

Benedictine Sisters of the Byzantine Rite Queen of Heaven Convent Community History



The birth, growth, ministries and the coming to fulfillment of The Benedictine Sisters of the Byzantine Rite trace their beginnings to 1951 when two Byzantine Rite women from SS. Peter and Paul Church in Minersville, Pennsylvania entered the Latin Rite community of Benedictine Sisters at Sacred Heart Convent in Lisle, Illinois. They were received there with the understanding that eventually a Byzantine Rite Benedictine Foundation would be established from that Priory to serve the needs of the Byzantine Ruthenian parishes in the United States.

In 1954, the Community Chapter of the Lisle Benedictine Sisters formally voted to establish a Byzantine Rite Foundation of Sisters at SS. Peter and Paul Parish in Warren, Ohio. The pastor there, Father Sylvester Hladsky, had asked the Lisle Sisters to open a school for the Warren Byzantine Rite Parish. 1954, being the Marian Year, the Warren convent was named Queen of Heaven Convent in honor of the Mother of God.



On August 24, 1955, in Sacred Heart Chapel the Foundation Cross was blessed and the departure service took place.



The Foundation Cross was given to Sister Juliana Konopka. Sisters Miriam and Mary Judith Konkus, O.S.B., the two Byzantine Rite women from Minersville, Pennsylvania, were assigned to teach at SS. Peter and Paul School in the fall of 1954. Together with Sister Mary Juliana Konopka, O.S.B., their superior, they opened the first Benedictine Convent of the Byzantine Rite in Warren that summer

Their first dwelling place was a home on East Market Street, and was blessed on August 27, 1955 with Father Prior Theodore Seginak, O.S.B. officiating.



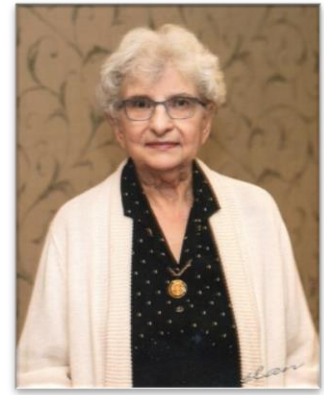
The number of Byzantine Rite Sisters in the Lisle Benedictine community continued to grow. In April 1965, they formally petitioned Cardinal Testa, Secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Church in Rome, for the right to function as a Byzantine Rite Community. Bishop Nicholas T. Elko of the Byzantine Rite Diocese of Pittsburgh, and Monsignor Sylvester Hladsky, Dean of the Youngstown Byzantine Rite Deanery and Pastor of SS. Peter and Paul Parish, both sent letters to Rome in favor of the Sisters' petition. Cardinal Cicognani at the Vatican gave his personal attention to this matter. As a result, all the Byzantine Rite Sisters in the Lisle Benedictine Community were sent to Warren in June 1965, and the community of Queen of Heaven Convent was given the opportunity to function as an independent house for a period of three years. During this time, more young women continued to join the new Byzantine Rite Benedictine Community in Warren.



Bottom Row (left to right): Sr. Margaret Chuma; Sr. Judith Konkus; Sr. Assumpta (Margaret Mary) Schima; Most Rev. Nicholas T. Elko; Sr. Ambrose Chuchvara; Sr. Miriam Konkus; Sr. Mary Francesca (Barbara) Pavlik.

Top Row: Sr. Theodore (Julia) Rohaly; Sr. Alexandra Belak; Sr. Daniel Zentkovich; Sr. Stephen Marie (Agnes) Knapik; Sr. Mary George (Marion) Dobos; Sr. Andre Repasky; Sr. Thecla (Helen) Labosh

Final steps to complete the establishment of this Byzantine Rite Foundation were taken in the summer of 1968. On November 19, 1968 a decree was received from Rome stating that the Foundation of Queen of Heaven Convent was granted its independence and could function thereafter as an independent Priory. The formal Founding Ceremonies and Election of the first Prioress took place on February 2, 1969. Sister Margaret Mary Schima, O.S.B. was elected first Prioress of Queen of Heaven Convent.



Preceding the election on February 2nd was a Ceremony of Foundation for the newly-established Benedictine Priory. Mother Mary Louise, Prioress of the Benedictine Sisters in Lisle, Illinois formally presented Bishop Stephen J. Kocisko, Eparch of the Pittsburgh Byzantine Catholic Eparchy, with the Document of Erection, which he then read to the charter members of the new Priory.

Also, representing the lisle Community at this historic ceremony was the former Prioress, Mother Mary Aemilia, during whose term of office this Byzantine Rite Foundation was initially launched.

Final Steps to complete the establishment of this Byzantine Foundation were taken in the summer of 1968. Under the leadership of its President, Mother Mary Susan Sevier, the Federation of St. Scholastica voted to accept Queen of Heaven Convent in Warren as autonomous member. On November 19, 1968, a decree was received from Rome stating that the Foundation of Queen of Heaven Convent was granted its independence and could function thereafter as an independent Priory.

Prior to the official independence, the Sisters had been planning to build their own Motherhouse. In 1967, they purchased a beautiful ten-acre site in adjacent Howland Township for this purpose. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on June 30, 1968 and construction of the new Motherhouse began after formal approval of autonomy had been received from Rome.

