The “Good Work”: The Franciscan Sisters of Saint Mary, Mill Hill and the African American Mission in Baltimore

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2018 Arnold Prize Submission

“Water trickling from everywhere; dampness clinging to every corner of the dimly lighted dock at Locust Point, Baltimore. This is what greeted four very frightened nuns as they clung to their soggy, wet luggage on the early evening of December 27, 1881. But the clouds soon lifted as they were recognized by a good Josephite Father who had come to meet them accompanied by Mr. John T. Murphy of Baltimore…

These two good friends gave them a truly Baltimore reception, and in a few moments more they were face to face with their “mission field”- a houseful of tumbling, crowing, laughing colored babies. Straight to one of the babies went one of the Sisters. Quick as a flash she had buttoned up rebellious buttons and smoothed out uncomfortable wrinkles. “You’ll do,” was the brief but discerning comment of the young priest.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

This anecdote is from the obituary of Sister Mary Teresa, one of the first Franciscan Sisters who came to Baltimore to work in the African American community. The sisters arrived in Baltimore at a time when the American Catholic Church was struggling to determine how to minister to its African American constituents. The Church’s support of institutions for African American orphans in Baltimore provides an excellent example of the mixed motivations behind its treatment of the African American community. The ways in which the Church behaved toward its African American members was both charitable and patriarchal. The patriarchal nature of its treatment was grounded in the belief that African Americans needed white members of the church to help them in both the spiritual and temporal worlds. That attitude further extended towards the communities of women religious who managed those institutions. The story of the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore is an excellent case study with which to examine both of those relationships.

Although the Catholic Church has had a complicated relationship with the African American community from the time that Jesuits first came to Maryland in 1634, it became more complex during and directly following Reconstruction. Martin Spalding, Archbishop of Baltimore from 1864-1872, was very concerned with the plight of the newly emancipated African Americans. He believed that they were of utmost importance to the growth of the American Catholic Church.[[2]](#footnote-2) As the presiding officer of the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1866, Spalding advocated for “some well thought out and well planned measures be undertaken for the moral and religious betterment of the former slaves.”[[3]](#footnote-3) In his instructions to the attending bishops, he advocated for separate churches for African Americans and the preparation of young African American men for the priesthood. Despite Spalding’s best efforts, the bishops only gave a tacit nod to the need to minister to the African American population. In their decree, they advocated the construction of separate churches for Negroes “if the local bishop deemed it practicable and expedient.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Spalding was more successful at the Tenth Provincial Council in 1869.[[5]](#footnote-5) There, he convinced his fellow bishops to establish separate schools and churches and special collections “as far as circumstances will permit”[[6]](#footnote-6) for African Americans. He and Father Michael O’Connor,[[7]](#footnote-7) his unofficial agent in Rome, thought that this was necessary because “the general antipathy towards Blacks even among Catholics was evident in the churches” and “attempts to work with Negroes in mixed congregations often was ‘detrimental to Blacks’ because they were often neglected by the priest who preferred ‘congenial relations with whites.’”[[8]](#footnote-8) Father O’Connor recommended that Spalding reach out to the newly formed missionary society, Saint Joseph’s Society of the Sacred Heart for Foreign Missions (later known as the Mill Hill Fathers) to assist in this endeavor. He thought that they might be the answer to the American Catholic Church’s need for a separate order of religious who was devoted solely to working with African Americans.

Heeding O’Connor’s advice, Spalding contacted Father Herbert Albert Vaughan,[[9]](#footnote-9) founder of the Mill Hill Fathers.[[10]](#footnote-10) In an 1871 letter, Spalding stated, “Baltimore is the natural & most appropriate point for the mother house of any institution for the benefit of the colored people.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Convinced, Vaughan agreed to send a group of priests to the United States to minister to the newly freed African Americans.[[12]](#footnote-12) Prior to leaving for the United States, the men were required to take the “Negro Vow” in which they pledged not to do any work that would cause them to neglect their mission of working with and for the black community.[[13]](#footnote-13) This insistence on keeping to the mission of only working with the African American community fit right in with Spalding and O’Connor’s belief in separate institutions for black Catholics.

The Mill Hill Fathers were established at Saint Francis Xavier Church in Baltimore by Christmas 1871. Saint Francis Xavier Church had previously been established in 1864 as the first parish church in the United States “for the exclusive use of the colored people”[[14]](#footnote-14) and was administered by the Jesuits.[[15]](#footnote-15) Father John Slattery, perhaps the most influential and controversial of the Mill Hill Fathers, arrived in Baltimore in 1877 where he became rector of Saint Francis. It was in this capacity that he became familiar with the work of Saint Elizabeth Home and the plight of African American orphans in Baltimore City.

