

BOTH SISTERS

AND

DEACONESSES

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An historical footnote

The archives of the New York Training School for Deaconesses contain interesting material pertaining to the unusual relationship between the School and a community of Sisters. Records show the first contact to have been made 66 years ago, though the story really begins one hundred years ago when, in 1865, the Community of St. Mary was founded by the then Bishop of New York, Horatio Potter. Under the aegis of the Bishop and certain of the clergy, the five Sisters of the Community began work at St. Barnabas House, an activity of what was then known as the New York City Mission Society.

Deeply rooted in most Anglicans was a suspicion of Rome and of medieval monasticism. In England, however, stimulated by the slowly developing Oxford Movement, the value of communities of Sisters gradually gained recognition. Not so in our Episcopal Church. By and large most of our clergy and laity were willing reluctantly to yield to, at least not interfere with, those sisterhoods organized along the lines of Dr. Fliedner's deaconess communities in Kaiserwerth, Germany. But they were strongly opposed to those communities leaning toward "the papal communion." It was almost to be expected therefore that the Community of St. Mary would be frowned upon in the diocese. The distrust thus generated caused the Sisters finally to withdraw from the work at St. Barnabas House.

One of St. Mary's novices preferred to remain, resuming her lay status and continuing to work at St. Barnabas House. This was Ellen Hulme who gradually developed plans for an evangelical sisterhood. Her plans materialized when, on April 6, 1869 in St. Anne's Church, Manhattan, the Bishop of New

York (Horatio Potter) received Ellen Hulme with two others, Elizabeth Dawson and Serena as the first members of the Sisterhood of the Good Shepherd. Sister Ellen was elected the "Presiding Sister" of the small community. A Certificate of Incorporation, dated March 27, 1871, was issued to "The Sisterhood of the Good Shepherd." According to its By-Laws each Sister had a vote. Five Trustees with three officers were elected annually. For the first fifty of its fifty-three years of existence, the Presiding Sister was elected President of the Board of Trustees of the incorporated Sisterhood.

Because the Sisterhood had no motherhouse where women could be trained, an unusual policy was adopted; no additional members would be received until death or resignation created a vacancy. The new Sisterhood therefore grew very, very slowly. In spite of the slow growth an amazing number of responsibilities were taken on by the small Sisterhood, accepting room and board in the institutions where they happened to be working. At St. Barnabas House a day nursery was started. Visiting prisons was begun in 1877. Country homes for use of the poor during the summers were established. In addition to the work in the Diocese of New York, the Sisterhood undertook work in North Carolina (1878-1892) — a school for the poor and a home for old men. In Asbury Park, N. J. another school was opened in 1879 called "The House of the Good Shepherd." In 1880, they undertook to operate Christ Hospital in Jersey City. In 1887 they began work in Tennessee at the Hospital of the Good Shepherd in Nashville, Tennessee.

In 1885 the longed-for motherhouse was provided by a legacy. The Sisters at work in Manhattan took possession of 417 and 419 West 19th Street. They then relinquished the work at St. Barnabas House taking with them some orphan girls who were to

form the nucleus of a training school in the newly acquired "Sisters' House." Gradually work in six Manhattan parishes was begun. One of the six parishes was Zion and St. Timothy, 334 West 57th Street, from 1890 to 1921. (In 1922 this parish was consolidated with the present St. Matthew and St. Timothy on West 84th Street.) Sister Isabel (Perry), the last survivor of the Sisterhood, worked at Zion and St. Timothy until she left for San Diego, California, in 1920.

According to one article, the Sisterhood of the Good Shepherd had really been a "society for deaconesses." It (the Sisterhood) was given its death-blow by the official recognition of the work of deaconesses and the molding of that work in non-communal form by the General Convention of 1889 at which time the first canon on Deaconesses was adopted.

Several Bishops immediately established Orders of Deaconesses or changed existing deaconess institutions to conform to the intent of the canon.

Two years before the adoption of the Canon on Deaconesses in 1889, the Foundress of the Sisterhood of the Good Shepherd died. When her successor, Sister Adelia (Barry), died some ten years later, the community had dwindled to four Sisters, nor did there seem to be any indication that there might be a renewal of growth.

The following year, at a Special Meeting of the Trustees of the Sisterhood, on April 21, 1899, a momentous decision was reached: 1) that the Sisters become Deaconesses, and 2) that a proposal regarding the disposition of their property be laid before the Bishop (Henry Codman Potter) and the Rev. Dr. William Reed Huntington, Rector of Grace Church, Manhattan, and first Warden of the New York Training School for Deaconesses.

