considered alongside topics where the male or clerical voice is clearly documented. This project has analyzed both the institutional contributions of the Sisters of Charity in Nazareth and Cincinnati and case studies in each community concerning conflicts of authority. These institutional contributions and conflicts of authority, however, were experienced and created by both sisters and their superiors, formulating different perspectives on each side; in documentation, the superiors' perspective overwhelms that of the sisters', and historians must keep this in mind when presenting their evidence. However, the experience of being a sister belongs exclusively to the sisters themselves; priests can tell historians many kinds of information, but they cannot tell us this. Consequently, focusing on the very experience of being a sister allows historians to analyze "the qualities of women's experience that sharply distinguish it from men's experience."[401]

In addition to balancing the individual and the community, sisters also had to balance their exterior and interior duties. This requirement historically arose from the question of how to live a virtuous life of service to others outside the cloister. Sister Margaret George, in her personal writings, often reflected on the nature of being an "active" sister, and what was required of sisters in order for community life to remain harmonious. Serving in many missions throughout the country, Sister Margaret was keenly aware of the need to balance the private and public aspects of being a sister, remarking that although a sister must be "employed in exterior duties, she must live in the world and yet be dead to it."[402] Religious life without the cloister raised new questions when St. Vincent de Paul first called virtuous women in France to serve the poor, and these questions arose again in the new American context, first at Emmitsburg and then throughout the nation as the Sisters of Charity expanded and new apostolic communities were created. Only sisters living this vocation could speak genuinely of its experiences and explore the negotiation of interior and exterior duties in practice rather than theory. For Sister Margaret, living in the world rather than in the cloister required an even higher expectation of behavior: "If a cloistered Sister wants one degree of perfect a Sister of Charity wants two."[403] Although living in community with other women provided frequent opportunities for potential conflicts and clashing personalities, sisters' faith and dedication to the collective good provided a powerful motivation to maintain harmony. Their personal reflections on life in community are an essential part of understanding how communities succeeded over decades and centuries of change.

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[401] Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 20.

The need for sisters to maintain respectful, if not always affectionate, interpersonal relationships is in some ways obvious. After all, the opposite of community, or being together, is to be divided. In her decades as a Sister of Charity, Sister Margaret certainly learned this, and her personal writings provide both a reflection on the dangers of division in a community and also an opportunity to understand Cincinnati's conflict with Emmitsburg as the process was experienced by the sisters themselves.

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[402] SCC: Box 3, Folder 7, page 13 of Mother Margaret George.

[403] Ibid.

In 1843, only a few years before her arrival in Cincinnati and subsequent union crisis, she stated clearly that "murmurs in a Community are the source of divisions & are more than a plague."[404] She further elaborated: "If envy once enters the mind of a Sister, division will not remain behind and the poor soul is lost. When division enters a community, it is to make its funeral obsequies – for death follows on her steps."[405] Such vivid imagery reinforces the gravity of her warnings and provides an unintentional foreshadowing of the division that would plague her own community in 1850. In a sister's own words, obedience was central to guard against potential divisions. Taken in historical context, this project has argued that what constituted "obedience" was not a fixed category, but rather a dynamic experience that involved the perspectives and personalities of both sisters and superiors, and subject to re-interpretation as circumstances changed over time. Ultimately, as supported by case studies presented at both Nazareth and Cincinnati, priests continued to wield significantly more authority in defining obedience than sisters; that reality did not render sisters completely powerless, but rather more elusive to historians' traditional understandings of the nature of power.

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[404] SCC: Box 3, folder 7, page 12 of Mother Margaret George.

[405] SCC: Box 3, Folder 7, page 13 of Mother Margaret George.

However, this analysis fails to address an essential question: how did sisters themselves understand obedience?

