

A calm and undisturbed
mind and heart
are the life and health
of the body

Proverbs 14:30



The View From The Bluff

October 2017

SISTERS OF CHARITY OF OUR LADY OF MERCY

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Moments In Ministry

Hightstown Regional Catechetical Center in New Jersey



1947

Mother Loretto, Bishop Griffin, Sr. Ignatia, Sr. Michael Joseph, Sr. Mary Charles, Sr. Agatha, Sr. Marie Cecilia

February 11, 1947 – Mother Loretto Reynolds wrote to the Director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Trenton, NJ, inquiring about the possibility of the OLMs establishing a mission in the Diocese of Trenton.

February 18, 1947 – The Diocesan Director, Father Emmett Monahan, informed Mother Loretto that the Bishop of Trenton, the Most Rev. William Griffin, was interested in her proposal and suggested that she visit Trenton to discuss the particulars with him. During the visit Bishop Griffin proposed that the OLMs staff the Regional Catechetical Center in Hightstown, NJ.

March 5, 1947 - Mother Loretto informed Bishop Griffin that the OLM Council and the Bishop of Charleston, Most Rev. Emmet Walsh, approved the offer, and, that “God willing, we shall be with you in Hightstown next September.”

September 8, 1947 – Sisters Ignatia Gavaghan, Sr. Michael Joseph Niggel, Sr. M. Agatha Sloan, and Sr. Marie Cecilia Ferro arrived in Trenton. They lived with the Sisters of St. Francis at St. Michael’s Children’s Home in Hopewell, NJ, until the house being renovated for them in Hightstown was ready.

1947

September 9, 1947 - Bishop Griffin informed Mother Loretto that the sisters had arrived safely and had a car ready for them on arrival. With Sr. Michael Joseph as driver they visited the Sisters in the Regional convents of Flemington, South River and Washington to get an idea of local conditions and their work. Agatha and Marie Cecilia learned to drive in Hightstown.



Sisters Ignatia, Agatha, Michael Joseph and Marie Cecilia with their 1947 Dodge

October 6, 1947 - OLMs officially began their work in the Hightstown Center. In the mornings the sisters visited homes and prepared a census of the Catholic families in the area. In the afternoons they gave religious instruction to the Catholic children who attended public schools in Windsor, Cranbury, Roosevelt, Englishtown, Perrineville and Hightstown.

October 21, 1947 - Bishop Griffin complimented Sr. Ignatia and Sisters on their work to date. Their discovery of 159 Catholic families in Englishtown encouraged the Diocese to go ahead with plans to build a Church there.



Bishop Griffin with Sister Ignatia

1948

January 11, 1948 - Bishop Griffin dedicated the Hightstown Regional Catechetical Center Convent on Franklin Street opposite St. Anthony's Church. The Reverend Louis F. Cogan, pastor of St. Anthony's Church, welcomed the Sisters to their new home.

October 3, 1948 - The Church of Our Lady of Mercy, Englishtown, NJ, named for the OLMs, was formally dedicated by Bishop William Griffin.



BISHOP'S HOUSE
NINE HUNDRED ONE WEST STATE STREET
TRENTON 6, NEW JERSEY

October 21, 1947

Sister M. Ignatia
c/o St. Michael's Children's Home
Hopewell, New Jersey

Dear Sister Ignatia:

Thank you for sending by special messenger copy of the census of Englishtown for 1947. It is quite evident that you and the Sisters have lost no time since arriving in New Jersey. One hundred fifty-nine families to date is a rather sizeable number and certainly warrants us in going ahead with the Church for Englishtown, work on which is about to begin. I daresay that by some time next Spring we shall be having the Dedication.

In the meantime I would advise that in cases for Baptism, fixing up of marriages, etc., you and the Sisters may discover, that you bring in Father Kucker and his curate from St. Rose of Lima's, Freehold, or if the family is beyond the northeast side of Englishtown, Father Donovan and his curate from St. James, Jamesburg. Thus the spiritual foundation will be well laid for the future work there and the people in general, Protestants as well as Catholics, will see that we mean business.

I compliment you and the Sisters on this thorough work and I know from experience that it is the kind that always brings results, because it is going out among the people and their children rather than having them come in.

