



Chapel of the Holy Child Jesus, New Sharon.

# A Saga of Faith Hope and Charity

BY

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Motorists passing by on Montgomery Avenue, ten miles out of Philadelphia, may not notice the sign at the entrance to Number 1341: *New Sharon Convent of the Holy Child Jesus*. They may be looking across the avenue, instead, at Rosemont College, or may be merely aware of the suburban loveliness of Philadelphia's famous Main Line. But if they do look, they will catch a glimpse of a curving drive, a grey stone house, barely showing through shrubs and trees, and the gothic roofline of a chapel. If they turn in at the gate, they will enter a vivid, self-contained world, withdrawn yet intense. Novitiates are like that, and this is a novitiate — the American novitiate of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. It is that — and more.

*New Sharon* is an odd name, and behind it lies a history. Ninety-

five years ago, a little band of Holy Child Sisters, after two years in a war-torn America, years of poverty and disappointment, were looking for a site for a permanent foundation. The Vicar General of the Diocese settled them in a one-time Quaker school in Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania, just outside of Philadelphia. "Sharon", as it was lovingly called by generations of Sisters and children, became not only a flourishing school, but also the American novitiate and Provincial house as well. But as early as the nineteen-twenties, it became apparent that sooner or later both the school and the novitiate would be better served if the noviceship should go elsewhere. Both needed more space. And so, whenever there was word of property for sale in some likely suburb, the Sisters went house-hunting for a

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New Sharon is the Provincial House for seven convents in or around Philadelphia, for two in Portland, Oregon, one in Pasadena, California, and one in Washington. The New York Province has its head-quarters at Westchester Avenue, Rye, N. Y.

“new Sharon”. The twenties moved into the thirties. A world at war put everything at a standstill, and no new foundation materialized.

But through those same twenties and thirties, Rosemont College, founded by the Sisters in 1921 in a suburb about ten miles from Sharon, grew and flowered. Sometimes the Sisters walked through the lovely grounds of the Johnson Estate across the street. It had a woody ravine, a pond, rustic bridges over a brook, a formal garden. The war ended. The Johnson Estate came on the market. It was purchased. In 1946, the centenary year of the Society, New Sharon changed from a dream to a reality. Its location was ideal – near enough to the college to draw on its intellectual resources; far enough away to preserve its own entity. God had been very good.

But the house – well, it was commodious and beautiful as a private mansion, but it would take a lot of squeezing to fit into it novices, postulants and professed Sisters, each needing their own separate quarters. And besides, it was out of repair, and the garden was over-run with weeds. Eventually there would have to be other buildings; but any kind of construction was out of the question in those confused post-war years. It was hard to get even the needed materials to turn the garage and stable into a noviceship. Novices and tertians drove each day from Sharon to scrub and weed. The college Sisters helped. It was hot, that summer of 1946. But gradually the attic became a postulantship, the garden-room a chapel. It was pioneer living that first

**It was Reverend Mother Foundress who specialized in cheerful laundry work, and Sister Mary Patrice is well aware of the tradition.**

THE PYLON



A July afternoon in Holy Child Garden.

year. Everyone knew that changes would come – no one guessed how soon!

First came the chapel – the Chapel of the Holy Child Jesus, small, intimate, exquisite, dedicated in 1948. It was the gift of Mr. and Mrs. John McShain, whose only daughter was then a novice. It was ready by the time she made her first vows.

