



# THE VIEW FROM THE BLUFF

MARCH 2020

SISTERS OF CHARITY OF OUR LADY OF MERCY

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA



*Mother Mary Charles Gibson*

1958-1970



Agnes Gibson, the future Sister Mary Charles, OLM, was born on May 26, 1899 in the family home on Yonges Island, SC. She was the daughter of Charles McDonald Gibson and Margaret Sweegan Gibson in a family of three girls and four boys. Agnes attended Craft-Bennett and Meminger schools in Charleston; received her high school diploma and B.A. degree from St. Genevieve of the Pines in Asheville, NC, and earned a Masters degree from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. She taught French at Memminger High School for three years prior to her entrance into the OLM Community on February 2, 1925. Miss Gibson became Sister Mary Charles at her Reception on October 10, 1925.





1940 in Aiken: Sr. Mary Charles, Novice Mistress(center front) with Srs. deNeri Faase, Marcella Zwingmann, Helen Grobusky, Michael Joseph Nigel, Agnes Edwards, Cecilia Ferro, Alice Ferarra, Martha Woodruff, Magdalene Dwyer.

Following her Profession on September 24, 1927, she returned to the classroom. Sister Mary Charles taught at the Academy of Our Lady of Mercy (1926-29), Bishop England High School (1929-34, and 1943-52) and served as Principal of St. Angela Academy from 1952-55. She also taught educational psychology several summers at the Catholic University of America. From 1955-58 Sister Mary Charles was the Elementary School supervisor for the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Charleston. She also held many responsible positions in the OLM Community during these years. She served as Novice Mistress from 1934 to 1940. Elected to the General Council of the Congregation in 1942 she served as General Councilor, Treasurer General, and Secretary General at various times.

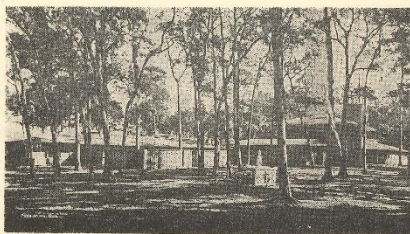
She was elected Mother General of the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy in 1958 and re-elected for a second six-year term in 1964.

The “times they were a changing” during Mother M. Charles twelve years as General Superior. Four months after her election Pope Pius XII died and was succeeded by Pope John XXIII. Vatican Council II opened in 1962 during his papacy and was concluded in 1965 by his successor Pope Paul VI (1963-1978). Bishop John Paul Hallinan, installed as Bishop of Charleston in November 1958, was succeeded by Bishop Francis Reh in 1962. When he was transferred to Rome in 1964, Bishop Ernest Leo Unterkoefler became Charleston’s Bishop and remained in office until 1990. Simultaneously the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War brought

change to many aspects of life in the USA.



*Souvenir Of The Dedication Of The New  
Generalate And Novitiate Of The  
Sisters Of Charity Of Our Lady Of Mercy*



Fort Johnson Road, James Island  
Charleston, South Carolina  
April 12, 1959

On September 1, 1958, Mother M. Charles accompanied by Sister Margaretta, Novice Mistress, and the Novices moved into the new Motherhouse on James Island. Bishop John Russell presided at its dedication on April 12, 1959, during which the newly appointed Bishop of Charleston, Most Reverend Paul Hallinan, delivered a memorable address. Early in her first term in office Mother M. Charles focused on the spiritual development of the Community. The Short Breviary was adopted in 1959 for Community morning and evening prayer. A six week program of spiritual renovation for professed members was held at St. Angela’s in Aiken, SC, during the summers of 1960 and 1961. Mother M. Charles was also dedicated to the educational development and advancement of all the members of the Community. In 1960 she was chosen as regional director of the Sister Formation Conference and served in that



Dedication of May Forest, April 12, 1959

capacity for six years. Following an assessment of OLM Junior College which indicated that its prospects for growth were slim, Mother Charles and her Council decided with regret to close the Junior College and established a Juniorate in St. Louis, Missouri. The first group of OLMs arrived there in September 1963. They lived with the Incarnate Word Sisters and attended Marillac College. In 1962 the Community sold St. Catherine's Convent in Sumter, SC, and built a new convent for the Sisters teaching in St. Anne's parochial school. In 1963 Mother M. Charles assigned two OLMs to teach in the recently established Nativity Parish School on James Island while continuing to provide Sisters for the parochial schools in South Carolina and New Jersey where they had been for years. In 1965, the Alumni Association of the Catholic University of America presented Mother M. Charles with a Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Education.