With a blessing on you and the Sisters, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

William A. Griffin
Bishop of Trenton

J.M.J. Gibbons

St. Michael Children's Home
Hopewell, N. J.
September 29, 1947

Dear Sister,

This is an interesting life--not a dull moment! We have spent three whole days in Englishtown and have contacted nineteen families with children that were not even on our list. For the most part they were lax Catholics but in every case except one they received us well and promised to do all we asked. Pray earnestly during the next few days that we shall be able to get the Englishtown Public School from 3:15 until 4:00 every Friday. I have contacted two of the Board and a Mr. Jerry Molony, a former teacher in the School is going to talk with the remainder. The Board meeting is to be held Monday week.

We are to begin our schedule in Hightstown on Monday, October 6. Everything has been arranged for us by Father Charles Poltarack (I think, this is his name) the assistant in Hightstown. He is a very progressive young man. He is going to teach with us also.

Tell Mother that I had a call from a Father Driscoll in the Newark Diocese. He is very anxious to get our Sisters. Most probably she has received a letter from him. He wanted to pay us for a little of our time, but I showed him how impossible it would be and besides I know that the Bishop would not hear to it. Bishop Griffin is wonderful to us! He gives us very special attention.

We have received two handsome gifts from a Mr. and Mrs. West, Hightstown parishoners. They are a silver service set for eight (Rogers) and a very nice set of dishes (open stock). The Rev. Mother and Local Mother of Plainfield, N. J. met us in Hightstown last Wednesday to talk about furnishings, etc. Afterwards we motored to their castle in the Mountains to spend our Feastday. In the evening we were guests at a musical, Daniel Endicourt famous French pianist performing.

The Glen Riddle Sisters are wonderful to us! We have every comfort and private elevator service.

Sister Agatha is driving well. We are taking the car to Trenton for 1,000 mile service tomorrow and hope to get her New Jersey license and Sister Marie Cecilia's permit. I suppose I shall learn in the spring just in time to take you for a ride. I can see your expression!!

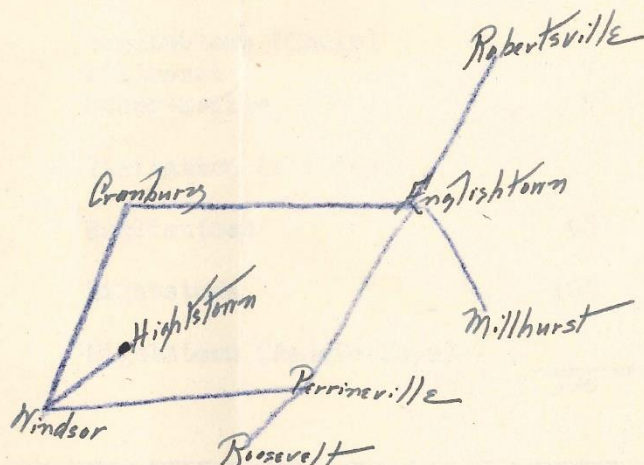
Well, Sister, I shall say bye-bye for a while. Do keep us in your good prayers. My Trio companions send their love. They are a great comfort to me--all trying to do their best.

With love and prayers, I am

Devotedly in Our Lady of Mercy,

Sister M. Ignatia

Letter from Sr. Ignatia to unknown OLM



Map draw by Sisters showing their destinations

HIGHTSTOWN REGIONAL CATECHETICAL CENTER

Established----September 8, 1947

Staffed by:

Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy
(Bishop England Foundation)
Charleston, S. C.
(four Sisters)

Stations:

Hightstown (Hightstown
(Center) (Cranbury
(Windsor
(Roosevelt

Englishtown (Englishtown
(Perrineville
(Robertsville
(Millhurst

REGIONAL CATECHETICAL PLAN

(For Catholic Public School Children in Rural Areas)

Inaugurated by the late:

Most Rev. W. A. Griffin, D. D.,
Bishop of Trenton

1. Establishment of a Regional Convent (non-Parochial)
2. Staffed by Sisters (number varying according to demand)
3. Expenses borne by the Pastors of the area being served.
4. Monthly requisition made out by the local Sister Superior; sent in to the Chancery and prorated through that office to the Pastors. (The Pastor of the main Center signs this requisition together with the local Superior)
5. Our Region covers two Parishes. Hightstown bears 59%; Englishtown, 41%.
6. The Regional Convent is directly subject to the Bishop, who employs a Rev. Director of Confraternity. They plan and issue directions.

Note:

There are eleven such centers in the diocese of Trenton.
Some cover six parishes with well over a thousand children.