Next came the Junior School, the following year. Can you imagine





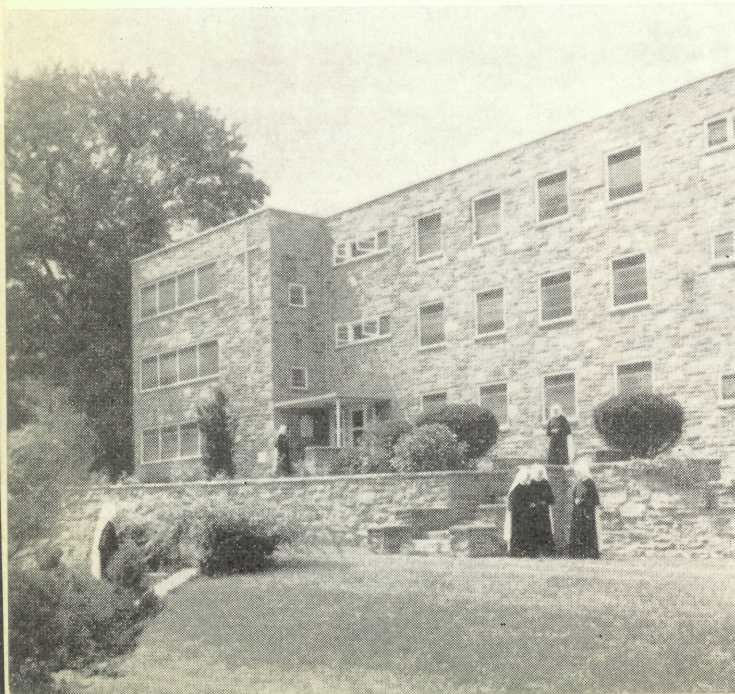
Mother St. Joseph asks her class a difficult question.

a Holy Child convent without children in it – sitting in joyous, ordered rows in pretty classrooms, spilling out onto the playground at recess, tiptoeing down the aisle of chapel for a visit? Well, New Sharon got its chorus of children's voices. God surely seemed to be

setting His seal on New Sharon. In 1949, the Castner Estate, on a corner lot across Montgomery Avenue, came up for sale. It was a spacious English Tudor house, gabled and half-timbered, set on a sloping lawn – just right for little children. School opened there that fall with a pre-school, first and second grade. Each year a grade was added. Children and parents were promised that there would be a high school by the time the first children were ready for it.

But in the meantime, the postulanship was outgrowing its attic, and the professed community, augmented to care for the new school, was

The perfect answer to another kind of question. The new Noviceship seen from Holy Child Garden.



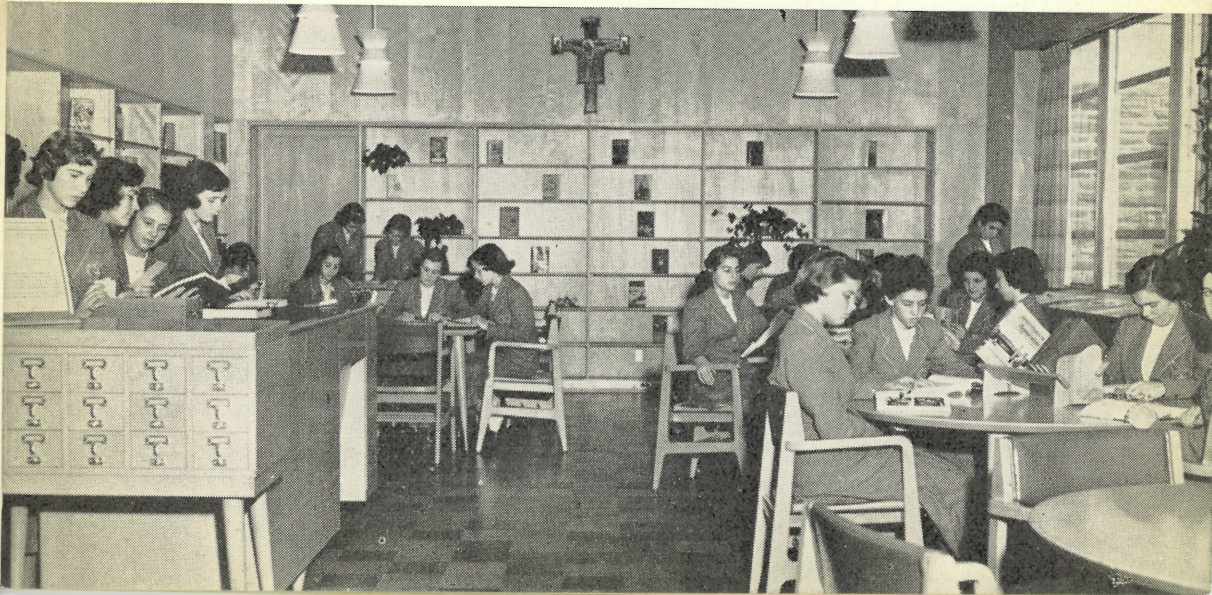
also outgrowing its quarters. The answer was a new noviceship, once more the gift of Mr. and Mrs. McShain. It was built in 1950, and there was a complicated three-way move – the novices into their new home, the postulanship into the old noviceship, the professed community spreading out into the whole of the Main Building. An addition was also built on, a small building beyond the postulanship to give more classroom space for the novices and dormitory space for the “tertians” when they came for their summers of preparation for final vows. New Sharon was taking on its permanent outlines. Almost but not quite. Those first children in the school were growing big. Soon they would be ready for their promised High school.

