

History of the Sisters of Notre Dame

God called into being the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame, and in the unfolding of its history we recognize the signs of his goodness and provident care.

The congregation was founded in Coesfeld, Germany, during a time of religious and social need. In 1849 a young teacher, Hilligonde Wolbring, out of love for the poor, took orphaned and neglected children into her home. Together with Elisabeth Kuhling, her friend and colleague, she educated and cared for them. Both women had been formed in the spiritual and pedagogical tradition of Bernard Overberg.

Through the support of their spiritual director, Theodor Elting, the spontaneous charitable service initiated by the two women became an organized work.

Recognizing the significance of their apostolate in the Church, he invited them to consider religious life.

In the sisters of Notre Dame of Amersfoort, The Netherlands, Theodor Elting found a similar apostolic aim. At the request of Bishop Georg Müller of Münster, three Sisters of Amersfoort came to Coesfeld in 1850.

Under their guidance, the two young women, Hilligonde Wolbring to be known as Sister Maria Aloysia and Elisabeth Kuhling to be known as Sister Maria Ignatia, began their formation for religious life, abandoning themselves in strong faith to God's action.

From 1850 to 1855, the Sisters from Amersfoort introduced the steadily growing community in Coesfeld to the spirit and rule of the Amersfoort congregation as they had received it from the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur founded in France by Julie Billiart in 1804.

In 1855 the foundation in Coesfeld became an independent congregation. According to tradition the foundation date is October 1, 1850. In the spirit of St. Julie Billiart, Sister Maria Aloysia, Sister Maria Ignatia and the first Coesfeld Sisters, our congregation continues to witness God's goodness and provident care throughout the world today. On August 13, 1874, two Sisters of Notre Dame arrived in Covington, Kentucky. Two days later, the sisters were officially welcomed by the pastor of Mother of God Parish and the next day they were faced with young curious children at the parish school. From 1875 to 1878, Covington served as the center of the congregation due to the political conditions in Germany. Covington became a province in 1924. The members serve in a variety of ministries including education, (from elementary to college), healthcare, childcare, religious education, pastoral care, and community services.

The Sisters of Notre Dame, an international congregation of women religious, now serve the Church in eighteen countries on five continents. For further information, visit the SND international website at www.snd1.org.