During her twelve years in office Mother M. Charles was a member of the Board of Directors of Saint Francis Xavier Hospital in Charleston, and, Divine Saviour Hospital in York, SC. In 1963 Divine Saviour Hospital opened a Nursing Home, the only catholic facility of its kind in South Carolina. Saint Francis Xavier Hospital replaced the 1926 wing with a new million dollar building. However, in 1966 the Governing Board of St. Francis Xavier Hospital announced that it was phasing out its Diploma Nursing Program and that the last class of St. Francis Nursing

## REMARKS OF MOST REV. PAUL J. HALLINAN

## DEDICATION, 1959

NOW it came to pass in those days, that there was a Dedication in the land of the people that are called Carolinians. And there was much rejoicing among all the people, seeing that it had been many weeks since any great edifice had been dedicated to the Lord. And the ancients said among themselves: "In the days of the former King it was not so -- because he encompassed the land with churches and schools of wondrous beauty. But our new King is always busy going and coming in his black chariot from the uttermost boundaries of Cheraw, unto the Setting of the sun in the territory that is called Greenville. And it has come to pass that he dedicateth very little."

AND the new King rising up made reply to the priest and elders: "Indeed verily it is true." And they, answering said to him: "Amen!" And the King opening his mouth again said unto them: "This is an exceedingly great Dedication, because it is the Motherhouse of those greatly loved by the Lord and by the people of our land. And I have heard it told how in the eighth year of the reign of the former King, the chiefs among the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy came unto the King and together they planned and built unto the Lord this glorious edifice."

AND the ancients spoke again, and said: "But it came to pass that ere the new edifice was completed, there went out from Rome a decree. And each went unto his new kingdom: the former King to Richmond into the land of the Virginians, and lo, it came to pass that the peoples of Carolina which is called South took unto themselves a new King who had come out of the wilderness in the North which is called Ohio."

SO the new King said unto his Chancellor: Let us write unto our brother, the former good King, and invite him to come out of Virginia unto our land, and let him speak unto our people again, and let us pray that he dedicateth the new Motherhouse on the Island that is called James." And the

Chancellor, answering, said: "Yes, verily, it will be good to see the face of the former King again, for he was much loved. And I his Chancellor, served him many years, and not until thou comest, did I ever suffer a broken arm."

AND the word went out over all the land, and the former King came on the appointed day, carried thence by a chariot which passed through the air with exceeding speed, from the city of Richmond even unto the place here the Ashley and the Cooper cometh together to form the sea that is called Atlantic. And there was great rejoicing, from the rising of the sun until the going down thereof, and there came together unto that place which is west of the Ashley a great multitude of people.

AND they said among themselves: "Is not this the place that is called 'the Dividing of the Parishes'?" And they passed through the land of the Tetrarch who ruleth on the Highway that is called Savannah, unto the land of the Tetrarch who governs the Island that is called James. And the chief priests and monsignors and elders were much rejoiced.

BUT in all the convents of the land there was a great coming and going because all the other communities of the Lord loved the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, and rejoiced exceedingly that their new habitation was worthy of the wonderful work that they had done for the Lord. And the people, too, came unto that place: Parthians and Medes, Charlestonians, and Columbians, and inhabitants of the Piedmont, and the parts of Carolina that lie about Sumter and Myrtle Beach, and even unto Aiken.

AND the former King spoke unto them all from the fullness of his heart, and remembered well all the kindnesses and grace and goodness of his former people, and the building was dedicated. But the new King presided, and opening his mouth, he spoke unto them as follows: "This is indeed the best and most pleasant assignment I have had in, lo, these four months."

