

The JOSEPH HOUSE



Little Sisters of Jesus and Mary

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Dear Friends of Joseph House:

Sr. Mary Elizabeth Gintling, our foundress, once said to a group of students, "Great things come from small beginnings, and you had the courage to begin."

Sister knew what she was talking about: those words came from her own experience. Fifty years ago this month, by herself as a laywoman with nothing to her name, Sr. Mary Elizabeth started the Joseph House ministry. **Fifty years!** Here in her own words, edited from her audio-taped recollections, is how it all began in 1965:

I was alone when I started it and remained essentially alone for about a year. I had no money either to work with, but I decided that if I do the right work, then people will support it.

I looked up all the pastors around that area [the Mosher Street neighborhood] because it seemed to me like it was a very poor area. It also was an all-black area, and I was not sure that I could live alone in an all-black area as a white person because the sixties were coming up and there was a lot of racial animosity.

So anyhow, I went to see Fr. Donald Knox, a Vincentian [pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, Druid Hill Avenue]. He was the third priest I went to see – the other two were very happy about what I was trying to do, but didn't feel that they could start it in their parish.

I made Fr. Knox realize that all I wanted to do was to do what I could in his parish without any particular costs to him, and that I did not expect a salary.

He didn't quite understand how we would go through this but he said, "First place, you have to get a place to live. I'll give you a place in my basement to start your work. It's not too great a gift because I haven't been down there since I've been pastor, and I've been pastor here for 11 years." [laughter]

So I got a fellow named Fred Jackson who wanted to volunteer and do something, and he was a school teacher at Mt. Carmel in Essex. He got his class to come one day and clean this entire cellar and whitewash it for me. And we had to let them take showers before they could go out into the street because the cellar hadn't been entered in all that time, and it was thick with dust and coal soot and everything under the sun.

So that was how I first started. I know it was October, October the fifteenth. Yes, because it was the feast of St. Theresa.



Prayer Requests: print, clip and mail to P.O. Box 1755,
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O Lord, hear my prayer:

There was nothing there in the cellar, it was just a bare room. I had passed Providence Hospital... I saw that they had thrown out a desk. They had it sitting on a street to be picked up by the garbage people. So I got some guys to carry it down to the cellar for me. [laughter] That was my first desk.

Another day I passed and they had a chair sitting there and I got somebody to carry the chair down. So I had that chair and that desk, and then I had a big, overstuffed, living room chair, those kind that nobody wants anymore. That was sitting on the street somewhere, and I got some fellows to carry that down for me. So the only thing I had was this desk and a chair and over on the side of the wall I had this overstuffed chair.

I tell you, it was such an impossible-looking thing that nobody really wanted to put their hand into it. They thought in a month or two she's going to realize it's a dream and off she'll go, you know. But I never minded that, I never minded that. That or the impossibility of the look of it or anything else. I always trusted God. And He always came through, that was the thing.

Fr. Knox was very kind to me. He fed me at the rectory for supper, and the other meals I had to supply myself.

When I told him that I really needed to live in the area, he said to me "Well, I'll give you the money in the poor box to pay a rent somewhere if you can find a rent. It's very little money in that poor box, but if you can find a rental that will be OK, I'll even help to find one for you." So he did. He found an elderly couple who lived down the street about four blocks and I moved into their third floor. My biggest problem was that they had some mice, although it was a nice clean place, so I got a bag of marbles and threw them at the mice at night to scare them away.

When I was there I really had to live very poorly because I had nothing. Many times I didn't have anything for breakfast or lunch because I couldn't afford to buy anything and I was only entitled to my supper at the rectory.

The first thing when I got that cellar I said to myself, "If I'm going to write letters I have to be somebody." Well, I never wanted anything named after me. So I said I have to name it quick because people will begin to say "Well, this is Mae Gintling's place and so it's Mae Gintling's thing and Mae Gintling's this." And I didn't want that.