<u>DAY</u>	<u>STATIONS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF CHILDREN</u>
Monday	Roosevelt	11
	Perrineville	22
Tuesday	Cranbury	42
	Windsor	16
Wednesday	Englishtown (Choir)	
	Millhurst	7
	Robertsville	9
Thursday	Visitation (all day)	
Friday	Englishtown	98
Saturday	Hightstown	101
Sunday	Hightstown (Pddie Boys)	306

Notes:

We have no released time in the schools.

The Classes are held:

Perrineville (
Robertsville (in the schools
Roosevelt (
Cranbury (
Windsor (in the homes
Millhurst (
Hightstown (
Englishtown (in Church

Pddie Boys not counted as Diocesan charges.



Rev. Louis F. Cogan, Pastor of St. Anthony's Church

J. M. J.

St. Michael Children's Home
Hopewell, N. J.
September 11, 1947

Dear Sisters,

Aren't you just a wee bit curious to know what we're doing? Guess I'll begin from the beginning! We arrived in Trenton at 6:20 A.M. (your time 5:20). Sr. Ignatia left Sr. Michael Joseph and me with the baggage while she looked for a red cap and phoned the Convent of our arrival. In the meantime we gazed in wonder at the surrounding countryside and the many beautiful high mountains. We took a cab to the Cathedral (since the Nuns were at Mass) and were in time for the 6:30 Mass. My gloves were lost en route. Reward if found! Sr. Barbara, principal of the Cathedral Grammar School (and we did have things in common) brought us to the Convent across the street where we refreshed and breakfasted. Sr. M. Cecelia and I were at the head of the table gazing down at a group of about thirty-five holy nuns. They made us feel quite at home. We met Sr. Marietta and were entertained by the school supervisor, Sr. Christine and Sr. Xavier a diabetic sister who is slowly losing her sight after many years of teaching, especially singing. She had Sr. Michael Joseph in her glory telling of a Fr. Gerald Fitzgerald who is doing wonderful work in rehabilitating priests who may have fallen by the wayside. Of course the story was repeated for our benefit. Some of you may have read his book - Letters of Fr. Page. Msgr. Crean (Crane) came to see us at 9 o'clock. We were duly impressed with him though he did remind us greatly of Fr. Burke. He stayed a short while then drove back our black 1947 Dodge, Fluid Drive (which means, for you experienced drivers, that one shifts to third gear and drives continuously without changing to first gear and then to second.) You'll understand when you have the chance of driving our car. A Trinitarian, Sister Margaret Alacoque was on her way to Hopewell to get a baby for adoption, so Sr. M. Joseph and I followed in our Dodge. The Sisters at the Orphanage greeted us very kindly and are perfectly to us. We're on the fourth floor away from everybody, have two bedrooms and a bath, a small community room which includes a table, four chairs, a floor lamp and a radio. We even rated an ironing board yesterday. What more could one ask for! We're even supplied with a bucket and have our trunks on the same floor. Our meals are taken alone in the auditorium surrounded by screens. We wash our dishes and re-set our table. I'm getting away from Sept. 8th. The Bishop met us here and had dinner with us. He is such a kindly, simple soul that we all fell in love with him. After a lovely dinner of chicken, new potatoes (each one the identical size) green peas, asparagus, carrots, plus all the trimmings and ice cream and cake, the Bishop's chauffeur drove his car to Hightstown while Sr. Michael Joseph and I followed. We saw Father Cogan, the pastor, and visited our little

convent. I shouldn't say little because there are eleven rooms and two bathrooms. The workmen are on the job but it will be some time before we can take over. In the meantime we aren't idle! We were duly impressed with the extensive yard which contains three apple trees loaded at present, a grape vine, a peach tree and some very nice shrubbery. There will be a double garage. We also drove to Englishtown which has already the property on which to build. (I'll let someone take over from here)

Lovingly in Our Lady of Mercy,

Sister M. Agatha

Chapter II

Dear Sisters,

The Church will be built in Englishtown in about a year. This is one of our districts. Some of the others are, Hightstown, the center with a Communion ^{class} of forty-five; Jamesburg, Freehold, Cranbury, Dutch Neck, Edinburg and Perrineville plus all the little towns and townships around these places. This is the reason why we may need two cars.