AND behold, the rest, is written in the book of the Banner, and the scribe thereof is even now compiling all these wondrous events of the 12th day of April in the year of our Lord 1959

School would graduate in 1968. When efforts failed to affiliate the School with an institution of higher education so that graduates would receive a college degree along with their RN, Mother M. Charles and her Council agreed to close the Nursing School. Mother M. Charles was also a member of the Governing Board of the City Orphan Asylum and the Board of Catholic Charities. In this capacity she reached an agreement with the Diocese of Charleston which resulted in the sale of Orphanage building (120 Queen Street), and the relocation of the children to a new facility owned and operated by the Diocese. The Charleston Home for Children, the new Catholic orphanage, opened in the fall of 1966. The Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy provided staff for the facility until it closed in 1990.

In August 1966 Pope Paul VI issued a directive which called each religious congregation to convene a General Chapter to consider and promote its adaptation and renewal in light of the decrees of Vatican Council II. Consequently, Mother M. Charles scheduled the first OLM Extraordinary General Chapter for July 1968.



Bishop England High School Graduation speech 1962, Mother Mary Charles, Bishop Hallinan and Msgr. Bernadine

Additional sessions were held in January and August 1969. During these sessions the Committees and Commissions established to study all aspects of our lives gave reports and made suggestions for renewal. In her report to the General Chapter of Elections, June 1970, Mother Mary Charles noted their progress as well as the other significant developments which occurred during the last two years of her administration. In September 1969 the Community closed the Juniorate in St. Louis as there were only two Junior Sisters then. The Convent at 68 Legare Street was also closed that month and negotiations begun to sell the property. Simultaneously, the Community opened England House, an experiment in small group living. In

December the Council approved plans for an addition to the Motherhouse which would include an auditorium as well as offices and living quarters for the General Council. The building was ready for occupancy in June 1970. Mother Mary Charles' report also included information about the Agreement between the OLM Community and the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky, which provided for collaboration between the two communities for the next five years. Although her term as Mother General ended during the Chapter, she was elected and served as a Member of the General Council until 1976. Her last years were spent at the Motherhouse on James Island where she died on May 23, 1987. Sister Mary Charles is buried in Holy Cross Cemetery.



Demolition of 68 Legare Street, 1970

# Renewal Chapter—Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy

## Bishop's Address

## Mother Mary Charles' Address



Bishop  
Unterkoefler

Charleston — The Most Reverend Bishop Ernest L. Unterkoefler opened the Extraordinary Chapter of Affairs of the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy in the Chapel of the Legare Street Convent with the celebration of Holy Mass at 11:45 a.m.

In the Liturgy of the Word, the Bishop presented a homily exhorting the Sisters to be special witnesses of the peace for which the world hopes and the Church prays so earnestly. He mentioned the role played by Pope Paul VI in bringing the world powers to the table of negotiation, and he spoke of a new age, — when "the lion and the lamb will lie down together".

In evaluating the new role of the Sister in the modern world, the Bishop warned that old forms, will no longer satisfy the demands of today. He emphasized the fact that today's religious must continue to be public witnesses in the world, although seeking to transcend its values.

The Bishop continued his homily by encouraging the Sisters to ask themselves anew, "Why am I a religious?" He suggested a return to the Bible and to the example of the early Church. He also admonished the Sisters to build and develop a new spirit of community, — free from division and hostility. In line with this idea, he presented a few practical suggestions which would facilitate dialogue with God and with the neighbor.

In conclusion, the Bishop exhorted the Sisters to continue and deepen their devotion to the Mother of the Church, becoming neither excessive nor minimal in honoring her. He told the Sisters that as women, they had a great advantage over men, in having a human being as perfect as the Blessed Mother upon whom to model their lives.

Charleston — In the opening remarks of the convocation of the Extraordinary Chapter of the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy Reverend Mother Mary Charles stated that this was the first official and recorded Extraordinary Chapter of Affairs in the history of the Congregation. She further added "Doubtless there were total Community gatherings during the first years of our corporate existence, but history does not record them as such. Since 1949, there have been as we know six Chapters of Affairs following the Community elections but these included only Superior Delegates and non-Superior Delegates elected according to the 1949 Constitutions. Certainly, at no time, have we had the intensive and prolonged preparation which paved the way for today's meeting. Today, after more than a year of study, discussion, and Community organization we meet to carry out the directives issued by Pope Paul VI on August 6, 1966, for the implementation of the 'Perfectae Caritatis' of Vatican Council II.