The origins of Saint Elizabeth’s begin with Mary Herbert, an African American Catholic and parishioner of Saint Francis Xavier Church. In 1871, Mrs. Herbert’s husband abandoned her and her disabled daughter. In order to support herself and her child, she began caring for the children of working friends and neighbors. The nursery, located in her home at 40 Cohen Alley,[[16]](#footnote-16) quickly developed into an orphanage when some of those parents failed to return for their children. At first, Mrs. Herbert told no one of what she was doing and used the income from various odd jobs to support her work. Eventually, with more than thirty children in her care, she turned to Father John Slatteryfor help. While Slattery praised her work, his church was impoverished and he could not give her any money. He did, however, give her permission to go door-to-door asking for financial aid. With that permission, Herbert approached Josephine Etting, a member of a prominent local Jewish family, for assistance.[[17]](#footnote-17)

There is some confusion as to how Miss Etting came to know about Mrs. Herbert’s work. In his history of the Franciscan Mill Hill Abbey, the Reverend C.C. Martindale, S.J. wrote that Miss Etting was Mary Herbert’s companion and that she had at first thought of the home as “a quaint negro whim.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Martindale went on to say that Miss Etting had “many eccentricities and dressed, acted, and indeed talked as much like a man as she could.”[[19]](#footnote-19) What is known about Miss Etting is that she was a member of one of Baltimore’s most eminent Jewish families. Her grandfather, Solomon Etting, was Baltimore’s first Kosher butcher and one of the first two Jews elected to Baltimore’s City Council. Her father, Samuel Etting, was a member of the First Regiment Fencibles that helped defend Fort McHenry during the War of 1812 and later was a founding member of Beth Israel, Baltimore’s first Sephardic Jewish Congregation. What can be implied about Miss Etting is that she was a precocious and determined woman. As a member of an elite Baltimore family, she could pursue her interests without fear of social repercussions. No matter how she came to know about Miss Herbert’s work, she deemed it worthy and took it upon herself to support the cause.

On January 1, 1880, Miss Etting created a subscription list for the “foregoing and most excellent work of charity deserving encouragement and support”[[20]](#footnote-20) and a number of Baltimore residents promptly contributed the annual fee of $5. Believing that a subscription list was not enough to support the orphanage and its need for a larger location, Etting reached out to James Gibbons, a known supporter of African American Catholics, who had become Archbishop of Baltimore in 1877.

Having become deeply interested in the noble efforts of a devout and unselfish woman named Mary Herbert who has at the present time, twenty-three destitute colored children under her care, I desire to procure for them a larger and more suitable home and some permanent means of support. For this purpose, I have received the generous aid of the most prominent Catholic ladies of Baltimore … to carry out this good work. I design to call a meeting of those ladies and most earnestly desire to assure them of the approval and blessing of the Most Reverend Archbishop whose interest and influence I respectfully request may be granted.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Gibbons expressed his support for her project, “I pray that God may reward you both here and hereafter for the warm interest you are taking in the poor Negro children” and even donated $5 towards the cause.[[22]](#footnote-22)

With Gibbons’ blessing and the connections afforded by her family, Etting reached out to Baltimore’s white Catholic community and called a meeting of the “most prominent Catholic ladies of Baltimore” to begin the “good work” of assisting African American orphans. The ladies that chose to attend the April 27, 1880, meeting included the granddaughter of Charles Carroll (a signer of the Constitution), a granddaughter of wealthy merchant Columbus O’Donnell, and the wife of Austin Jenkins, another wealthy merchant. At that meeting, a Board of Managers was elected, with Miss Etting as the secretary. Other officers included Miss E.L. Harper,[[23]](#footnote-23) president, Mrs. Austin Jenkins, vice president, and Mrs. Emily Hillen,[[24]](#footnote-24) treasurer. [[25]](#footnote-25) The ladies formed a governing board, elected officers, and planned the procurement of a new building for the use of the orphanage.

