

History of DCCW in the Diocese of Springfield–Cape Girardeau

On a September evening in 1957, in the Sacred Heart parish hall, Willow Springs, at the organizational meeting, Msgr. Walter J. McGrane was appointed Diocesan Moderator to the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women by the Rt. Msgr. Clarence D. White, Moderator of the Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women of St. Louis.

The Most Reverend Charles H. Helming, first Bishop of Springfield – Cape Girardeau, addressed the delegates, giving an outline of the work of the diocesan Federation patterned after the National Council of Catholic Women and dedicated the fledgling organization to Our Lady of Good Counsel. Mrs. Gorman Greeman of Mansfield was appointed temporary chairman to preside over the election of officers. Officers elected were Mrs. Henry Meeth of Springfield; Vice President, Mrs. George Dorr, of Dexter; Secretary, Mrs. Gorman Freeman, of Mansfield; Treasurer, Mrs. Con Eldringhoff, of Springfield, Pomane and Mrs. Leo Franken, of Springfield, Publicity Chairman.

At the first annual meeting in Willow Springs, September 1958, Bishop Leo C. Byrne, then Auxiliary Bishop of the St. Louis Archdiocese, spoke to the group, inspiring them anew with the zeal of the apostles to continue this good work. At the same convention, Ms. Dorothy Willman, National Committee Chairman of Adult Education of St. Louis, spoke on "Women as Lay Apostles and their Responsibilities." The DCCW has continued through the years to have outstanding speakers to inspire its members at all the annual meetings.

In September 1958, at the annual meeting in Cape Girardeau, Bishop Helmsing was awarded the Pro Ecclesial Et. Pontifices medal to two ladies in our Diocese for their service to the Church and community: Mrs. Anna M. Hotze of Leopold and Mrs. Elizabeth Stenger of Glennonville.

In September 1961, the Diocesan Social Chairman, Mrs. Julia Opperman of Fredericktown, was appointed National Chairman of the Social Action Committee. This was a distinct honor to the Diocese, considering we were an "infant" council, having only four years in operation.

In March 1962, members of the Council were honored recipients of the St. Pius X medal. At St. Agnes Cathedral in Springfield, this medal was presented to Mrs. Henry Meeth of Springfield, the first president of the Council of Catholic Women. In the same week, in a ceremony in Cape Girardeau, this medal was presented to Mrs. Larry Nowak of Jackson, the second president of our Council; to Mrs. Teresa Gallaher of Hayti; the third president and Mrs. Julia Opperman of Fredericktown, National Chair of Social Action.

Bishop Helmsing expressed the appreciation of the Church and the Diocese to these women and commended them for their dedicated services.

In the spring of 1962, the Holy Father, Pope John XX111, announced the appointment of Bishop Helmsing to the Kansas City – St. Joseph Diocese. Shortly after that, Pope John designated Rt. Rev. Msgr. Ignatius Strecker becomes the new bishop of the Diocese. The new bishop became greatly interested in the work of the Council. He was aware of the growth and development of affiliates. (In 1987, there were 7,925 affiliates of the NCCW.)

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On February 18, 1970, his Eminence William Bernard Cardinal Baum was appointed the Diocese's third bishop.

October 22, 1973, His Eminence Bernard Cardinal Law was appointed our fourth bishop. We celebrated the 25th anniversary of becoming a diocese during his service with us. In August 1981, during the year of celebration, all the twelve past presidents of the DCCW were invited to a special dinner in their honor held in West Plains Holiday Inn. Nine of the twelve were able to be there to reminisce about their involvement in the Council of Catholic Women.

At the banquet, the then Bishop Bernard Law congratulated the DCCW and reminded those present, "God worked something new in the world, the creation of the Diocese of Springfield – Cape Girardeau." You have done your part in developing a sense of community across the 26 thousand square miles of the Diocese. Your leadership, and God, working through you, has brought this about.

Our fifth bishop, John J. Leibrecht, was appointed on October 23, 1984. He continues in the footsteps of our past bishops in his support of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women.

James Johnston Jr., our sixth bishop, has been named bishop for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Mo.

Johnston follows Bishop John Leibrecht, bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau since December 1984. Johnston was ordained and installed on March 31, 2008.

Our seventh and the present bishop, The Most Reverend Edward Rice. Pope Francis announced that Edward Rice, auxiliary bishop of St. Louis, will take over as head of the Diocese covering southern Missouri. Rice has spent the last 29 years in St. Louis.

He filled the position vacated when James Johnston Jr. left in November 2010 to take over as bishop for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

Rice was appointed auxiliary bishop in December 2010. Since his ordination in 1987, he has served as a pastor, director of Cardinal Glennon College Seminary, and other roles.

The Diocese supports the organization with funds for the annual meeting. Officers and moderator participation in national conferences and other administrative costs are also a part of the Council's budget, as are the training sessions given for the regional commission chairpersons.

Although every Catholic woman is potentially a member of the Council, individuals become active members through the affiliation of their local parish organization.