

OUR HISTORY

In 1856 in Switzerland, a Franciscan priest named Theodosius Florentini founded the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross. "I shall send my sisters where their presence is most badly needed," he wrote, "to the poor, to those hungry for education, to the sick, the orphans, the neglected, the factory-children and the industrial workers." In response, several women took permanent vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to give their lives to the needy, forfeiting prospects for marriage, family, and worldly success. A capable young woman named Mary Theresa Scherer became their first superior.



The congregation grew rapidly. When Mother Theresa died in 1888, she was survived by almost 2,000 sisters. Presently there are over 4,000 Holy Cross Sisters serving on five continents.

Holy Cross Sisters came to the United States in the early years of the twentieth century to found several hospitals in frontier towns. In 1912, responding to a bishop's invitation, six sisters established a hospital in Dickinson, ND. A few years later the sisters were invited to take charge of a hospital in Breese, IL. In 1923 city fathers invited Holy Cross Sisters to Merrill, WI, and in 1926 the immigrant Swiss sisters dedicated Holy Cross Hospital, now known as Good Samaritan Hospital.

Many local women joined the Holy Cross Sisters to form the United States Province, which is based in Merrill. During the next 80 years, besides working three hospitals, the Holy Cross Sisters established and taught in grade schools, high schools, and colleges. They ran an orphanage between the wars. They continued to expand and have served in various ministries in North Dakota, South Dakota, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Missouri, Montana, Florida, California, Maryland, and Louisiana.

In 1987 the Holy Cross Sisters sold their three hospitals, and, in 1990, responding to a rising need for elderly care, turned their provincial convent in Merrill into a community-based residential facility for the elderly. Bell Tower Residence, providing highest quality senior care to the public, is a sponsored ministry of the Holy Cross Sisters.