Of the officers, Margaret Ann Jenkins became the biggest supporter of the institution. Her husband, Austin Jenkins, was from a prominent Catholic family and was a director of numerous companies including the Baltimore Coal Company, the Baltimore Gas Light Company, and the Savings Bank of Baltimore. Mrs. Jenkins was described as:

A beautiful old lady, a typical Baltimore aristocrat whose ancestors were of the Plowdens[[26]](#footnote-26) of England. Her name was Mary Plowden. She was blessed with wealth which she was very generous in using for the interests of her church and was an ardent Catholic—a militant one! Her pity for the colored people was extraordinary and though she never spoiled them, nor advocated their being over-educated, so as to unfit them for what was so evidently their place in God’s plan, she was most tender in her solitude for their well-being and for their training to be loyal to Holy Church and creditable to their race.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Like many wealthy patrons of the time who made their fortune in real estate and other commercial ventures, the Jenkins family sometimes chose to give property rather than money to their favorite causes.[[28]](#footnote-28) In May, Mrs. Jenkins gifted a four-story home at 317 Saint Paul Street, previously owned by her husband Austin Jenkins, to be placed at the disposal of Saint Francis Xavier Parish for use as the new Saint Elizabeth Home for Colored Children.[[29]](#footnote-29) Mrs. Herbert and thirty-five children moved into the home on July 12, 1880.

Despite the new building and increased moral and financial support, the orphanage was too much for Mrs. Herbert to handle on their own. The number of residents had increased to fifty and many of them suffered from whooping cough. Mother Paul’s Diary indicates that Father Slattery and the board did what they could to support Mrs. Herbert, but their ingrained prejudice, led them to have little faith in her ability to efficiently run the institution. They did not feel that anyone of the colored race would be competent in the role. In her diary, Mother Paul recorded that:

“They visited it, directed Mary Herbert when they could and were indefatigable in working outside for it. But the Fathers and Ladies had long recognized the futility of securing anything like intelligent care of the house or the inmates thereof under the ruling of any colored woman, however reliable she might seem to be. The time had not come for that! Therefore they had so piteously begged for Sisters to come to their aid.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

An April 1881 letter from Slattery to his superior, Canon Benoit, in England, supports Mother Paul’s observation. Slattery declared that:

“The public papers secular & religious, took hold of the matter [St. Elizabeth Home] & consequently the poor women and your humble servant were so praised up that little moons, innumerable stars etc. gyrated round at least the latter… The colored woman is entirely incompetent to manage the place. In fact I believe, her elevation turned her head.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

By June of that same year, Slattery was thoroughly “put out” with Hebert. In another letter to Benoit, he wrote that “The Colored woman…is completely amuck.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

Even though he had dedicated his life and career to the advancement of African American Catholics, Slattery fell victim to the prevailing racial and gender biases of the Catholic Church and American society. That manifested in his attitude toward Mary Herbert and the other African Americans in his care, particularly women. It seems that while he believed in the African American mission, he did not have faith that African American women were capable of serving as leaders of their own institutions. This became apparent in his complicated relationship with the Oblate Sisters of Providence. The Oblates, the first black Catholic religious order in the United States, were founded in Baltimore in 1828 as an order dedicated to the education of girls of color. They ran a number of schools in Baltimore including the parish school at Saint Francis Xavier. Slattery did not feel that they were qualified to be educators since most of the sisters had only a basic grade school education. This was due to the fact that higher levels of education were closed to them because of their race. Slattery also disagreed with the type of education the Oblates offered at Saint Frances Academy. He felt that it did not suit the social situation of the school’s black students and urged the sisters to open an industrial school instead. Owing to these conflicts, he resigned as their spiritual director and began to look for another religious order to take over the parish school at Saint Francis Xavier.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Slattery consulted with Cardinal Vaughan, extant leader of the Mill Hill Missionaries and supporter of the African American mission, about the need for new management of Saint Elizabeth’s. Vaughan had recently supported the creation of the Franciscan Sisters of Saint Mary, Mill Hill, a new community of women religious that were dedicated to helping the underprivileged. Slattery thought the new order would be a perfect fit in Baltimore and asked Vaughan’s blessing to invite a contingent of Franciscan Sisters to Baltimore.

The Franciscan Sisters of Saint Mary, Mill Hill grew out of the mid nineteenth century Oxford Movement[[34]](#footnote-34) in England when many Anglican orders converted to Roman Catholicism. Mary Eliza Basil was an Anglican nun of the Society of Saint Margaret who worked in the poorest London neighborhoods when she converted to Catholicism in 1868. With the help of Father Herbert Alfred Vaughan,[[35]](#footnote-35) she became Mother Mary Francis, founded the Franciscan Sisters, and moved the order to Mill Hill, London, in 1870. In 1881, Father Vaughan “made a visitation of the work being done in Baltimore for the colored Catholics.”[[36]](#footnote-36) While there, he met with Archbishop Gibbons and Father Slattery and further discussed their need for assistance in the mission. Upon his return to England, he approached Mother Mary Francis and informed her “how dire was the need of Sisters to further their efforts for the education and instruction of the children” in Baltimore.[[37]](#footnote-37) He explained that church leaders had made personal appeals to several religious communities to take up the work but that “the prejudices against the recently emancipated negroes were far too strong to elicit any service for that race as a distinct work.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Mother Mary Francis promised him an “earnest consideration” of his appeal.[[39]](#footnote-39) She was hesitant to agree to the mission at first because she felt that her new sisters needed a solid spiritual foundation before “sending them into the Master’s Vineyard” in faraway America.[[40]](#footnote-40) After consideration, she agreed to assign four of her sisters to the American field.[[41]](#footnote-41) The sisters were to be assigned to both Saint Elizabeth Home and Saint Francis Xavier Parish School.