Obedience is a topic addressed across multiple correspondences and personal writings for both the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati. Taken together, the rich texture of the understanding of obedience and its role in religious life can be glimpsed through those it most affected. In 1839, Mother Columba wrote of the dangers of obeying a superior without a higher purpose: "There is something too slavish and base in the idea of obeying a mere human creature, no human being has a right to expect obedience from another… the individual who obeys through fear of a mortal being, how more than base."[406] Part criticism of earthly authorities and part suggestion that fear of an immortal being was the true concern, this brief remark highlights the difficulties of interpreting personal understandings to create a clear argument. That a sister – later elected to the office of Mother – would imply that obedience for obedience's sake was incorrect and should be avoided certainly proves analytically difficult to reconcile with the idea that a vow of obedience must be a shared experience between all sisters in the same community.

Another Mother at Nazareth, Frances Gardiner, offered this advice to another sister: "It is very certain that a good Sister of Charity will always be happy in the place obedience places her, if she seeks, as she is bound to do, the will of God in all her actions."[407] Although expressed significantly differently than Mother Columba's remarks on obedience, both point to the belief that obedience was ultimately to God, and obedience to those on earth could not supersede a sister's duty to God. This point is expressed in another way in a separate letter, where Mother Frances reminds another sister that "the least action, done through obedience, pleases God more than the greatest done to please nature."[408] A belief that obedience was ultimately to God, however, did not solve all earthly problems, especially those involving superiors like Mariano Maller. The experience of Sister Margaret in Cincinnati demonstrates not only a case of obedience in practice for historians to analyze, but also illustrates how the methodology of women's history can be used to better understand the role of women religious in American Catholicism.

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[406] SCNA: Mother Columba Carroll's diary, p. 24.

[407] SCNA: Letters of Mother Frances Gardiner, p. 17. Mother Frances was Nazareth's fourth Mother Superior, 24 years, 5 months in office (1832/1838 – appointed by David after Angela Spink's resignation in March, elected in August), 1844-1850, 1856-1862, 1868-1874.

Sister Margaret wrote extensively about obedience prior to the crisis of union with Emmitsburg in the late 1840s. Her spiritual writings reflect clearly on both the nature of obedience as well as its centrality to a harmonious community. Throughout her personal writings, Sister Margaret described the expectations of being a Sister of Charity in boldly unequivocal terms, and her descriptions of obedience were no exception. Her clearest declarations include "obedience is the mother of salvation," as well as "obedience is the philosophical stone which changes whatever it touches into gold."[409] In an entry entitled "spiritual resolutions," among "never to complain of anyone or anything except when really necessary to," and "never ask for temporal favors of any kind," there is also a single, emphasized word: "Superiors."[410] In light of these sentiments concerning obedience and the need for unity rather than division in a community, Sister Margaret appears to have been an unlikely candidate for becoming the center of a conflict of authority that challenged her new superior. Such vastly different perspectives are difficult for historians to reconcile. In light of her personal writings, how should Sister Margaret's choice to create a division for what she believed to be the collective good be understood?

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[408] SCNA: Letters of Mother Frances Gardiner, p. 18b.

[409] SCC: Box 3, folder 7, page 13 of Mother Margaret George.

[410] SCC: Box 3, folder 7, page 15 of Mother Margaret George.

Consideration of this question highlights both a challenge and a benefit of creating women's histories. Joan Scott argues that the complexity of women's history challenges traditional, male-dominated narratives by "not only multiplying stories, but subjects."[411] Through correspondence between Mariano Maller, Jean-Baptiste Étienne, and John Purcell, historians risk viewing Sister Margaret as a subject primarily through this male lens; their voices strongly outweighs hers, even as she has one letter offering a response to Maller's accusations. Through her own writings, that describe her experiences and expectations of her many years in religious life, however, Sister Margaret is her own subject, and understanding her personal values and experiences challenges the established story of how Cincinnati split from Emmitsburg. By analyzing and accounting for her own understandings of obedience, Sister Margaret's role in her community's history challenges historians to recognize that to better understand women as subjects, we must analyze cases in which "histories are written from fundamentally different – indeed, irreconcilable – perspectives or standpoints, none of which is complete or completely true."[412] To Mariano Maller, Sister Margaret was "scheming and turbulent," a woman who "deems herself to important on account of her age," and had "lost the spirit of her vocation."[413] By her own accounts, she believed deeply in community unity and wrote of high standards for her own behavior as well as expectations for other sisters; the sisters who supported her leadership and remained in Cincinnati with her after 1850 elected her Mother. These are two contradictory and potentially irreconcilable descriptions of the same event, all from individuals who witnessed the transition and played an active part in shaping its events and interpretations.