The Bishop is a firm believer in farm house teaching (the Church going to the people). Also the teaching of public school children on released time, etc. According to his directions, we will spend the mornings making visitations, e.g. knocking on each door in all our territory. We will have the afternoons for teaching all those whom we discovered in the morning plus the regular groups. In the evenings, I believe, will be devoted to adult convert classes. We shall be busy but happy gathering the harvest that the Lord has entrusted to our care.

The Bishop left us after giving us all possible information, help and advice. We then returned to Hopewell where we met a few more of the Glenriddle Franciscans and visited the nursery, the tiny tots department, etc. We have also seen the beautiful new library and have had recreation, and singing with the older girls. While Sister Ignatia and I visited Flemington to get tips from the Loretto sisters at that Catechetical Center, Sister Agatha and Sr. Michael Joseph got the tips from the Hopewell Center. The Loretto Sisters are having a housekeeper this year making five Sisters their quota. They were very kind to us. They remembered Mother Loretto and Sister Mary Charles (the little Sister with the BIG brown eyes) and hope to see them again at our dedication. That will be a big event indeed. The Loretto Sisters had about fifty religious, not to mention the number of people at their dedication last year.

I'll let Sister Michael Joseph, our driving professor, continue with the news. Please write to us or we will scold the mailman for not bringing us a letter.

With love and prayers,

Sister Marie Cecilia

CHAPTER III

Dear Sisters,

After reading the previous chapters, I discovered my new title, "Driving Prof", and it seems to me that all that has not be related is that Sister Mary Agatha can now drive the Jersey Limousine backwards.

With love and prayers,

CHAPTER IV

Dear Sisters,

The O. L. M. quartet is enjoying the Jersey scenery everyday in its beautiful Fluid Drive 1947 Dodge. Of course these trips have been arranged by His Excellency (everyone uses this title) for us.

Sister Michael Joseph is a very careful chauffeur and Sister Agatha is rapidly becoming qualified.

We shall make our first appearance on Sunday— Sisters Agatha and Michael Joseph in Perrineville at the nine o'clock Mass and Sister Marie Cecilia and I in Hightstown at the nine thirty Mass.

Next week will be taken up in setting up centers and making a schedule, etc. We expect to begin work about the twenty-second--at the latest October 1. The mornings shall be taken up in social service work (visiting homes) and the afternoons in catechising.

Everyone tells us that we are in a well-to-do Irish farming section (truck farming) and that we shall be well treated. Father Cogan, the pastor, seems pleased and I know the Bishop is happy!

Please pray that we realize to the fullest these bounties, and that we are able to keep up to the task before us.

Lovingly in Our Lady of Mercy,

Sister M. Ignatia

P. S.--Pass this letter on to the other missions, please.



Hightstown Regional Catechetical Center Convent on Franklin Street

1949

October 23, 1949 - The OLMs participated in the Tenth Annual Mission Sunday Celebration held in St. Mary's Cathedral, Trenton, NJ. Two little girls dressed in the OLM habit joined the procession of school children representing the religious communities of men and women working in the Diocese.



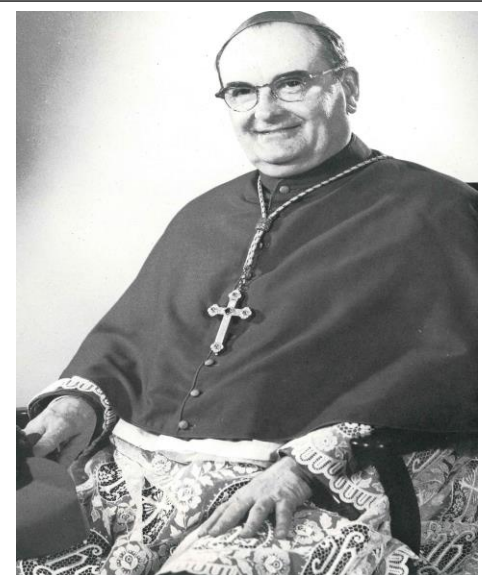


Mission Sunday Children dressed in habits of religious orders. Can you find the OLMs?

1950

January 1, 1950 - Bishop William Griffin, Bishop of Trenton, died. His successor, the Most Reverend George W. Ahr, was installed the seventh Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton, on March 20, 1950.

November 28, 1950 - At the invitation of Bishop Ahr, Diocesan Catechists gathered at the Cathedral High School Auditorium, Trenton. Sister Ignatia Gavaghan chaired a session entitled "Parent Catechist Organization". Sister Marie Cecilia represented Hightstown on a panel entitled "Some principles for the Successful Teaching of Religion."