Once notified of Mother Mary Francis’ decision, Slattery and the Board of Managers[[42]](#footnote-42) met to discuss the future of Saint Elizabeth’s and the transition to the management by the Franciscan Sisters. They decided that the Board would continue as a governing body for the institution and would meet quarterly. They also made plans for the arrival of the Sisters. Slattery agreed to finance their arrival and to make sure that the ladies were suitably greeted and taken to their accommodations.[[43]](#footnote-43) The stage was now set for Slattery and the white Catholic establishment to take over the institution.

On December 27, 1881, Sisters Winifred Phillips (Superior), Rose Mitchell, Teresa Bartram, and Augustine Royston (lay sister) arrived in Baltimore.[[44]](#footnote-44) As mentioned in Sister Teresa’s obituary, the four sisters were greeted by Father Slattery and prominent Catholic laypeople and taken to Saint Elizabeth Home.

According to Mother Paul’s Diary, Mary Herbert had mistakenly thought that the sisters had only come to work in the Saint Francis Xavier parish school and that she would “hold undisputed sway over the main part of the house and wholly over the work for [Saint Elizabeth’s] inmates.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Because of this, she was offended when the sisters began to inspect Saint Elizabeth Home and make plans for its future. Franciscan history states that Mrs. Herbert soon left to venture west and open another house for orphaned colored children.[[46]](#footnote-46) Nothing is known about the reasons for Mrs. Herbert’s departure, but it is almost certain that she felt powerless to run the home in the face of Father Slattery, the Franciscan Sisters, and the white Catholic establishment who had taken over its administration.

Under the leadership of the Franciscan Sisters, Saint Elizabeth Home was incorporated by the city in 1882. Almost from the moment of its incorporation, Saint Elizabeth’s became a valued partner of the City and the Catholic Church in the care of African American orphans. They cared for boys and girls, no matter how young and was the only institution in Baltimore that accepted babies.

Children came to Saint Elizabeth’s Home in a variety of ways. Like other orphanages, they received children from government agencies and desperate parents and family members. Mr. George Parker, agent for the Society for the Protection of Children recounted the need for Saint Elizabeth’s in the 12th Annual Report of the Home, “I do not know what the Society I represent could or would do without the Sisters at Saint Elizabeth’s Home. They cheerfully receive from us the unattractive, forlorn bits of humanity that are tortured and left to die by heartless parents.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

What set Saint Elizabeth’s apart from other Baltimore institutions that served African Americans is that it was the only institution that would accept and care for infants. Because of this, it found itself on the receiving end of a number of foundlings. The annals are filled with stories of babies who had been deserted by their mothers. Sometimes local authorities brought those babies. Other foundlings were left at the Home by their mothers. “Some babies were found in ash barrels; many more were just placed on the doorstep, the bell furious rung, and one answering the call could still hear the clatter of flying feet as the runaway escaped recognition and left the baby to the charity of the Sisters.”[[48]](#footnote-48)

Exactly one year after its incorporation, Saint Elizabeth’s was awarded a contract by Baltimore City to provide for the care of African American foundlings and orphans.[[49]](#footnote-49)

This acknowledgement by Baltimore City government and the receipt of a contract to do business with it further solidified Saint Elizabeth’s as an important and viable Catholic institution.