The decision that the Sisters become deaconesses was effectuated on St. Mark's Day 1900 when the four Sisters were set apart as Deaconesses by the Bishop of New York (Henry Codman Potter) in the crypt of the Cathedral. The Bishop celebrated the Holy Communion and Dr. Huntington preached the sermon. The newly ordered deaconesses were Sisters Ruth (Buffington), Helena (Haubold), Isabella (Perry) and Julia (Price). It is of interest to note that the Sisters did not adopt the title "Deaconess" but continued to be called "Sisters." They kept on working in their respective fields: Zion and St. Timothy Parish, Manhattan; a clothing bureau in Manhattan; management of the school established by the Sisterhood in Asbury Park, N. J., and a summer home for working girls connected with St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Philadelphia.

The proposal for the disposition of the property of the Sisterhood was presented to the Trustees of the New York Training School for Deaconesses by the Warden of the School on May 4, 1899. This proposal consisted of three statements all of which are here quoted verbatim: 1) "The property on West 19th Street (#417 and #419) would be sold and the proceeds given to the Trustees of the New York Training School for Deaconesses for the purchase of the house adjoining St. Faith's Home on East 12th Street (#226), one room being reserved for the Sisters, provided that, when that property is sold and the house on the Cathedral site is built, the amount given by the Sisters be used for the building of the Chapel of the house, to be called the 'Chapel of the Good Shepherd.'

2) "If no Chapel is to be built in connection with the house, the amount may be used for a certain part of the house, a suitable tablet being placed on the wall, in either case, to commemorate the gift.

3) "The Trustees of the Sisterhood would reserve the House of the Good Shepherd in Asbury Park and the Trust Funds for the support of the Sisters, making provision that all remaining property revert to the Trustees of the New York Training School for Deaconesses at the death of the last survivor."

After the presentation of this proposal to the Trustees of the New York Training School for Deaconesses, a "resolution of acceptance with heartfelt thanks was passed unanimously."

In February 1900 almost \$18,000 was received from the Sisterhood toward the purchase of 226 East 12th Street.

In 1909 the agreement of 1899 was amended to read "Oratory" instead of "Chapel." Parenthetically it should be noted that the commemorative tablets mentioned in the 1899 agreement were in place when the new building, "St. Faith's House," on the Cathedral Close was opened for students in 1910. The tablet commemorating the gift of the Oratory is a permanent part of the south wall of what is now a part of the Library in the Diocesan House. The brass plate on the door of Sister Isabel's room (southeast corner of the third floor) was removed when the building was undergoing renovations in 1950. It is now in the School's storeroom in the Diocesan House.

By 1920 Sister Isabel was the sole survivor of the Sisterhood. In 1921 the Trustees of the Sisterhood and the Trustees of the New York Training School for Deaconesses voted to enter into a final agreement whereby the Sisterhood would turn over to the New York Training School for Deaconesses their remaining "property, cash and securities to care for the remaining Sister Isabel (Perry) through her life; to the extent of annual stipend of \$300.00 per annum, or more if needed." A year or so before

Sister Isabel's death in 1926 in San Diego, the annual stipend had been increased to \$500.00 "to enable her to maintain her present standard of living."

In March 1922, securities (\$28,979) and cash (\$28,600) were transferred to the New York Training School for Deaconesses in the total amount of \$57,579.00 by Eva Browning, Treasurer of the Sisterhood. Sister Isabel had signed a document expressing her acquiescence.

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Total Received by the New York Training School for Deaconesses from the Sisterhood of the Good Shepherd:

February 1, 1900	\$17,654.00
March 1922	57,579.00
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	\$75,233.00

REFERENCES:

Minute Book of the Sisterhood of the Good Shepherd — 1871-1922

Reports of the Sisterhood (presented at each annual meeting from 1871 to 1899)

Minute Book of the New York Training School for Deaconesses

Vol. I 1891-1902

Vol. II 1902-1911

Vol. III 1911-1921

Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the Trustees of NYTSD, 1911-1926

New York: Journal of Convention, 1900 — p. 103

Photostat of article in Holy Cross Magazine February 1965 *The Sisters of the Good Shepherd* by William Hogue, Ph.D., Headmaster, the Tome School