Bishop Ahr

1952-1954

June 16, 1952 - Sister Mary Bernard Campbell was elected Mother General replacing Mother M. Loretto Reynolds whose term had expired.

August 1953 - Sister M. Gerald O'Brien was appointed Local Superior of the Hightstown Mission replacing Sister M. Ignatia Gavaghan whose term had expired. Sister M. Paul Hogan and Sister M. Andrew Clutterbuck were also assigned to Hightstown.

February 26 1954 - Bishop Ahr of Trenton wrote to Mother M. Bernard Campbell inviting the OLMs to provide teachers for a new parish school in Middlesex. His letter noted "the splendid work accomplished by your Sisters in the Catechetical Center at Hightstown"

March 8, 1954 - Mother M. Bernard replied that the Community was not able to accept the Bishop's invitation due to a lack of personnel. However, she held out hope that the situation might change in two years which would enable the OLMs to consider a similar proposal favorably.

1955

February 24, 1955 - Bishop Ahr presented a new proposal. He suggested that the Victory Noll Sisters who were staffing a Catechetical Center in Middlesex and whose Constitutions did not permit them to teach school, take over the Hightstown Catechetical Center and the OLMs transfer to Middlesex to staff the new school.

March 1, 1955 - Mother Mary Bernard wrote the Bishop that she was open to his proposal but needed more information before accepting it.

May 18 1955 - Bishop Ahr formally requested the OLMs be transferred from Hightstown to Our Lady of Mount Virgin Parish, Middlesex, NJ, to staff the parochial school to open in September 1955.

June 16, 1955 - Mother Mary Bernard informed Bishop Ahr that the OLM General Council approved the withdrawal of the OLMs from Hightstown and the opening of the parish school in September 1955. She also noted that Sister M. Roberta Bridgeman was appointed Local Superior and Principal of the school.

September 1955 - The transfer of the Communities was accomplished in August. We do not know the exact date of the OLM withdrawal from Hightstown. However, the Sisters arrived in Middlesex in time for the opening of the OLMV parish school in September.

March 1979 - In preparation for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Community Sister Jean Marie O'Shea, OLM, met with members of the New Jersey Planning Committee. Mrs. Angela French of Englishtown, NJ, a member of the Committee, recalled that the OLMs taught catechism in her home thirty-two years earlier. Sr. Jean Marie, who grew up and met the OLMs there, entered the Community in 1951. She was an active member of the Community until her death in 2012.





OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF TRENTON
153 NORTH WARREN STREET
TRENTON 8, NEW JERSEY

February 26, 1954

Rev. Mother Mary Bernard, Supr. Gen.
Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy
68 Legare Street
Charleston 4, South Carolina

Reverend dear Mother:

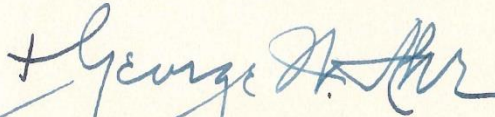
Permit me to ask that you accept this letter as a formal and most cordial invitation to send Sisters of your esteemed Community into the Diocese of Trenton to engage in teaching in a parish established two years ago, in an area of the Diocese twenty-five miles from New York City, which is experiencing a tremendous expansion. In the Spring we expect to dedicate the new Church and School which has been erected during the past year.

If you could see your way clear to supply three or four Sisters for the opening of the school in September, and additional Nuns later as the growth of the school warrants, I can assure you that we would do everything in our power to provide for their spiritual needs and to give the Sisters such comforts as your Rule permits.

Knowing full well the splendid work accomplished by your Sisters in the Catechetical Center at Hightstown, which, by the way, is but twenty miles from the parish in question, I am turning to you in this hour of need to ask your assistance. I am sure the presence of your Sisters in another convent in the Diocese would prove a source of spiritual comfort and strength to the Hightstown group.

With the fervent hope that you will find it possible to give an affirmative reply to this request, and with a blessing for you and all the Sisters, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,


Bishop of Trenton



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF TRENTON

153 NORTH WARREN STREET

TRENTON 8, NEW JERSEY

February 24, 1955

Rev. Mother Mary Bernard
Superior General
Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy
68 Legare Street
Charleston, South Carolina

Reverend dear Mother:

On February 26, 1954, I wrote to you to ask whether it would be possible for you to staff a new school which we are building in Middlesex, New Jersey, and which we hope to open in September of this year. At that time you indicated that you would be unable to undertake such a new project because of the shortage of vocations. We have since continued our efforts to obtain Sisters for this school without success.