The Saint Elizabeth Home benefitted from the largesse of the white Catholic community. In addition to the “most prominent Catholic ladies of Baltimore” who served on the Board of Managers, some of the City’s most preeminent Catholic men also supported the institution. A number of professional Baltimoreans volunteered their time to Saint Elizabeth’s as physicians or advisors. Many also served on the Home’s Advisory Board that was created by Cardinal Gibbons in 1908. Saint Elizabeth’s Golden Jubilee Pamphlet declared that “like the chivalrous Catholic gentlemen that they were, they rallied to the support of the Home when social prejudice, political bias, and financial difficulties would have literally wiped it out of existence.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Chief among those advisors and supporters were Charles Bonaparte and Cardinal James Gibbons. Charles Bonaparte[[51]](#footnote-51) served as the Home’s legal counsel. Bonaparte was deeply religious and was seen as “a good son of the Church.” He also was known for his support of African Americans and was sometimes called the “spokesperson for the Negro in America.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Perhaps their most important supporter, however, was Cardinal Gibbons. In addition to monetary donations, he visited the Saint Elizabeth Home almost every day on his afternoon constitutional. This very public backing was probably more important than the financial support he provided.

Despite government funding and the support of Baltimore’s Catholic elite, the Franciscan Sisters still struggled financially. This caused them to resort to begging or what they liked to call, “questing,” efforts.

Now in 1915, there is a fine wagon, bearing on it a large silver plate, with St. Elizabeth’s Home: St. Paul Street on it. More than one bakery in the city contributes weekly three hundred loaves of bread to the Institution. Regular trips are made to the terminal of Railway Stations, where the Commisariate holds over for our Sister any provisions unused on the journey; these are always of the best, and are, like the Waverly Pen, “A boom and a blessing” to the Home. Sometimes, large tins of cream and milk come, and four or five pounds of so-pronounced “real English butter” is churned from it in the Convent kitchen. Let it be written to their credit that the charity of the Baltimoreans is unsurpassed; and that the present status St. Elizabeth’s Home is in great measure due to the helping hand they have never refused it. And God blesses them for it. [[53]](#footnote-53)

The success of the questing efforts proves that the Saint Elizabeth’s Home was supported by all parts of Baltimore society, not just wealthy Catholics. The Franciscan Sisters also employed a number of creative fundraising efforts including minstrel shows, card parties, and pound parties.

Besides caring for their charges physical and spiritual wellbeing, the Franciscan Sisters were also responsible for educating them. That education was very different from the academy education provided by the Oblates of which Slattery was so critical. As he told Canon Benoit in a letter in August 1881, “What education do Colored girls need beyond that given in Industrial Schools viz: the three R’s & a trade?”[[54]](#footnote-54) Slattery’s influence held sway throughout the life of Saint Elizabeth’s. Children received little more than an elementary education. The 14th Annual Report of the institution reported that,

“On reaching a suitable age, children are required to attend class during part of each school day, where instruction is given in the subjects of an elementary curriculum.  Emphasis is also laid on the dignity of labor, and training is given in cleaning, cooking, washing, and ironing- with a view to make the children self-supporting after leaving the Home, and thus enabling them to preserve their pride and protect themselves against the pitfalls set for the unwary.”[[55]](#footnote-55)

Preparing the residents of Saint Elizabeth’s Home to be ready for domestic service was a stated purpose of the institution. Early annual reports[[56]](#footnote-56) from the institution emphasize the existence of the Industrial School affiliated with the home that provided the older girls with “more advanced training in industrial works” in order to “make good and respectable servants of them.”[[57]](#footnote-57) The Annual Report of 1900 elaborated on the type of training that the girls received. “They are taught to cook, wash and iron and do plain sewing. An industrial school is attached to our Convent on Maryland Avenue, where the older girls get a final training before going out to service.”[[58]](#footnote-58)

The practice of sending children out to service was one that had been in practice in Baltimore since the early 1800s. Records of the placement of these girls are not available, but it can be inferred from other Baltimore institutions at the time some of the circumstances around their placing out. In her study of two Baltimore orphanages for white children, Marcy Kay Wilson found that girls were placed into “Christian homes in this city and in other parts of the state.”[[59]](#footnote-59) Little is known of what type of positions were found for the girls. Most records simply noted that children had gone out to good homes and were sent into gender-appropriate employment such as mantua-making, dress-making, and domestic service.[[60]](#footnote-60) Unlike their counterparts at the white orphanages, the inhabitants of Saint Elizabeth’s, due to their race, were probably almost always sent out to be domestics.

