**Foundation Day**

**October 1**

Today, October 1, we celebrate the 163rd anniversary of the founding of the religious community: the Sisters of Notre Dame of Coesfeld, Germany. A little bit of the story…

We begin with Hilligonde Wolbring. By the time she was seven, both of Hilligonde’s parents and a baby brother had died. This put Hilligonde into the home of an aunt and uncle and several cousins. As she grew up, she hoped to be a missionary, but the idea was discouraged by those around her. Being a missionary was too dangerous for a young woman in that day. They encouraged her to help those in need in her own town. Hilligonde decided to become a teacher. At that time, 1846, being a teacher meant going through an intense and regimented teacher preparation program that involved not only academic but also spiritual development, passing the state examination, and remaining unmarried.

When Hilligonde began to teach at a parish school, she became friends with another teacher who had been there several years, Elisabeth Kuhling. They shared not only a passion for teaching but a desire to do more for the poor and neglected children in their school. As we ourselves know, with a friend, it is easier to brainstorm ideas and plan projects. That is what they did. They decided to get a large house so they could bring in orphans and care for them.

Also at the school and parish was a young, energetic priest, Father Elting, who taught religion. After discussing their plan with him, he encouraged them to begin a religious community so their work could become permanent and grow. Father Elting connected with a community of sisters in Holland (Sisters of Notre Dame of Amersfoort, Holland) that matched the direction and spirit of Hilligonde and Elizabeth. So, sisters from Holland came and taught these young women how to be sisters, what the vows meant and how to live them.

On October 1, 1850, Hilligonde became Sr. Maria Aloysia and Elisabeth became Sr. Maria Ignatia, novices of the Sisters of Notre Dame. After a few years because of different laws, especially for teacher training, in the two countries, the group of sisters in Germany became independent from the sisters in Holland. By that time there were eleven sisters who made their vows and 22 novices. October 1 is considered Foundation Day because it was the first day of having Sisters of Notre Dame in Coesfeld, Germany.

In 1874, sisters came to the United States because the oppression of the Catholic Church in Germany meant the sisters could not function publicly. So, they came to the U.S. and first began schools in parishes where there were German immigrants. St. Peter Church in Cleveland, OH, Mother of God Church in Covington, KY, St. John Church in Delphos, OH are several of the places where the sisters opened schools right away.

Now there are about 2200 Sisters of Notre Dame in 18 countries on 5 continents, working in schools and other related ministries. Let us pray for them, their work, and their continued success.

*Good and Provident God, today as we celebrate the beginnings of the Sisters of Notre Dame of Coesfeld, Germany, we offer you praise and thanksgiving for all that the sisters have given over 163 years and continue to give. May we who share in their charism of trusting in a good and provident God, show that trust in our daily lives, also.*

*Amen.*