

St. Joseph Home Historical Highlights

Sister Anthony O'Connell's original work with unwed mothers began in the late 1860s when she was the administrator of Good Samaritan Hospital at Sixth and Lock Streets in downtown Cincinnati. By that time she was a familiar figure in Cincinnati. She had arrived in the city in 1837 to begin her work as a Sister of Charity at St. Peter's Orphan Asylum and School for girls. Given charge of St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum for boys when it was begun in 1852, she later oversaw the combining of the two asylums in the Cincinnati neighborhood of Cumminsville. Later in the decade she was placed in charge of Good Samaritan Hospital and served as a Civil War nurse. At the conclusion of the war in 1865, she returned to the hospital where she remained in charge until 1880. Seeing the unmet needs of unmarried women and their babies, she began to care for them at the hospital. Within a short time Mr. Joseph Butler, one of the major donors of the hospital, offered her property to open an infant and maternity home.

Significant Dates

- 1867 Sister Anthony O'Connell leased a building adjoining Good Samaritan Hospital as a refuge for unwed mothers and other destitute women and children whom the hospital could not always shelter. It was called Saint Ann Home.
- 1873 May 20 -- In order to expand the work started at Saint Ann Home, Mr. Joseph Butler presented Sister Anthony with the deed to the Boyle homestead on property at Reading Rd. and Tennessee Avenue. His sons later purchased land adjoining the original eight acres, extending the property to twenty-four acres.
- September 11 -- Saint Joseph Infant Asylum opened its doors as a branch of Good Samaritan Hospital. It cared not only for unwed mothers and their babies, but for other homeless young children.
- Sister Agnes Regina Browne set up an enterprise to assist the Home financially and to provide employment for the residents" the Home would launder delicate laces for the affluent families from Avondale and Clifton. The practice was discontinued when other means of fundraising became available.
- 1874 Sister Cecilia Griffin, administrator of the Home, directed the building of a hospital, convent, and chapel.
- 1875 Saint Joseph Infant Asylum became independent of Good Samaritan Hospital
- 1896 Sister Agnes Regina Browne, administrator of the Home, oversaw the erection of a three-story building for the children and a new residence for the chaplain.

- 1916 The Home became affiliated with Catholic Charities at the request of Archbishop Henry Moeller.
- 1917 The Home became a member of the Community Chest. Support through the years has come from lawn fetes, raffles, St. Joseph Guild, Catholic Women, and many other generous friends of the Home.
- 1946 A nursery school for three-and four-year olds was initiated.
- 1954 The maternity hospital at Saint Joseph Infant Asylum was closed, and residents were sent to Good Samaritan Hospital for delivery. The hospital had served not only the unwed mother but other pregnant women in the area.
- 1956 With the approval of Catholic Charities, the St. Joseph Maternity Guild was established under the direction of Mrs. Nancy Ihlendirf.
- 1958-60 Sister Redempta Wittberg worked with Procter and Gamble, experimenting with improving paper diapers. Pampers were put on the market in 1960.
- 1965 Saint Joseph Maternity Home High School was opened with credits given through Seton High School. After the Home moved to Sharonville, credits were given also through Princeton High School.
- Sister Ellen Joseph Walsh, administrator of the Home, announced the purchase of the twenty-acre Barrow Farm on Wyscarver Road in Sharonville. Because the original buildings were old and in poor condition, and the area was surrounded by businesses, a new location was desirable.
- 1966 March 30 -- Work began on the new Home in Sharonville. Plans projected 13 buildings which included accommodations for 40 unwed mothers, a clinic, high school, nursery buildings for 60 babies, offices, convent, chapel and offices. The project cost was \$2.8 million.
- 1967 September 23 -- The move to the new location in Sharonville was made.
- 1968 Sister Mary Francelline Ryan retired after 42 years of caring for infants and toddlers, lavishing upon them love and devotion, day and night.
March 19 -- The new Saint Joseph Infant and Maternity Home was dedicated by Archbishop Karl J. Alter.
- 1973 A Centennial Celebration was held at the Home. Records showed that over the past 100 years nearly 15,000 babies had been received in the nursery. Records of unwed mothers were incomplete, but in the 1900s alone the Home had served close to 10,000 women.

- 1976 Sister Mary Rita Vieson, administrator, directed the termination of the newborn nursery since more unwed mothers were keeping their babies and taking them home when they left the hospital. The nursery was used as part of a resident program for profoundly handicapped, non-ambulatory children. The home was licensed by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Retardation.
- 1984 July -- Saint Joseph Center was opened in a wing of the Home as a residence for retired sisters.
- 1989 December 15 -- The Maternity Home and High School were formally closed, necessitated by a declining need for this kind of service. United Appeal funding was terminated and future use of the buildings was undetermined.
- 1990 The name of the facility was changed to Saint Joseph Home. Sister Marianne Van Vurst, administrator, launched the first Capital Fund Drive with a goal of \$6.3 million to expand the facility and renovate existing structures in order to care for the profoundly handicapped non-ambulatory children and young adults. An endowment fund was also created. The fund drive was successfully completed in February 1991.
- August 14 -- Groundbreaking took place for five new cottages, bringing the number of buildings in the complex to 18.
- 1991 February 12 -- The first phase of the expansion was completed, and the residents moved into the new cottages.