Mother Mary  
Charles OLM

In discussing the principles which should guide deliberations, Mother Mary Charles, who is Mother General of the Congregation, stated: "The first overriding principle for Extraordinary Chapters seems to be freedom to blaze new trails in decision-making; the second one is that these decisions are entirely experimental, to last only until the next session of the Extraordinary Chapter or if there is none, until the next ordinary General Chapter which will be in 1970; and the third and last principle is that there should be no attempt at final Constitutions since they are necessarily dependent on Canon Law which is still in process of revision."

As a basis of definite areas to be considered during the Chapter, the Sisters were given the following recommendations or conditions to be remedied:

1. Necessity for Community Supervisor of Educational programs of Sisters.
2. Studying relationship of true liberty with false license.
3. Intensifying the spirit and practice of prayer.
4. Freeing Councilor Generals from other duties for the purpose of devoting full time to Community work.
5. Closing the "generation gap" by increased love, tolerance and understanding.
6. Developing proper balance between freedom and authority.

7. Studying every work of the Community with the spirit of our Founder in mind.

8. Reviewing all experimental procedures adopted since the Chapter of 1964.

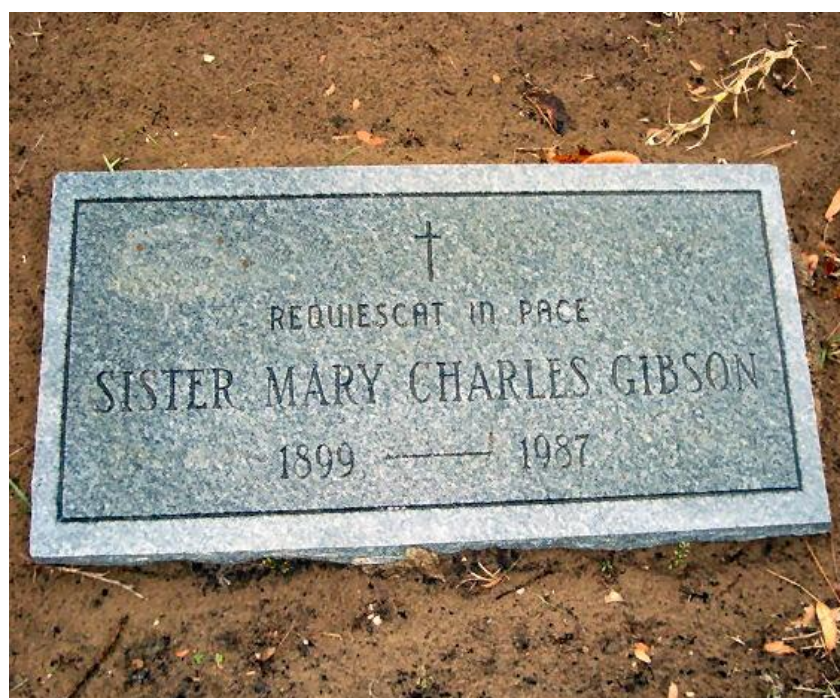
9. Studying personally, privately, intimately and together why we are Religious at all.

10. Studying the trends to discover the distinction between Religious Community and Secular Institutes.

The Sisters were reminded by Reverend Mother Mary Charles that in the solution of the above problems, they "should remember at every moment we are founded to serve the Church and to be co-workers with the Ordinary of the Diocese of Charleston and our very existence as a Religious Community depends on his authority."

