1. How and why did we come into existence?

"Called into being by the grace of the Spirit through Mother Alfred Moes and Father Pamfilo da Magliano"...answers this very briefly in our current CONSTITUTIONS.

Mother Alfred Moes, Maria Catherine, an educated, wealthy Luxemburger, had heard Bishop Henni of Milwaukee preach in her home land. He pleaded for women to come to America to teach the Indians. Maria Catherine and her sister Catherine responded to this call. After spending time with three different religious groups, the Moes Sisters in consultation with Father Pamfilo da Magliano, Custos Provincial of Allegany, New York, came to Joliet, Illinois, at the request of Rev. Carl Kuemin, pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish.

Father Pamfilo da Magliano, an Italian Friar teaching at St. Isidore College in Rome, met Bishop Timon of New York, at the celebration of the Proclamation of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. This Bishop pleaded with him to come to America to work with the Italian immigrants. Fr. Pamfilo spent the next twelve years of his life in the United States not only working with the Italian immigrants but also establishing St. Bonaventure's University, laying the groundwork for Provinces of Franciscan Friars, founding the Franciscan Sisters at St. Elizabeth's in Allegany, New York, and founding our Congregation as the first Franciscan Sisterhood in Illinois. Our title: Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate is the gift of our Franciscan Founder dating back to our founding date: August 2, 1665, the feast of Our Lady of Angels, (Portiuncula).
ST. FRANCIS CONVENT
520 PLAINFIELD AVENUE
JOLIET, ILLINOIS 60435

Archives

2. What was the context in which we were created?
   (A need for women religious to teach in the Midwest)
   What were the expectations of those who brought us into being?

As stated before, Mother Alfred thought she was coming to the USA to teach Indians. Between 1851, her arrival date, and our foundation in 1865, she spent time teaching in the wilderness of Wisconsin with Fr. Carl Ruehrd, then studying with the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Milwaukee, and in 1856 joining the Marianites of the Holy Cross in South Bend, Indiana. When, where, and how she came in contact with Fr. Pamfilo, we don't know, but he appointed her as the first Superior of a new Franciscan Congregation based in Joliet, IL. Although he never was able to come to Joliet in person, we have his correspondence as he guided Mother Alfred through our beginning years.

Both our Foundress and our Founder were very responsive to current needs in the church, even when these were not within what each of them had planned to do. Here in Joliet, due to a fire in St. John's Church, homeless children lived with our pioneer Sisters even before our official foundation. Soon there were students from outside of the city living with the Sisters, also. It seems that Mother Alfred knew what to do when the need arose:
3. How did we initially define ourselves; our role and mission?

In retrospect and after the research done by the recent CONSTITUTIONS committee, this is the image that emerges of our Foundress:

Article 24:

We desire to emulate the courage and wisdom of Mother Alfred Moes.
For the sake of a people in a foreign land,
    she became a missionary;
For those in need of education,
    she opened a school;
For the homeless children,
    she began an orphanage;
For those in need of nursing care,
    she founded a hospital.
With ingenuity, for the sake of those in need,
She created something where there had been nothing.

The opening statement of our annals is:

(1865)

"The Motherhouse and Novitiate of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis at Joliet, Illinois, was established in the year of Our Lord 1865 by Sister Mary Alfred Moes, under the direction of the Very Rev. Papaio da Magliano, Custos Provincial of the Friars Minor of the Province of the Immaculate Conception at Allegany, Cattaraugus County, New York, and with the approbation of His Lordship, the Rt. Rev. James Duggan, Bishop of Chicago."

Our Constitutions up until 1880 had been borrowed from the Franciscan Sisters in Allegany, New York. Our first unique Constitutions of 1880 define us this way:

"Divine Mercy has called us to a Community that has a two-fold end: The first and most important is our own sanctification; the second, the education and training of youth in parochial schools and academies. The first end is obtained by faithfully observing the simple and perpetual vows of poverty, of chastity, and of obedience, according to the Rule of the Third Order of St. Francis, as approved by his Holiness, Pope Leo X, for religious of both sexes. The second end will be obtained by observing the general rules of Christian instruction."

With teaching as the principal apostolic ministry the Sisters in every era of the Congregation, in the spirit of our Foundress continued to recognize the needs of the Church and try to care for them in their "spare time"!

Every ministry in which we have Sisters engaged today can be traced to another time in our history, although the Sisters could not devote full-time to the effort.
ST. FRANCIS CONVENT
520 PLAINFIELD AVENUE
JOLIET, ILLINOIS 60435

Archives

4. List some of the key moments or "critical incidents" in our corporate life that brought a change or new focus or upheaval or genuine success and satisfaction?

The early trauma of our history occurred in 1877 when Bishop Foley would not allow Mother Alfred to continue as a member of the Joliet Congregation. At that time the Sisters were given 10 days to decide: Each member was given the option to remain as a Joliet Franciscan Sister or to join Mother Alfred and become a member of the new Franciscan Congregation formed in Rochester, Minnesota. At that time 92 remained with the Joliet group and 25 formed the new community. Under Mother Francis Shanahan's leadership and careful placement of the Sisters, the Congregation continued. The Congregation experienced death of young members, teen-agers, twenty and thirty year old Sisters often in its early days. Tuberculosis, yellow fever, typhoid fever, diptheria, pneumonia were common causes of death.

Another "critical incident that we sometimes overlook was the "closing" of St. Francis Academy in June, 1904. The Sisters realized that space-wise and faculty-wise they could not continue on a full scale at that point. The Art and Music students were continued if they were residents of the area. Normal School for the Sisters, Novices, Postulants, and Aspirants was given full rein with the hope of training excellent teachers for all the schools and for the re-opening of St. Francis Academy. The Taylor Wing was added to the Motherhouse and full classes resumed in Sept., 1915.

Chronologically the 1901 Polish Separation did occur before the closing of the Academy, but it took many years for the Church authority to bring the situation to a peaceful conclusion. Since this Separation did not include the Foundress or nearly as many Sisters, the trauma was not nearly as severe. The racial conflicts were deeply felt, especially by the Sisters of Polish origin who remained in the Joliet community.

The Great Depression of 1929 seemed to have a greater effect on the living situation of the Sisters than did either of the World Wars. The struggle to retain the land we had in Joliet and to eventually pay off the mortgages on the buildings was one of the greatest challenges the Sisters faced in the course of our history.

Our Congregation rallied through two separations and the threat of a third separation in the 1960’s. With the struggle of renewal and adaptation as mandated by Vatican II came polarization. Time and patience have brought us to a new understanding of diversity in the Congregation.