Walker also spoke of children who were identified as “unfit for service” due to health problems. Instead of being placed out, they were transferred to other institutions that would better serve those needs. Those institutions included the Blind Asylum and the Hospital for Women.[[61]](#footnote-61) This almost certainly also happened at Saint Elizabeth’s Home. Surviving Annual Reports from 1907 through 1916 document children who left Saint Elizabeth’s and were placed in other institutions.[[62]](#footnote-62)

As a Catholic institution, inevitably some of inmates were “called” to the service of the Lord. Franciscan reaction to this calling show the racial bias that existed within the community and the established Catholic church. The Franciscan Sisters did not allow African Americans to join their sisterhood. Instead, young ladies, even those who had been raised by the sisters themselves who wished to take on the vocation, were referred to the Oblate Sisters of Providence. The first girl to do so was Teresa Cromwell.[[63]](#footnote-63) She entered the Oblates in January 1907 and received the habit on August 15, 1907, taking the name of Sister Leonarda.[[64]](#footnote-64) Oblate records show that at least four other “Saint Elizabeth girls” followed in Sister Leonarda’s footsteps.[[65]](#footnote-65) One in particular made it clear why she became an Oblate. Sister Mary of Nazareth[[66]](#footnote-66) stated in her pre-admittance interview that, “I noticed all the Colored Sisters were Oblates. I was Colored, so I wanted to be an Oblate.”[[67]](#footnote-67) The refusal of the order of the Franciscan Sisters to allow their pupils to join their community is another example of the racist attitudes of the established Catholic Church.

Like many congregations of women religious, the Franciscan Sisters of Mill Hill faced challenges to their autonomy and authority by the male hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Those challenges primarily came in the form of Father John Slattery. Father Slattery had become a very polarizing figure. He believed that the African American mission should sever its ties with England and become a distinctly American mission that only worked in the United States. That separation would involve the Franciscan Sisters and the Josephites seceding from the Archdiocese of Westminster in England. As an established member of the American Catholic hierarchy, Slattery believed that he was the perfect person to lead that work. It was said that “In his intense devotion to work among the coloured people, he wished to divide the Sisters working among them, by a clean cut, from the mother-house in Mill Hill, and practically make a new congregation of them exclusively devoted to work among the negroes in America.”[[68]](#footnote-68) Slattery, who was also leading the effort to separate the Josephites from their English leadership, wanted to make the Sisters a “sort of counterpart to the Society of Saint Joseph.”[[69]](#footnote-69)

The Franciscan Sisters were opposed to Slattery’s ploys. In an effort to preserve their decision-making autonomy, Reverend Mother Agnes travelled to the United States specifically to meet with Slattery. Cardinal Gibbons presided over the meeting where Mother Agnes asserted that the Franciscan Sisters would continue the “good work” but that she could not agree to Slattery’s terms without the approval of Cardinal Manning in London. Back in England, Cardinal Manning refused Slattery’s terms, declaring that the Franciscan Sisters would remain under the auspices of his leadership and that of the Archdiocese of Westminster.[[70]](#footnote-70) Father Slattery was not happy with this decision and from that moment forward did everything within his power to make the operations of the Franciscan Sisters and Saint Elizabeth Home difficult.

The American Catholic Church was impacted by the Progressive impulses of the twentieth century. The desire to streamline, professionalize, and make institutions efficient greatly influenced the way African American Catholics and the institutions that served them were treated by the Catholic hierarchy. In 1923, Archbishop Michael Curley[[71]](#footnote-71) formed the Bureau of Catholic Charities to consolidate the work of the multitude of charitable agencies and institutions in the Archdiocese.[[72]](#footnote-72) Three years later, the Bureau reorganized and consolidated Baltimore’s child-care institutions. As noted in a document discussing the plan, “He feels sure that there are too many institutions in Baltimore doing the same kind of work, and he wants each one to take a special phase of the Colored work, so that no two institutions will have the same work.”[[73]](#footnote-73) He chose Saint Elizabeth Home and the Franciscan Sisters to take over the care of orphans.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Due to the change in belief concerning congregate care of dependents and more assistance to struggling families, the numbers of children at Saint Elizabeth’s dropped dramatically in the decades after the consolidation of orphanages.[[75]](#footnote-75) By 1960, numbers were down in all of Baltimore’s Catholic institutions and the decision was made to consolidate all children, black and white, in Villa Maria, a new facility in Baltimore County.

The Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore no longer exist as an order of women religious. In 2001, the order, which had separated from the Franciscan Sisters of Saint Mary, Mill Hill in 1982, voted to merge with the Sisters of Saint Francis of Assisi in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. While the Sisters are no longer working with African American orphans, the legacy of the former buildings that housed Saint Elizabeth’s lives on. The former Maryland Avenue Convent, now known as the Margaret Jenkins House, houses the Women’s Housing Coalition.[[76]](#footnote-76) The Women’s Housing Coalition provides transitional housing for women in need. Right around the corner, in another building that formerly housed the orphanage, is the Saint Francis Neighborhood Center, which coordinates with community partners to provide programs and services to the residents of Reservoir Hill.[[77]](#footnote-77) The last site of Saint Elizabeth’s Home, Chestnut Hill, now serves as the Henry and Jeanette Weinberg Community Center. The Old Stone House has meeting spaces, a computer lab, and an exercise room to serve the residents in the low-income apartments in the adjacent residence.[[78]](#footnote-78) The name Saint Elizabeth’s continues in what is currently the Saint Elizabeth School, a non-public special education school that resides in a new building on the lot bordering Chestnut Hill.[[79]](#footnote-79)

The history of Saint Elizabeth Home is an excellent example of the tenuous nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and its African American constituents. While the Church provided for the spiritual and temporal care of black Catholic orphans who might otherwise have been abandoned, the care was provided with the belief that it was best coming from white Church representatives. The Church representatives, most of whom were women, also faced prejudice and discrimination because of their gender. Despite those obstacles, the good work that was accomplished by the Sisters of Saint Francis at Saint Elizabeth Home survives as a testament to their hard work and determination. As stated in Sister Mary Teresa’s obituary, “They …never wavered in their dedication which they made in a day when the millions of Negroes in this country needed friends and found few.”[[80]](#footnote-80)

1. “Pioneer Franciscan Sister Dies After Sixty Years on Negro Mission,” The Colored Harvest, Vol. XXIX, No. 5, October/November 1941, p 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Thomas Spalding, *The Premier See: A History of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 1789-1994*

   (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 189-190. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. William Francis Collopy, “Welfare and Conversion: The Catholic Church and African American Communities in the U.S. South.”(PhD diss., Texas A& M University, 2011), 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Collopy, “Welfare and Conversion.” 117 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 100. A provincial council was the meeting of all of the bishops in a province under the leadership of their archbishop. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Davis, *The History of Black Catholics*, 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jamie T. Phelps, “John T. Slattery’s Missionary Strategies.” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 7, no. 2/3 (Spring-Summer, 1998): 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Herbert Albert Vaughan (1832–1903) was from an old English family that was traditionally Catholic. His uncle, William Vaughan, was the Bishop of Plymouth. He served as [Archbishop of Westminster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archbishop_of_Westminster) from 1892 until his death, and was elevated to cardinal in 1893. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Origins of the American Josephites,” *The Josephite Harvest*, 95, no. 3 (Autumn, 1992): 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Spalding, 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In 1893 the society reorganized to form the Saint Joseph Society of the Sacred Heart, also known as the Josephite Fathers. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Origins of the American Josephites,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Spalding, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. John Thomas Scharf, *The History of Baltimore City and County from the Earliest Period to the Present Day: Including Biographical Sketches of their Representatives* (Baltimore: Lit Everts, 1881), 543-544. Saint Francis Xavier Church was purchased by the Archdiocese of Baltimore in 1863 for the use of Colored Catholics who had previously worshiped in the basement of St. Ignatius Church. This purchase was done under the leadership of Rev. Michael O’Conner, formerly Bishop of Pittsburgh, who was stationed at Loyola College. Rev. Peter Miller, SJ governed there until 1871 when the Mill Hill Fathers took over. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Cohen Alley ran south of Mulberry Street between Howard and Eutaw Streets. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Etting was born May 4, 1830 in Philadelphia and died August 4, 1914 in Baltimore. She is buried in the Gratz family plot in Philadelphia. Other family members (including her parents) are buried in the Etting family cemetery at Pennsylvania and West North Avenues in Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Reverend CC Martindale, S.J., *An Untold Tale: The Franciscan Mill Hill Abbey* (Baltimore: O’Donovan Brothers, 1943), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Sister Mary Gray, *Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore: A Brief History, 1868-1999* (Unpublished: Archives of the Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore [hereafter AFSB], Baltimore), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Josephine Etting to Archbishop Gibbons, April 12, 1880, AFSB, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Archbishop Gibbons to Josephine Etting, April 12, 1880, AFSB, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Emily Louisa Harper was the granddaughter of Charles Carroll of Carrollton. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Emily Hillen was the widow of Solomon Hillen, former mayor of Baltimore. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Sister Mary Gray, *Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore: A Brief History, 1868-1999* (Unpublished: AFSB, Baltimore), 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. B.N. *The Jesuits; Their Foundation and History*, London: Burns & Oates, 1877, 299-300. The Plowdens were an ancient Catholic family in England “which through the long dark years of persecution had faithfully kept the faith, and…and had given several of its sons to the Society of Jesus.” Chief among those sons was Father Charles Plowden, SJ. Father Plowden had been the Minister of the English College at Bruges when it was destroyed by the Belgian Government in 1773. After a time of imprisonment there, he returned to England where he practiced as a secular priest. Upon the restoration of the Catholic Church in England, he was placed in charge of the Jesuit Novitiate that was established at Hoder in 1803. In 1814, he was appointed Provincial in England and Rector of Stonyhurst College. Father Plowden was also a friend and confidant of Bishop John Carroll. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Mother Paul’s Diary, 1868-1890, page 94-5, Franciscan Sisters Folder, Josephite Archives [hereafter JA], Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Mary J. Oates, *The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Sister Mary Gray, *Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore: A Brief History, 1868-1999* (Unpublished: AFSB, Baltimore), 43-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Mother Paul’s Diary, 1868-1890, 10, Franciscan Sisters Folder, JA, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. April 28, 1881 Letter to Canon Benoit, Father John Slattery’s Copybook, page 154, JA,