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[411] Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991), 776.

[412] Ibid.

Sister Margaret George is far from the only sister whose involvement in a conflict of authority with male superiors places her at the center of a controversy despite lacking a clear voice in narratives that historians – reliant on sources – can make of her own experience. The experiences of Angela Spink and Ellen O'Connell at Nazareth in the 1830s are visible to historians almost entirely through John David's letters to another sister, Elizabeth Suttle. Taken on their own merits, both women were valuable and well-liked community members; Angela, elected Mother, must have earned the confidence of the community to be its leader, and Ellen was likely one of the best-educated of the sisters, crucial for both teaching other sisters and being able to teach a varied and rigorous curriculum. However, most of what is known about them as individuals are descriptions in David's letters, which are unflattering to the point of malice. Unlike Sister Margaret in Cincinnati, whose personal writings and one letter concerning the union crisis exist to challenge the accusations in Maller's correspondences, no sources are available in Mother Angela or Sister Ellen's hand. In the case of Sister Ellen, a combination of lack of foresight and natural disaster may be to blame for this absence. The community's early annals noted that Sister Ellen had attempted to create a record of the early years of Nazareth, but that "when Sister Ellen died quite suddenly, in Lexington [1840], her papers then little valued, were scattered, and ultimately destroyed, it is thought, when St. Catherine's Academy was burned, so that no trace of them remained," and acknowledged that "those early annals had they been preserved, would doubtless be highly prized."[414] However, remembrances of both Angela and Ellen are scattered throughout other sources, all of which are recorded by women themselves. Taken together, these remembrances can provide clues as to why these two particular sisters ran afoul of David's temper.

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[413] SCC: Letter from Rev. Maller in Philadelphia to Rev. Etienne in Paris. Vincentian Archives in Paris; typescript ASJPH 7-4-3, #12. Pages 177-178. April 14, 1850; #110, Letter from Rev. Maller to Rev. Etienne in Paris. Vincentian archives in Paris; typescript ASJPH 7-4-3, #33. Pages 189-190. December 31, 1850; #117, Letter from Rev. Maller in Emmitsburg to Rev. Etienne in Paris. Vincentian Archives in Paris; typescript ASJPH 7-4-3, #14. March 14, 1852. Research guide, 204-205.

Sister Ellen is consistently described as an intelligent, highly-educated women, and although vital to the sisters and their schools' successes, these qualities may have also laid the foundation for her conflict with David. The significant amount of effort Sister Ellen put towards the sisters' education mission was noticed even by the young students she taught. One former student, looking back on her time at Nazareth Academy, recalled that "young as I was, I saw that Sr. Ellen's labors were incessant, teaching all the higher classes in the school, as well as writing, tapestry, embroidery and painting for which she had a true and educated talent. She was at the same time preparing the young Sisters for teaching and was Mistress of Novices."[415] Further in the annals, the depth of knowledge Sister Ellen possessed is significant enough to warrant a comparison to David's own: "Sr. Ellen was a better English scholar than he, but he, of course, more learned, was ever willing to aid her. He continued to teach the Sisters French and Christian doctrine and music."[416] It is possible that David felt threatened by the possibility of being outsmarted or out-taught by a woman; an insecure David then might well have developed a sensitivity to Sister Ellen's remarks, and finally have been pushed over the edge by whatever comment or joke made she made that led to his attempts to remove her from the community. Sister Ellen's education and her role as educator may have served as a challenge to David's authority, unintentionally or not.

