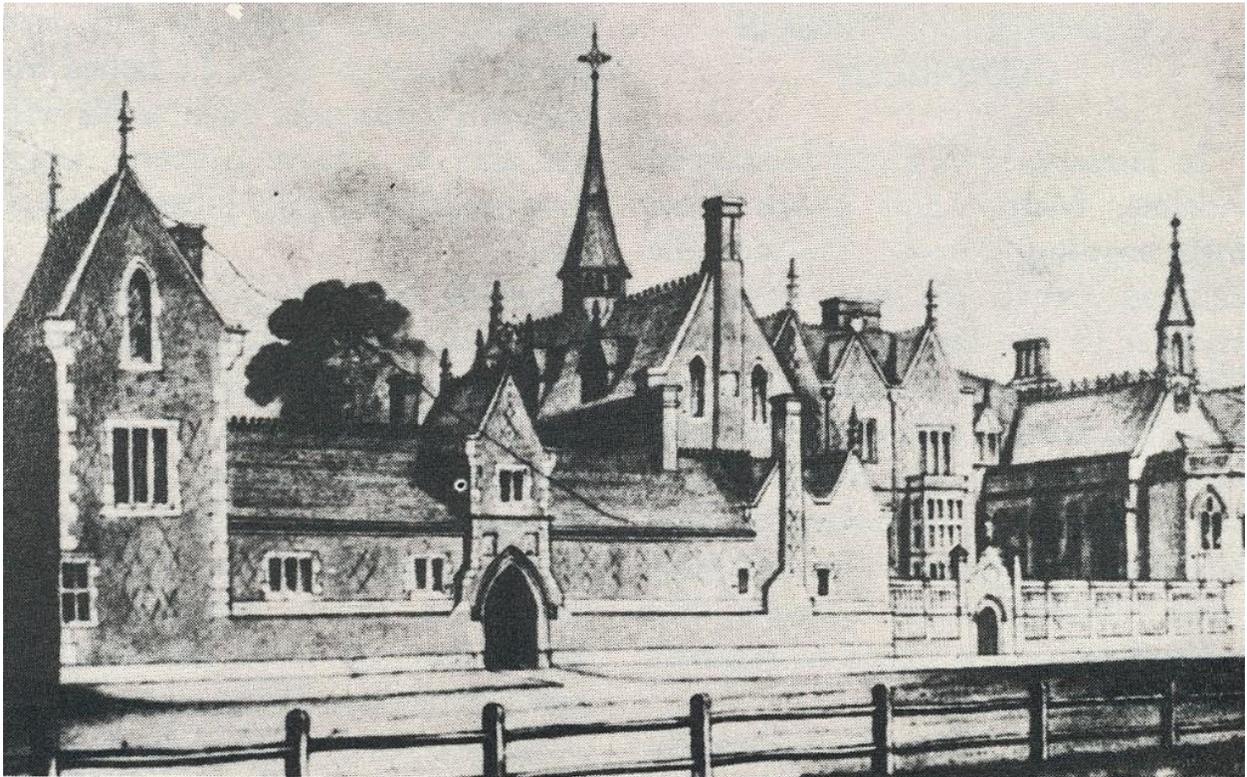


## Brief History of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus

### The Society's Founding

On October 13, 1846, at the request of Pope Gregory XVI, Cornelia Connelly began what would become an international congregation of women religious in the Catholic Church in Derby, England. Two days later, on October 15, Cornelia and three postulants assisted at their first Mass as a religious community. October 15, 1846 is formally recognized as the date of the founding of the Society. For 175 years, the Society's members have lived out Cornelia's vision to "meet the wants of the age."



*The Society of the Holy Child Jesus was founded in Derby, England, in 1846.*

Today, the Society's ministry spans four continents, where our Holy Child family lives the mission **to rejoice in God's presence and to help people believe that God lives and acts in them and in our world**. The Sisters work collaboratively with others in educational, spiritual, pastoral, social justice, and healthcare ministries. The Society's leadership resides in Rome, Italy, with Province Leadership teams in Europe, America, and Africa.

