

IN THOSE DAYS

Celebrating
175
Years

Sisters Who Ministered at St. Boniface Parish, Germantown (Goldenthal) WI

We knew her as Miss Billquist. She was our public grade school music teacher/guidance counselor. On Sundays we'd hear her playing the organ or see her directing the choir. While her students called her "Miss" at church, some adults would call her "Sister" or "Sylvia." "Sylvia," usually passed unnoticed. Adults always called each other by their first names. "Sister" caught our ears. We knew her roommate, Sr. Helen Kastner, also. "Miss Kastner" would substitute for our teachers occasionally. They were among the smartest and most compassionate people we knew; yet could be strict and quirky on a bad day. We never thought anything of it. Our other teachers were the same.

Down the road there was another woman named Miss Bissen. Parents begged for their hyper-active children to be in her classroom. At church her name was Sister Leona, the sacristan who



Sr. Adeline Loebe, sssf with Joseph, Joanna and Ethel Heisdorf.

kept servers, priests, deacons and liturgy committee in line. Parish politics and **MAN**-made rules disgusted her. We knew that our peers at the neighboring Catholic school had four or five of these "Sisters" teaching them. They loved them, respected them, disliked them and poked fun of them just as we did our own teachers. Never did we see the MEd, MM, MS -Psy, M-Div or Doctorate degree that rightfully suffixed many sisters' names. Other things—like our formation—were more important to them.

The generation before us knew full teaching and nursing staffs of these enigmatic strong women. There was always one called "Mother" who would show up for a visit with the same frequency and clout as an Archbishop. She was usually a *mulier fortis*. One such woman was named Mother Corona.

Her November 10, 1951 request for a raise for the sacristan and organist left no doubt in Pastor Alois Klas' mind that he was not about to win an argument with her. By the early 1950's the sisters were on the cusp of becoming one of the most educated corps of professional women in the United States. Encouraged by Pius XII and the Sister Formation Conference, they pursued the education that would hone their talents. They became and still are the envy of many a priest and bishop.



Srs. Asteria, Adeline, Licinia, sssf. 1930-1931

Today there are fewer sisters around. Some are found among the doctors, nurses, teachers, scripture scholars, directors of homeless shelters, professors, lawyers, pastoral associates, musicians, spiritual directors, managers of women's shelters and advocates for justice and peace who serve the church and community. As always, they are on the cutting edge.

Most, though, are now at the stage of life where they are passing their dwindling communities' core values on to other lay people who will carry on their unique charisms in new ways. They are managing their decline with dignity by merging with other communities, re-purposing sprawling convents or razing them with an eye toward re-claiming the land leaving nary a scar of their former footprint save a cemetery. Their legacy is in their people. The church has been blessed. St. Boniface has been blessed, the community at large so blessed by their ministry through the years.

—Fr. Mike Petrie



Sr. Dorothy Kessler retirement. June 1982