

A Dream Becomes a Reality

Assumption College for Sisters Educates Women for Worldwide Service

During the past 10 years, 242 students from 22 countries and five continents, representing 32 religious communities, have studied at this unique New Jersey college

Joseph Spring, SCC

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Assumption College for Sisters (ACS) in Mendham, New Jersey, began with a dream, the dream of a German noblewoman named Pauline von Mallinckrodt, foundress of the Sisters of Christian Charity. Her dream—to assist in the spread of the Kingdom—has become a reality in many ways at ACS, especially today as it seeks to educate women religious from around the world.

Comparatively young among institutions of higher learning, the college has roots that reach back more than a century and a half. Only four years after founding the Sisters of Christian Charity (SCC), Mother Pauline established a Normal School for teachers

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in 1853 within the motherhouse in Paderborn, Germany. Mother Pauline required her young sisters to become as qualified professionally as their contemporary lay counterparts. Simultaneously intent on their religious formation, she provided for an integrated program of spiritual, intellectual and cultural development.

Her new community flourished; however, 20 years after its inception, Germany experienced the “Kulturkampf” under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. It was a time of religious persecution and political unrest. Forced to choose between secularization or the loss of nearly 20 institutions, Mother Pauline, faithful and insightful, accepted the latter. With unwavering trust in divine providence, she responded to the needs of the church across the sea in the Americas.

Her congregation, suppressed in its native land, attracted many young women in the New World where it took firm root. Hardships were numerous, but Mother Pauline retained her commitment to a holistic education of the young sisters. By 1873, the new motherhouse in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, housed the Mallinckrodt Normal School, affiliated with the Bloomsburg Normal School (today Bloomsburg University).

The Normal School, later transferred with the motherhouse to Wilmette, Illinois, developed into an accredited two-year college in 1923. Rapid growth of the Sisters of Christian Charity in North America resulted in the creation of the Eastern Province, which established a second motherhouse in Mendham, New Jersey. The sisters immediately integrated the academic development of the young postulants and novices with their religious formation. Seton Hall College (now University) allowed the sisters to function as an extension of its institution, a situation that continued until 1953.

Encouraged by Seton Hall, the Society of the Sisters of Christian Charity of New Jersey, under provision of its charter of incorporation, replaced the extension with Assumption Junior College, approved by the state in 1953. In 1961, this institution, newly named Assumption College for Sisters, was incorporated as a separate legal entity, authorized to confer appropriate academic degrees on women religious and those in the program of religious formation. The college remains the embodiment of the heritage received from Blessed Pauline von Mallinckrodt, her dream fulfilled. It witnesses to her conviction that sisters should be well prepared, spiri-

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tually and professionally, to spread the Kingdom of God through sound education, from which, in her words, "flows the temporal and eternal welfare of the individual and of society." As a sister-formation college, it is the only one of its kind in the United States.

Fully Accredited

First accredited by Middle States Commission on Higher Education in 1965, ACS continues to hold that accreditation, last awarded in 2005 for 10 years. The college holds memberships in the New Jersey Association of Colleges and Universities, the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities and the National Catholic College Admission Association. All instructors and members of the administration, both religious and lay, hold advanced degrees. Because of the small enrollment and the unique nature of the institution, the college offers an enviable instructor-student ratio.

Assumption College for Sisters is located within Mallinckrodt Convent,

Mendham, New Jersey, which serves as the motherhouse of the North American Eastern Province of the Sisters of Christian Charity. It shares facilities with the Quellen Spiritual Center, the SCC motherhouse community, provincialate, formation ministry and development office. The overlapping of facilities and personnel, as well as the close proximity of the community of sisters, contributes to a spirit of mutual hospitality. College students and faculty benefit from the welcoming atmosphere of the motherhouse and in turn generate a spirit of youthfulness, energy and service to the resident sisters and visitors. Many sisters in residence also provide valuable one-on-one academic help for the students.

The 112-acre property provides a serene and spacious campus, ideal for recreational activities as well as for prayer and reflection. The large, beautiful motherhouse chapel is available to the students for quiet moments with God. College space includes a student center, classrooms, a science laboratory, library

rooms, a computer laboratory, offices for administrators and faculty and the use of an auditorium.

The college is about 50 miles from New York City and about twice that distance from Philadelphia so ACS faculty members enrich themselves and their students through visits to museums and attendance at conventions, workshops and lectures. Administrative collaboration with neighboring colleges allows students to take advantage of resources and cultural enrichment not available at ACS.