THE CATHOLIC BANNER-OSV

July 14, 1968





A visit to Bishop England High School during Catholic Schools Week

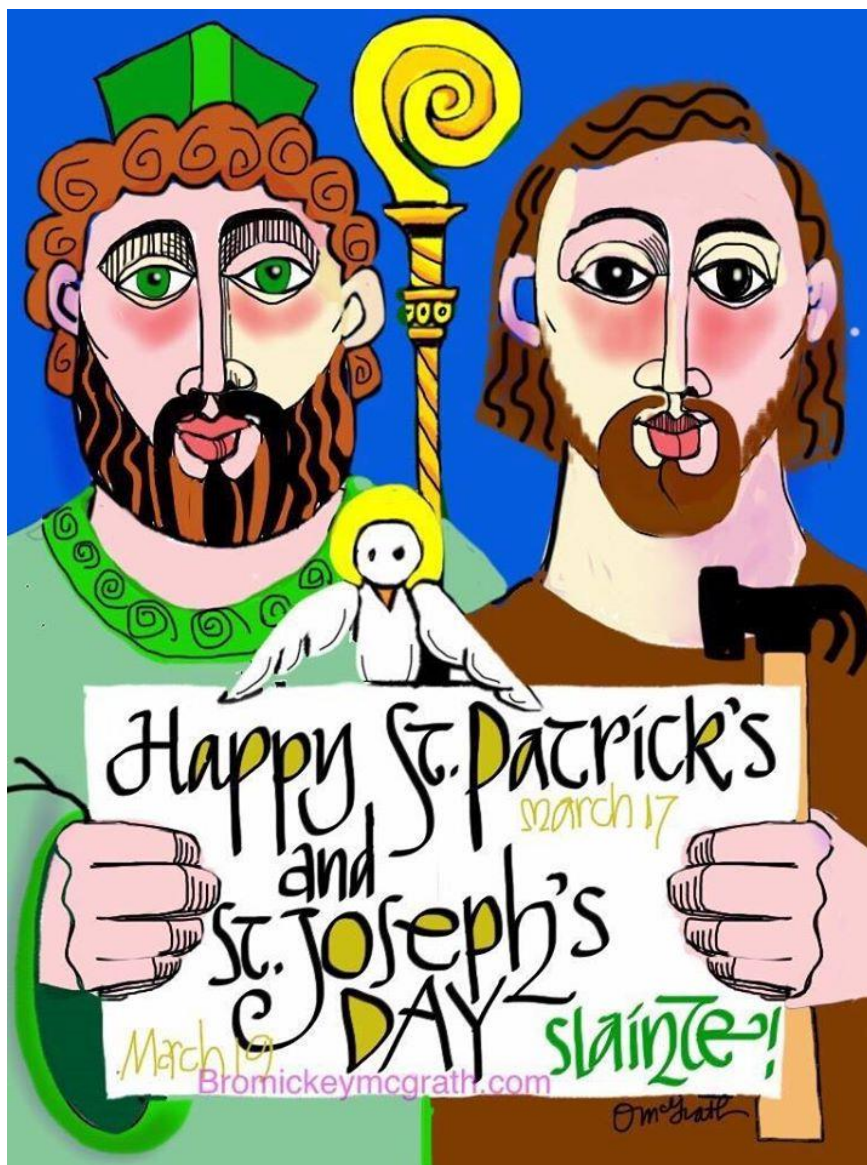


CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK 2020

## Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy

### A Visit from the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy

When Reverend ("Doc") Joseph L. O'Brien and Reverend James J. May opened Bishop England High School in 1915, they asked for the support and assistance of the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy. Three OLM sisters were on the original faculty at the founding of the school. We were blessed to have three current OLM sisters who have ties to Bishop England visit with us yesterday to celebrate vocations in conjunction with Catholic Schools' Week: Sister Mary Joseph (BEHS Class of 1960); Sister Stella Maris, who attended BEHS from 1947-49 and taught from 1970 – 74 in the science department; and Sister Anne Francis, who served as Social Studies Department Chair and teacher in 1988- 89 after a long and vibrant career as History Professor at the College of Charleston. Source: Bishop England High School webpage.



MAY YOUR troubles  
BE LESS &  
YOUR blessings  
BE MORE  
and  
NOTHING BUT  
happiness  
COME  
THROUGH YOUR DOOR.  
-irish blessing

**KEEP  
LOOKING  
UP** there may  
be a  
**RAINBOW**  
WAITING  
FOR you

**SAINT JOSEPH**  
was a just man,  
A TIRELESS WORKER,  
the upright guardian  
OF THOSE ENTRUSTED TO HIS CARE.  
**MAY HE ALWAYS**  
guard, PROTECT, and ENLIGHTEN  
FAMILIES. - ST. JPII  
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