The Sisters moved into their newly-constructed Motherhouse on December 13, 1969. It was blessed and dedicated on May 3, 1970 by Most Rev. Stephen J. Kocisko, Metropolitan Archbishop of the Byzantine Catholic Archdiocese of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania assisted by Most Rev. Emil J. Mihalik, Byzantine Rite Bishop of Parma, Ohio.



Sister Mary Judith Konkus, O.S.B., succeeded Sister Margaret Mary Schima as Prioress of the community in 1973, serving a 4-year term of office.



On February 1, 1981 Sister Agnes Knapik, O.S.B. was installed as the third Prioress of Queen of Heaven Convent. In 1984, she was re-elected to a second 4-year term of office.

In 1986, the Sisters voted to formally change the name of their Motherhouse to “Queen of Heaven Monastery.” Such a change in name was encouraged by the Federation of St. Scholastica after its 1986 General Chapter because “monastery” more aptly describes the place where Benedictines live.

On May 6, 1989, Sister Barbara Pavlik was elected to succeed Sister Agnes. She was installed as the fourth Prioress of Queen of Heaven Monastery on June 3, 1989. In 1993, she was re-elected to a second 4-year term of office.



In 1997, Sister Margaret Mary Schima was elected by the Monastery Chapter to serve again as Prioress. Sister was re-elected in 2001, 2005, and again in 2009 Under her leadership, the Sisters strove to respond to the needs of the Church today, as they live out their Benedictine charism “to seek God in cenobitic life, prayer and ministry.” They praise God daily in the Divine Liturgy and the Liturgical hours of Matins and Vespers celebrated according to the Byzantine Rite. They pray especially for the needs of the Church, for their families, friends, and benefactors, as well as for the needs of all who ask for their prayers.

The Sisters were and have been engaged in various levels of educational work, hospital services, child care, pastoral care, parish ministry, retreat work, office work, and domestic service. In whatever ministries they chose to serve, they strove to integrate contemplative living and active ministry on behalf of others.

Their prayerful monastic life overflows into loving service to others. The Sisters have ministered in various Byzantine Catholic parishes in the states of Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. At present Sister Marion Dobos is the director of the Pittsburgh Archeparchy's Office of Religious Education and Pastoral Field Formation at SS Cyril & Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary. And Sister Barbara Pavlik stays involved in pastoral ministry and education at St. Peter and Paul Byzantine's parish.

As their contribution to church unity, the Sisters give special attention to promoting knowledge and appreciation of the riches of the Eastern Christian Churches. They belong to and participate in the programs of the Saint John Chrysostom Society, a group that works for understanding and unity among the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. They also participate in the Oriental Lumen Conferences. They have welcomed people to their monastery home to pray the beautiful, Matins, Vespers, and Divine Liturgy of the Byzantine Catholic Church in their icon-adorned chapel. They sponsor Spirituality Days, open to the public, in which presentations on timely topics enrich all who attend. The monastery provided an environment of beauty and peace for persons needing time and space to experience Christ's healing presence.

A group of Oblates, both men and women, are attached to Queen of Heaven Monastery in order to promote their own spiritual growth by living according to the Rule of St. Benedict as their particular life circumstances permit. They held meetings on a monthly basis.

Another group, the St. Benedict Auxiliary, had generously assisted the Sisters over the years by sponsoring fund-raising projects for many of the furnishings needed in the Monastery. They also share in the spiritual life of the Sisters.

Wherever they serve and in whatever capacity they minister, the life of the Sisters centers on the desire, expressed in Scripture and repeated by Saint Benedict in his Rule, "that in all things, God may be glorified!"

Since 2001, the Sisters had been discerning their future as their numbers were beginning to diminish. In 2007, the Monastic Chapter voted to become a dependent monastery of Sacred Heart Monastery in Lisle, Illinois.

On October 2, 2010, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches in Rome, decreed that Queen of Heaven Monastery of the Byzantine Rite, Warren, Ohio, was officially permitted to change its independent status in order to become a dependent of Sacred Heart Monastery in Lisle, Illinois.



The Lisle Sisters unanimously agreed to grant their request. In a ritual of change of status on November 21, 2010, the seven Sisters in Warren were welcomed by Sister Judith Ann Heble, Prioress, as members of Sacred Heart Monastery, Lisle.

Sr. Glenna Smith, OSB, President, Federation of St. Scholastica and Sr. Judith Ann Heble, OSB, Prioress, Sacred Heart Monastery, Lisle, Il., were present for this change of status.



The Sisters will remain in Warren, retaining their unique Byzantine spirituality, traditions, and liturgical life, and ministering to the people of the Byzantine Church.

It was at this time in their history that they sold Queen of Heaven Monastery on Squire lane and moved into one wing (8 apartments of the 42 available) of the newly built Manor on the property of the parish of SS. Peter and Paul.



Sister Mary Bratrsovsky and Helen Jilek were present in Warren when: On June 1, 2021 the Trustees of Queen of Heaven Monastery admitted that the internal life of the community is no longer sustainable or viable and thus voted to begin the procedure for the dissolution of the Corporation of Queen of Heaven Monastery by a unanimous vote of the three trustees present. At that point they became members of Sacred Heart Monastery.

It was agreed that, if necessary, for health reasons and care, the sisters will live at Villa Maria in Pennsylvania.