

It's All About Relationships: The CSJs and the Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis

Many of those who know the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, St. Paul Province (CSJs), and even some who don't, sometimes inquire about the relationship between the Sisters and the Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis.

A bit of history helps to understand the reporting structure.

The Sisters trace their roots to LePuy, France in 1650 when, according to primitive documents, this congregation of women religious dedicated themselves to "the practice of all the spiritual and corporate works of mercy of which woman is capable and will most benefit the ... dear neighbor."

The Sisters of St. Joseph were forced to disband for a time during Napoleon's reign. During the French Revolution five Sisters of St. Joseph were put to death and a sixth, Mother St. John Fontbonne, barely missed the executioner's blade as Robespierre was guillotined on the very date she had been scheduled to die.

At the request of a bishop desiring a school for the deaf in St. Louis, Missouri, the first Sisters of St. Joseph came to America from Lyon, France in 1836. Initially, two convents were established near St. Louis. The Sisters presence in Carondelet, now an area within the city, remains. It didn't take long for the Sisters to expand their passion for the "dear neighbor" throughout a fast-changing land. In 1851 Bishop Cretin requested that the Sisters of St. Joseph come to St. Paul, MN to serve local needs.

In 1860, the Sisters convened in St. Louis to approve a general government plan that established three provinces including the one in St. Paul. An outgrowth of that meeting was a desire to secure "papal approbation for their Constitutions." This "papal approbation" would determine the reporting structure.

Catholic congregations, communities and religious orders operate under either a diocesan or pontifical right. According to the online resource, *Catholic Answers Forums*, "a diocesan right is one that is under the canonical authority of a bishop in a particular diocese. A pontifical right means that the local bishop has no authority in the internal affairs of the community, he has no voice or vote on their constitutions or how they interpret or apply their ministry."

The CSJs received their "papal approbation" in 1877. Today, with provinces in Albany, NY; Los Angeles, CA; St. Louis, MO; and St. Paul, MN and vice provinces in Hawaii and Peru, they continue to serve the "dear neighbor" through their work in the areas of healthcare, education, advocacy, safe housing, spirituality and the arts. Although the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet are a pontifical institute, in each diocese/archdiocese where they serve, they work to maintain a respectful relationship with their bishop/archbishop and maintain an open dialogue on issues of mutual concern.

The CSJs, whose founding documents challenge them to move "always towards profound love of God and love of neighbor without distinction," do not receive financial support from the diocese. Instead, some Sisters working in business, private practice or as entrepreneurs pool their income to support Province expenses. Other Sisters work or donate their time in ministries that support the mission. Funding for ministries is provided through a combination of direct gifts, development efforts and gifts from the Province. Through this communal approach to finances, with each Sister using her respective gifts and interests, the Province as a whole can pursue the important work of caring for the "Dear Neighbor."

Operating under pontifical right, the CSJs report to an organization in the Vatican called the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL).

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