At this time, I would like to present for your consideration a different proposal. At present, there is in Middlesex a Catechetical Center staffed by the Victory Noll Sisters. These Sisters, according to their Constitutions, do not teach school, and so, will be unavailable for that purpose. It has occurred to us here that we might solve our problem if we could arrange for the Victory Noll Sisters to take over the Hightstown Catechetical program and transfer your Sisters to Middlesex to staff the new school. We would, I think, be able to open with four Sisters; however, we would like to look forward to the possibility of adding more Sisters in succeeding years.

Before I write to Victory Noll, I would be very grateful if you would give me your frank opinion, about the possibilities of this proposal as it affects your Community, and your considered judgment as to whether you would be willing to grant permission for the transfer of your Sisters to Middlesex.

With a blessing for you and all the Sisters, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ George A. Ahl
Bishop of Trenton

Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy
68 Legare Street
Charleston, South Carolina

March 1, 1955

Most Reverend George W. Ahr, S.T.D.
153 North Warren Street
Trenton 8, New Jersey

Your Excellency:

To your letter of February 24 I have given much thought, and although I have no hesitation about the transfer of the Sisters from Hightstown to Middlesex, I do not know enough of conditions there to give unqualified approval. I desire very much to assist your Excellency in this matter, but I fear to undertake a project which might prove too much for us to handle.

As we have initiated the new Sister-Formation program of the N.C.E.A., the extended period of Sister training will necessarily delay additions to any of our institutions. If your Excellency can augment the staff of four Sisters by employing lay teachers for, say, two years, I believe the proposal can receive favorable consideration.

Begging your prayers and your blessing, I have the honor to be, Most Reverend Bishop,

Very respectfully yours in Our Lady of Mercy



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF TRENTON

153 NORTH WARREN STREET

TRENTON 8, NEW JERSEY

May 18, 1955

Rev. Mother Mary Bernard
Superior General
Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy
68 Legare Street
Charleston, South Carolina

Reverend dear Mother:

I am now in a position to give a definite reply to your letter of March 1, and your subsequent inquiry of May 3. I would therefore at this time make a definite request that the Sisters at present assigned to the Hightstown Regional Catechetical Center be transferred to Our Lady of Mount Virgin Parish, Middlesex, New Jersey, to staff the parochial school which will be ready for occupancy in September, 1955.

I think we can, in accordance with your suggestion, augment the staff of four Sisters by employing lay teachers for two years.

If you would give your approval, I could have the Pastor discuss the program and the problems in detail with the Superior, so that you could have a complete picture in time for the General Chapter which is to convene early next month.

With gratitude for your kindness, and a blessing for you and the Community, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Bishop of Trenton

J. M. J.
Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy
68 Legare Street
Charleston, South Carolina

June 16, 1955

Most Reverend George W. Ahr, D. D.
Trenton,
New Jersey.

Your Excellency:

Our new General Council gives its approval to the withdrawal of the Sisters from Hightstown and to the opening of the school in Middlesex in September 1955.

If you think it necessary for the Superior appointed to the Middlesex school, Sister M. Robert, to consult with Rev. Father Gauci and the Sister Superior of the Victory Noll Sisters, I can arrange that Sister Robert go over to Middlesex from the Catholic University in Washington some weekend during the summer session.

With grateful thanks to you for your many kindnesses to the Sisters who have been stationed in Hightstown during the past years, and with earnest prayers to God for His blessing upon you and your Diocese, I am

Sincerely in Our Lady of Mercy,

Mother General.

Autumn Prayer

God of all seasons, we thank you for Autumn.
 We thank you
 for the touch of coolness in the air that gives
 us a new burst of energy,
 for the coloring of trees that shows the
 creativity of the Divine Artist,
 for the falling leaves that reveal the strength
 of the branches,
 for the hues of fields that bring peace to our
 souls,
 for the smiles on pumpkins that bring joy to
 children,
 for the fall harvest which that brings us
 gratitude for the bounty of our land,
 for this change of seasons that reveals the
 circle of life.
 God of all seasons, as you transform the
 earth, transform us by your Spirit.

Amen

- Doug Leonhardt, S.J.

