

Daughters of Charity to withdraw from Nashville, eight other dioceses

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The Daughters of Charity, who first came to the diocese of Nashville in 1898 to establish St. Thomas Hospital, announced they will withdraw from the diocese in the fall of 2014.

The withdrawal and partial withdrawal from Nashville and eight other dioceses will allow nearly 60 members of the order's Province of St. Louise, based in St. Louis, to receive new missions serving the poor, said Belinda Davis, director of communications for the province.

It also will mean no Daughters of Charity will be serving at St. Thomas and its clinics for the first time since the order founded the hospital in 1898.

"I have spoken at length with Sister Janet Keim, our provincial councilor, and she has shared with me the prayer and concern that have gone into this decision," Dr. Mike Schatzlein, president and CEO of St. Thomas Health, wrote in a letter to employees. "The Daughters have carefully considered their history of service here in Nashville as well as the call they have to respond to unmet needs throughout the country."

He said Keim explained that many factors were involved in the decision, "including the decrease in the number of sisters available to staff ministries and their confidence that there are others who can continue the works the Daughters began here in Nashville."

"Being able to entrust the ministries to us gives the Daughters of Charity the opportunity to place the sisters where there is great need, as well as to provide sufficient numbers for their life together in each local community," Schatzlein said.

He said that over the next several months St. Thomas officials "will be exploring this transition and the ways we will keep the presence of the sisters with us in both our spirits and our daily activities."

Sr. Dinah White will continue to serve on the board of directors, he said. "We are hopeful that we will have sisters serving on our board long into the future."

In 2011, four of the five Daughters of Charity provinces in the United States unified to form the single Province of St. Louise. Since that time, the province has been studying its missions and ministries, which are spread throughout a large portion of the country, to determine where and how the 512 Daughters of the Province should be used in the future, said spokeswoman Davis.

Among the considerations were: the number of the order's members available for ministries; the ability to sustain sufficiently sized communities of members in local missions; and the readiness of lay leadership to carry on works initiated by the sisters, Davis said.

Over the years, St. Thomas Health and Ascension Health, the system of which St. Thomas is a part, have

developed mission, spirituality and formation programs for lay leaders in its hospitals to prepare them to continue the mission and social teaching of the Catholic church and the mission of the Daughters of Charity, Schatzlein wrote in his letter to employees.

"Now that this change is a reality, we must fully appreciate the remarkable gift and responsibility we have been given and strive to be worthy of the confidence placed in us by the sisters we love," he wrote. "It is a huge responsibility to carry the work forward, and we accept it with humility and determination."

The Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul were founded in Paris in 1633 by St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac. In the United States, the sisters trace their roots to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton who founded a community, then known as the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph, in Emmitsburg, Md., in 1809.

The Daughters of Charity are dedicated to serving the poorest and most abandoned in society. Among the ministries in which they serve are: social services, health care, education, prison ministry, services for immigrants, anti-human trafficking efforts, parishes and social justice issues.

The Daughters of Charity of the Province of St. Louise will continue to serve in many health care ministries and other works in 18 states, the District of Columbia and Montreal, as well as in foreign missions on every continent except Antarctica.

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