Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes

Promoting justice, building community

1855
A discouraged Austrian missionary to Wisconsin, Father Caspar Rehrl, visits the tomb of St. Agnes in Rome. Convinced that a Christian education is one of the greatest needs of the immigrant children, he vows to establish a community of teaching sisters whom he will name the Agnes Sisters.

1864
Sister Mary Agnes Hazotte, seventeen years of age, seen as a child of destiny by Father Rehrl, is elected general superior of the struggling society. Meanwhile, Father Rehrl is absent much of the time because of his responsibilities to the mission churches under his care.

1870
Tensions exist between Father Rehrl's emphasis on apostolic action and Mother Agnes' desire for a traditional religious life. Mother Agnes meets Capuchin Father Francis Haas who affirms her convictions and counsels her to move the community to Fond du Lac.

1875
Rose McKenney, known as Sister Magdalene, entered the convent in 1866 at age twelve. Three years later, she and another sister opened St. Mary's School in Appleton. During her first year at the school, eight young Appleton women join the sisters in Barton; Sister Magdalene soon becomes ill and dies five years later in 1875. (The median age of the first fifteen sisters to die is twenty-two.)

1889
The St. Raphael Society, an organization created to aid German immigrants, invites the congregation to staff The Leo House, a house of hospitality in New York City. The congregation's growth allows it to expand its mission by accepting the invitation.

1898
Mother Agnes purchases two farms at the outskirts of Fond du Lac to provide food for the hospital and the motherhouse. The property, part of the Niagara Escarpment, also contains limestone which will prove useful in further building projects.

1896
Mother Agnes responds to requests from a group of local civic leaders to open a hospital in Fond du Lac. By 1920, the congregation extends its health care ministry to include four hospitals, a home for the aged, and a school of nursing.

1858
Gertrude Rehberg, named Sister Mary Agnes Clara, is one of the first three women to join Father Rehrl. He provides a convent in the village of Barton, Wisconsin, where the sisters receive rudimentary instruction in religious life and for teaching.

1861
Although a few other women join the sisters in Barton for a time, circumstances are so dire that even Sister Clara leaves. Only one sister remains and she is blind. Within a few weeks, Sister Clara returns and the community begins slowly to increase.

1915
The sisters are enjoying recreation at St. John the Evangelist parish in Defiance, Ohio. St. John's is the first school the sisters accepted as a mission outside Wisconsin in 1870.

1909
An astute businesswoman, Mother Agnes purchased twelve city lots for $6,300 in 1870. She used the downies of two new members from Europe to make the initial payment of $1,500. The lots extended from East Division Street to the center of Sheboygan Street and included a small frame home which became the first convent. By 1909, newly expanded, St. Agnes Convent is a stately Fond du Lac landmark.

1929
The sisters founded St. Mary's Springs Academy east of Fond du Lac in 1909, extending their ministries to include Catholic secondary education. In 1929 they add the Main Building to the campus.

1945
Four sisters arrive on the east coast of Nicaragua to assist the Capuchin friars with their mission to the Miskito Indians. The sisters are responsible for both a school and a clinic.

1936
Since Wisconsin state law prohibits them from wearing habits in the classroom, sisters were unable to complete the requirements for a teaching degree in state institutions of higher learning. The congregation responds by founding Marian College of Fond du Lac.

1969
The Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes commits to the Second Vatican Council's call to be relevant to the modern world in accordance with the spirit of their founders, the needs of modern life, and situations where they live and work. Key changes in the congregation include its governance, community living, spirituality, and dress.

1975
The congregation welcomes its first associates as they make a commitment to God within the spirit and charism of CSA. Lay women and men gather together with the sisters, collaborating as partners to further the mission of Christ and the mission of the congregation.

1985
The decision to embrace a preferential option for the poor increases a commitment to minorities as well as to underserved people in the South and Southwest.

1990
The Justice, Peace, Ecology ministry contributes to the ongoing, nonviolent transformation of the world towards peace, and ecology. CSA encourages political awareness and appropriate actions in responding to injustice of all kinds.

2002
"Oh, how I wish that the Sisters of St. Agnes might someday live on this beautiful land watered by the springs," Father Caspar Rehrl told the Barton sisters after a missionary journey to Fond du Lac. In 1898 Mother Agnes Hazotte purchased more than 400 acres of land in that same area of the Niagara Escarpment. In 2002 the sisters move into their new home and central offices on that sacred ground, the beautiful land watered by the springs.

2008
CSA sisters and associates gather on the lawn of Marian University as the congregation celebrates the 150th year of its founding.

1855 1858 1861 1864 1870 1875 1889 1896 1898 1909 1915 1929 1936 1945 1969 1975 1985 1990 2002 2008...