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[414] SCNA: Early Annals of Marie Menard, 1.

[415] SCNA: Early Annals of Marie Menard, 50.

Sister Ellen's life did not offer a happy ending to outweigh the consequences she faced in the wake of David's fury. Although he was not successful in forcing her to leave the community, she was only able to remain a sister by accepting a lifelong assignment to the Lexington branch, never to be reunited with her many close friends who remained at Nazareth or were assigned to other branches. Her place in community memory, however, demonstrates the ability that the sisters themselves possess over their own history and the legacy each member leaves. In the narrative of her conflict with David, the early annals also admit that "'tis time she were surrounded with honor and affection," and conclude her life story with the powerful statement that "there is not one of us now, there will not be one in the future, free from indebtedness to her."[417] These statements, though brief, ensure Sister Ellen's place within Nazareth's institutional memory. Though they do not call into question the validity of David's reaction, or his actions as superior, their value lies in the validation of Sister Ellen's character and her value to the community. By remembering her in this manner, the early annals demonstrate that it was possible for a sister to be both integral to her community, well-liked by other sisters *and* be disliked, targeted, or even punished by a superior; these two occurrences are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Although not a contemporary source as David's letters are, the early annals ensure that his words are not the singular description of Sister Ellen's life and memory.

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[416] SCNA: Early Annals of Marie Menard, 152.

[417] SCNA: Early Annals of Marie Menard, 157, 159.

Intertwined with Sister Ellen's experiences and memory is Mother Angela Spink, the only Mother at Nazareth in history to resign from the office. Even less is known about her than Ellen O'Connell, and David saved his harshest comments for Angela, even though she did not share Ellen's fate of exile from Nazareth. Less is recorded about her personality than her physical strength: "Sister Angela was endowed with masculine strength, and she worked with incredible energy; she was known to fell stout trees, split fence rails and build fences; she ploughed the fields, and reaped the harvest, and thus succeeded in providing livelihood for the Sisters who toiled likewise at home."[418] Before she was elected Mother, she served as Sister Servant at the Union County school, indicating that she was recognized for potential leadership skills. Given her physical strength, her experience in managing institutional affairs, and the community's confidence in, it is unclear why the annals describe her as "an excellent woman, but she was unfit for her position, and she knew it."[419] Mother Angela requested to resign in spring of 1832, and her refusal to renew her vows that year until her resignation was accepted by the Council, demonstrated an assertion of her own will. In this case, her commitment to her vows allowed her to exercise her choice even though others on the Council disagreed with her, an important point to consider in discussions of how vowed life could bring certain freedoms or constraints.

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[418] SCNA: Early Annals of Marie Menard, 20.

[419] SCNA: Early Annals of Marie Menard, 75.

Identifying the factors that contributed to Mother Angela's resignation is a more difficult process than identifying the consequences that came after it, such as the doomed-to-fail mission at White River that David sent her and Sister Ellen on as punishment. If Sister Ellen's crime had been her high level of intelligence and penchant for witty remarks, what had been Mother Angela's? The only clue exists in one of David's letters: "I have been obliged to remove Ellen from the Mother House in which her influence, as you well know, was pernicious. She had so perfectly possessed herself of Mother Angela's mind, that the latter could but see through her eyes, and was entirely governed by her."[420] Mother Angela resigned immediately after Sister Ellen was targeted by David and threatened to remove her from the community. Such timing, alongside descriptions from the early annals and David, raises several possibilities why she felt the need to resign. It is possible, as David implied, that Mother Angela felt that she would be unable to govern without Ellen to advise her; if she felt capable to continue governing without Ellen, her embarrassment over the situation still may have prompted her to resign. Or perhaps David's influence as superior played a role in how other sisters perceived Mother Angela, and she felt as though she no longer had the community's trust to carry out the duties of her office. What is most clear, however, is that the two women trusted each other and made many decisions together, and their superior did not approve of this.