### ***Our Presence in Europe***

Given the Society of the Holy Child Jesus was founded in Europe – in Derby, England – by Cornelia Connelly, who was an American, you might say we were international – aware of the wider world – from the beginning.



*Layton Hill in Blackpool, England, the only school and convent that Cornelia was actually involved in designing and building from scratch.*

During Cornelia's lifetime, convents were established up and down England, and Sisters were sent to establish new works in France and the United States. Cornelia wanted her congregation to reflect the love and mercy of God, as they responded to whatever pressing needs they encountered. From the beginning, the Sisters were concerned for women and girls. Wherever they went, the Sisters opened schools, worked in parishes, taught factory girls in night schools, and educated women to be teachers.



*Convent of the Holy Child Jesus, St. Leonards-on-Sea. View from outside gates*

*St. Leonards-on-Sea in southern England, was Cornelia's home from 1848 until her death in 1879.*

Among those of us in Europe now, there are women from France and Germany and Switzerland, though most of us are British or Irish, and it is in England and Ireland that we have most of our communities.

Today – as we celebrate 175 years since our founding – we are a much older group of women than the Sisters were during Cornelia’s time, but the invitation that has shaped our lives remains undiminished. Whoever we meet, whatever we do, our desire is to help others grow strong in faith and live fully human lives.



*Today, the European Province centre is located at Cherwell Centre in Oxford, England.*

### ***Our Presence in the Americas***

In August of 1862, 16 years after Cornelia Connelly founded the Society of the Holy Child Jesus in England, she missioned six Sisters to America. They described their first night as one of “warfare with mosquitoes, which left their marks of victory on the faces.” A week later, in Towanda, Pennsylvania, they arrived at the “small mansion” they had been promised to establish a school and convent. Upon arriving, however, they found a rat- and spider-infested house. Nonetheless, the women persevered and opened the school within a week.



*Photo of the Sisters' first convent and school in Towanda, Pennsylvania.*

Early struggles and challenges proved to be indicative of what lay ahead. Yet, with determination, the Sisters pushed forward, and many of the laity found their spirit to be infectious. By 1879, 55 women had entered the Society.



*Photo of Holy Child Sisters enjoying a picnic in Cheyenne, Wyoming.*

After establishing schools on the East Coast, the Sisters traveled west to Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, Wyoming, and California, where they continued to open schools and live out their mission to help individuals identify and develop their God-given gifts. The Society expanded its presence to include South America, where the Sisters started ministries in Chile in 1967 and the Dominican Republic in 1995.

Currently, the Sisters, joined by Holy Child Associates, heads of schools, faculty, staff, administrators, benefactors, and friends, remain alert to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and continue to reach out with love, compassion, joy, and zeal.

### ***Our Presence in Africa***

In 1930, the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus arrived in West Africa at the invitation of Bishop Joseph Shanahan, an Irish-born priest of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. European and American Holy Child Sisters began their work in Calabar, Nigeria. Sixteen years later, our Sisters were missioned to Cape Coast in Ghana and later spread to other parts of the country. In 1992, the first Sisters of the Holy Child convent was opened in Chad.



*Sister Mary St. Henry Parker teaching at Holy Child Secondary School Marian Hill, Calabar, Nigeria, in 1966.*



*Teresa Okure, SHCJ, is the first African Sister to enter the Society of the Holy Child Jesus - African Province. Today, Sister Teresa is a well-known and distinguished theologian in the Catholic Church.*

Ninety years after arriving on the continent, the Society is represented in many communities and institutions of learning. In 1963, the first African member of the Society entered the novitiate. Every year, new candidates and novices are welcomed. The African Province now has 122 perpetually professed members, and 62 in the various stages of initial formation.

Province ministries involve mostly teaching children and young adults and the administration of educational institutions; running women's centers; providing healthcare in clinics and hospitals; and engaging in pastoral ministries, such as counselling, training spiritual directors, running retreat centers, and contributing to parish life.

As we look to the future of **Love & Serve**, the Society's priorities include supporting lifelong formation; enabling sustainable growth of ministries in the Province; undertaking capital projects to build, expand or improve schools; and providing accommodation for Sisters, including retirement facilities.



*In 2019, the Society of the Holy Child Jesus built a new school and convent in Goaso, Ghana.*