According to the current mission statement, "Assumption College for Sisters exists primarily to educate women called to a life of consecration to God and of service to the Roman Catholic Church." It provides a value-centered, two-year program in theology and the liberal arts. The college welcomes women religious of any racial or ethnic background. At present, the young women in formation for the Sisters of Christian Charity are enrolled in the college along with women in



ASSUMPTION COLLEGE FOR SISTERS PHOTOS

Assumption College students have come from 22 countries.

Goals to Support a Unique Mission

- **Integrated Religious Formation:** Throughout its history, ACS has consistently maintained its focus and distinctive mission of educating women religious. By providing sound theology and philosophy courses in an atmosphere of integrity and shared vision, the administration and faculty strive to enhance the religious formation of the students within the context of their own distinctive community charisms.
- **Leadership:** ACS strives to form women who will be a light for the world and a leaven in society. Whatever form their service may take, Assumption's students need to be prepared to assume the responsibility of Christian leadership and the commitment to bring, through countercultural witness, the Gospel message to God's people.
- **Service:** Service, central to Christian discipleship, is an essential aspect of ACS. Students are expected to avail themselves of opportunities to prepare for a life of service in the church.
- **Community:** Community, founded on service and respect for each person's dignity, ranks among Assumption's most cherished values. Intrinsic to its heritage, the college strives to further the vision of Blessed Pauline and the spirit of Christian charity she imparted to her sisters.
- **Social Justice:** Growing out of a firm belief in the dignity of each person, faculty and students at ACS strive to see the face of Jesus in all. They seek ways to embrace the poor and eliminate systems of oppression worldwide.

formation from neighboring religious congregations.

Students from Five Continents

In recent years, ACS has welcomed an increasing number of women religious from African nations and Vietnam as full-time, resident students. During the past 10 years, 242 students from 22 countries and five continents, representing 32 religious communities, have studied at ACS. Although the Sisters of Christian Charity had been accustomed to sponsoring a few international students periodically since 1968, the recent increase in students from developing nations represents a new direction in the college's mission of educating women religious.

The SCCs have made a commitment to sponsor 25 international students annually, made possible through congregational resources, fund-raising activities and the generosity of many benefactors. The intercommunity, international, multicultural dimensions at ACS generate a global spirit of community among faculty and students

In addition, any woman who is seriously discerning religious life and is recommended by a vocation director or spiritual director may enroll, although she is not yet part of a religious community or a formal formation program. There is on-going dialogue between the college and the young woman applying to determine if this would be an appropriate institution in which she can discern whether or not she is called by God to religious life. A discernor is free to enroll in order to attain an AA or an ARA (Associate in Religious Arts) degree.

The optimum situation is for the discernor to live elsewhere and to commute to classes. If she needs to live on campus at the motherhouse of the Sisters of Christian Charity, she would need to visit for several days to see if she feels she can live in a structured, conventual atmosphere. The discernor is expected to pay full tuition for classes and room and board if she lives on campus. She is free to be independent and to dress casually. She is not expected to live as a religious, but she is invited to

participate in daily liturgy and daily prayers if she chooses. Currently one young woman is enrolled as a discernor and two more are in the process of applying with this status.

Assumption College for Sisters also welcomes lay persons to earn credits in theology and philosophy courses and to pursue the Certificate in Theological Studies. They are invited to audit any course and to attend workshops. Their presence is

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mutually beneficial to all members of the college community. By opening its doors to them, ACS deepens its commitment to the education of those who serve the church through ministry. The presence of lay students in classes is another source of diversity that strengthens the college. The witness of their deep faith and the sharing of experiences inspire both students and faculty.

The students' well-balanced life of prayer, study, work and recreation in community accounts for their goal-centered and characteristically joyful approach to life. Years of experience evidence the supportive influence of the liberal arts curriculum, with theology and philosophy as its crux, on the broader program of the sister-student's religious formation.

A student's credit load harmonizes

with her stage of religious formation as required in her particular community. Some students carry only one or two courses a semester, because superiors have assigned them to participate in their community's active ministry or because they are taking non-credit classes already connected with their formation in religious life. This arrangement delays academic progress, but compensates by providing opportunities for service in the church through participation in community apostolates.

During their period of initial formation, students gain experience in the ministries of their respective communities. Such occasions offer them many opportunities to share their faith with children in local parishes, to participate actively in youth ministry, to serve the handicapped, to visit

the elderly and the imprisoned or to observe and assist professionals in the ministries of education and health care.

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The Sisters of Christian Charity believe that "as an active apostolic congregation, we embrace the mission entrusted to us by Christ: to go out to all the world and bring the Good News" (SCC Constitutions). Through the present mission and vision of Assumption College for Sisters, we have gone out to the world in a way that was never before dreamed of when our sisters began the college in 1953. Indeed, ACS not only fulfills, but surpasses Blessed Pauline's greatest dreams. ■