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[420] SCNA: DLB 2, p. 3. Letter from David to Elizabeth Suttle at St. Vincent's, 1832.

This mysterious conflict can point women's historians to the significant influence, even power, of female friendship and collaboration. The community's first mother, Catherine Spalding, enjoyed frequent praise from David and likely consulted him often; if, as Mother, Angela consulted most often with Ellen, David might have seen his authority threatened and his role as superior diminished. In Cincinnati, Mariano Maller also felt his authority threatened by Sister Margaret's refusal to accept a new superior with no connections to the community in which she lived nearly her entire adult life. Both cases demonstrate that although sisters living in apostolic communities did rely primarily on friendships and social networks of women, "women's allegedly 'separate sphere' was affected by what men did," sometimes with consequences that drastically altered the course of women's lives.[421] The differences in power between sisters and the clergy, however, did not unilaterally decide the history of Nazareth, or Cincinnati, or the history of American Catholicism more broadly.

Sisters' ability to make decisions for themselves and to participate in a governance structure that allowed their voices to be heard can be seen throughout histories like that of Cincinnati and Nazareth. Some events, such as Flaget's unsuccessful union attempt, or Sister Margaret's founding of a new community, clearly illustrate that "activities defined by women in their own sphere influenced and even set constraints and limitations on what men might choose to do."[422] As a whole, however, identifying the ways in which sisters influenced the priests in their lives requires more nuance. Using religious communities as a way to write women's history highlights the importance of analyzing personal experience, emotions, expressions, and choices. In addition to investigating questions concerning the significance of women's labor, their social institutions, their role in the Catholic Church, the gendered dynamics of their communities and the creation of female spaces, historians must also ask: What did it mean to choose to become a sister? How did sisters understand their vocation? What did it mean to live in community, and how were relationships negotiated among women and with men in this context?

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[421] Linda K. Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1997), 171.

[422] Ibid.

That clerical records and the voices of priests outweigh those written by sisters concerning their own experiences is undeniable, but the consequences of this imbalance are in the hands of historians to address and interpret. Sister Ellen O'Connell and Mother Angela Spink have no letters to their name, and yet other community sources written by sisters offer their own legacy for these two women, one that challenges the characterization created through David's perspective. Sister Margaret did not write extensively concerning her role in Cincinnati's separation from Emmitsburg – or if she did, such sources were not preserved – but she left reflections that offer significant insight into her values and how she understood the duties of her vocation, both of which undoubtedly influenced her decisions surrounding the crisis. These are only a few examples of the value of studying women religious through the methodologies put forth by women's history. If sisters are put at the center of the narrative, with the perspective of priests as necessary but mindfully limited, the growth of Catholicism in the nineteenth century can challenge "the framework of conventional history" by offering "a new narrative, a different periodization, and different causes" than traditional understandings of institutional and ecclesiastical history.[423]

Women's history endeavors to make visible the lives of ordinary and notable women alike, along with the structures that shape the world these women lived in.[424] Women in the nineteenth century who felt called to a vowed life of poverty, chastity, and obedience were in many ways both ordinary and notable. Some were highly-educated, charismatic, skilled managers, able to balance a demanding set of duties with maintaining the religious practices and prayer life that often drew them to such a life in the first place. Others were less educated or skilled yet still provided vital work and prayers to the community; all types of women were needed, sharing their dedication to Catholicism and answering the call to serve those in need. For the Sisters of Charity, the needs of this world and one's fate in the next were intimately intertwined; as Margaret George wrote in her journal, "Those who have loved the poor during life will not fear the approach of death."[425] Loving was not a thought or a feeling, but an action and a choice. For the women in these communities both in the nineteenth century and today, they lived out the choice to "not love God by our words, but by our works, by the labors of our hands & the sweat of our brow."[426]

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[423] Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 19.

[424] Ibid.

[425] SCC: Box 3, folder 7, page 11 of Mother Margaret George.

[426] Ibid.

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