That came in 1956, just ten years after the opening of New Sharon. Erected at the lower end of the property, facing on Airdale Road, it was not even visible from the Main Building. The blueprints call in time for an addition, when it outgrows its present quarters. It will have its first graduation this

June, and some of its first graduates will be those tiny pioneers who climbed the steps of the Junior School, small, eager and freckled, on its opening day in 1946.

In 1956, the year the high school opened, New Sharon was given its first local superior – Rev. Mother Mary Laurentia, now Reverend Mother General, who had been novice mistress during New Sharon's first decade. Till then, Reverend Mother Provincial – Reverend Mother Mary Pauline – had acted also as local superior. Under her guidance, New Sharon had come of age. One other name is remembered, in the development of those first years – the name of Reverend Mother Mary Felix, whose dream it was. She went out of office as Provincial, having held it twenty-two years, just as New Sharon became a reality; but she lived her last years there watching it grow, rejoicing in it, watering it with her prayers. She lived to see all but the high school; yet in a sense, she is present there too. The library was furnished in her memory by Mr. and Mrs. McShain, and she looks down from the painting over the mantle-piece

One end of the beautiful High School Library where the quest for knowledge never ends.





« *Quid petis, filia mea?* »  
asks Father E. Paul Amy, S.J.  
during the Ceremony of First  
Vows.

at the girls who come and go about their school-girl tasks.

This, then, is New Sharon. Each day the morning Angelus finds the chapel filled with kneeling figures, white-veiled and black-veiled, offering their day to God.

I will go to the altar of God,  
to God who giveth joy to my youth...  
New Sharon holds the secret of perpetual youth. Coming out of chapel, kindled and fortified, they go their separate ways – the postulants to their classes, to their history and apologetics; the first year novices to their huge and hidden task of inner formation; the second year novices to their normal school courses, their mornings of practice teaching; the professed to their work in the schools and the varied activities of the House.

There is separateness yet togetherness. All are about the same business – the business of love. All are drawn by the same magnet toward

the same center. That center is the Sanctuary. Once a year that sanctuary is the setting for a beautiful ceremony – the ceremony of religious Profession.

“ *Quid petis, filia mea?* ” asks the officiating priest. “ What do you ask, my daughter? ”

“ The grace of God and admission to Holy Profession in the Society of the Holy Child Jesus . . . ”

Once again the age-old holocaust is offered. Once more young lives are flung down before God in a folly of love and praise. That is what makes New Sharon different from other houses of the Society in America, except, perhaps, for Sharon. It gets into the stones and timbers of a place – the odour of sweetness of that sacrifice. It is different, as the *Casa Madre* in Rome is different, now that the English Sisters pronounce their final vows there, different as Mayfield is different as the Chapel of the Prince



Novice mistresses keep an ever-open-door. Here, Mother Mary Esther is discussing a schedule with Sister Mary Carole.

of Peace in Ifuho is different, where the African Handmaids of the Holy Child make their own oblation.

This is the saga of New Sharon – a saga of faith, hope, and love: The faith and hope that what needs to come will come, when the work of God hinges on it; the love of a father for his daughter and for the God who chose her; the inextin-

guishable, inestimable love of God toward those who give themselves to Him. New Sharon stands for the hallmarks of the Society – Sacrifice and Joy, the legacy of Mother Foundress. In its history, its external framework, its inner meaning, it weds the contemplative and the active. It epitomizes the spirit of the Holy Child.

Second  
year  
Novices  
return  
from  
a class  
on  
teaching  
methods  
in the  
Normal  
School.