So I prayed to St. Joseph and I said to him that I would work as hard as I could all my life for the poor if he would supply the money for it. And I said I can't do both. So if you supply that money I'll do the work. And it came in! It came in dribs and drabs, but it came in. I also said to him that I would name everything I had after him. That was in the sixties when it was very unpopular to be religious. It was very unpopular to call anything Saint this, that or the other thing. And I was

working in an area where they were all unchurched people and for the most part "Saint" meant nothing to them. I tried to think of a name with Joseph in it.

I remembered reading about the Josephinum. It's a seminary in one of the Midwestern states. Ohio or somewhere like that. I thought well, it has the word "Joseph" in it and it doesn't say "Saint" so maybe I could use that. I got a phone put in and it was called the Josephinum House. [laughter] This woman from the phone company called me and she said, "May I speak to Mrs. Enium, please?" [laughter] And I said this has got to go!

So I said, "OK, I can't call it Saint Joseph, why don't I just call it Joseph House?" So I settled on that name. I put that on my monthly letters that I was putting out. It was nice except that I was always unhappy about not calling it "St. Joseph." However, it served a good purpose for a long time not to call it St. Joseph. And that's when it began, it was pretty early.

I would sometimes see two or three people a day, but I always went out to see them afterwards to see what their homes were like and what were the things they weren't telling me. I began to realize that people told you what you wanted to hear. You really had to make a home visit if you were going to judge the case in the right way. And if you made the home visit in the right spirit then people did not resent it at all.

I had some good experiences and some bad experiences doing that. Strangely enough I was not afraid, and I used to sometimes go and pull guys out of a bar, make them go home to their wives and children, things like that, you know, that normal people don't do. [laughter] I just really was one-minded.

My first family to help was a family of nine children whose mother was living right across the street from the rectory with this big family in a three-story house. The father was in the penitentiary for murder. The mother was unable to keep the family going.

There was a coal yard down about three blocks from there. They would sell me coal at fifty cents a bushel. But I had to carry it myself. So I had Fred Jackson, the fellow who got the kids to clean the basement, he came and the two of us walked the three blocks with this bushel of coal. Our hands were frozen!

We carried coal to their house to keep them from freezing and that was the first thing I did. That family became very fast friends with us and eventually a lot of good was done through them.

Sr. Mary Elizabeth was never alone for long. She had a gift for attracting people and getting them involved. You, dear friends, are part of her legacy. Sister had another important quality: she made herself a servant of Providence. She let God be in charge of the ministry's direction and growth. That is why the Joseph House is here today, 50 years after it started, and 11 years after Sister departed this earthly life.

Above, you read the story of the first family Sr. Mary Elizabeth helped. Stories such as this make up the history of the Joseph House. They reveal people with their struggles and joys and how we can come together in a spirit of love. The Joseph House always assists individuals, not simply "the poor." We have many more stories to share with you, and we will next month.

We are making plans for a community-wide celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Joseph House. It will likely take place in the spring, around the time of the Feast of St. Joseph the

Worker (May 1). Stay tuned for updates, and please check our Facebook page and website for news and pictures: facebook.com/theJosephHouseSalisbury and thejosephhouse.org.

Our Deepest Gratitude: We wish to acknowledge **E & S Printing** and the extremely valuable contribution they made to our ministry. For years, E & S printed our monthly Newsletter at no charge. The money we saved went to helping people at the Joseph House. We also came to rely on their friendly and expert service for many of our other printing needs. Thus, we are sad to report that the folks at E & S Printing have decided to close their business. This is a difficult time for them, and we wish everyone Godspeed as they begin new journeys of change and uncertainty. They will always have our gratitude.

And may God bless all of you for your continued support of the Joseph House. For 50 years the charitable love of people like you has come to the aid of those in need. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you!

With our never-ending prayers,

Your Little Sisters of Jesus and Mary



*Give thanks to the Lord for He is good,
His love endures forever!*

Psalm 118