    Washington, D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. June 4, 1881 Letter to Canon Benoit, Father John Slattery’s Copybook, page 154, JA, Washington D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Stephen Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The Oxford Movement. <http://www.britannica.com/event/Oxford-movement> accessed December 15, 2015. The Oxford Movement was a nineteenth-century movement that was centered at Oxford University sought a renewal of “catholic” thought and practice within the Church of England in opposition to the Protestant tendencies of the church. The argument was that the Anglican Church was by history and identity a truly “catholic” church. In their terms, “catholic” meant faithful to the teaching of the early and undivided church. John Henry Newman, a leader of the movement, along with a number of others, eventually left the Anglican Church and converted to Roman Catholicism. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Herbert Albert Vaughan (1832–1903) served as [Archbishop of Westminster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archbishop_of_Westminster) from 1892 until his death, and was elevated to the cardinal in 1893. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Mother Paul’s Diary: 1868-1890, 9. Franciscan Sisters Folder, JA, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Sister Mary Gray, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Sister Mary Gray, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Mrs. Austin Jenkins, Mrs. Tormey, Mrs. Morris, and Miss Josephine Etting [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Sister Mary Gray, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. 12th Annual Report of Saint Elizabeth’s Home, 1893, MHV995.S137R, Maryland Historical Society [hereafter MDHS], Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Baltimore City Ordinance No. 14, March 21, 1883. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Saint Elizabeth’s Home Golden Jubilee Pamphlet, Franciscan Sisters Folder, Josephite Archives, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Clarence Edward Macartney and Gordon Dorrance. *The Bonapartes in America* (Philadelphia, PA: Dorrance and Company, 1939). [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United\_States/\_Topics/history/\_Texts/MnDBIA/3\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/_Topics/history/_Texts/MnDBIA/3*.html) Bonaparte was the grandson of Jerome Bonaparte and Betsy Patterson. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Phelps, “Charles Bonaparte and Negro Suffrage in America,” 337-338. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Mother Paul’s Diary, 1868-1890, 68, Franciscan Sisters Folder, JA, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. August 10, 1881 Letter to Canon Benoit, Father John Slattery’s Copybook, page 174, JA, Washington, D.C. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. 33rd Annual Report of Saint Elizabeth’s Home, 1914, MHV995.S137R, MDHS, Baltimore, MD [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. 8th Annual Report of Saint Elizabeth’s Home, 1889, MHV995.S137R, MDHS, Baltimore, MD.; 12th Annual Report of Saint Elizabeth’s Home, 1893, MHV995.S137R, MDHS, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. 8th Annual Report of Saint Elizabeth’s Home, 1889, MHV995.S137R, MDHS, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. 19th Annual Report of Saint Elizabeth’s Home, 1900, MHV995.S137R, MDHS, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Marcy Kay Wilson, “Dear Little Living Arguments: Orphans and other Poor Children, Their Families and Orphanages, Baltimore and Liverpool, 1840-1910.” (PhD Diss., University of Maryland, 2009), 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Wilson, “Dear Little Living Arguments: Orphans and other Poor Children, Their Families and Orphanages, Baltimore and Liverpool, 1840-1910,” 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Wilson, 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Saint Elizabeth’s Home Annual Reports 1907-1916, MHV995.S137R, MDHS, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Congregation Records, RG I, Box 43, Folder 2, Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence [hereafter AOSP], Baltimore, MD. Teresa Cromwell was born on August 16, 1887 in Baltimore to non-Catholic parents. She taught at Saint Augustine (Washington DC) and Immaculate Conception (Charleston, SC). She was at the Motherhouse from 1926 until her death in 1972. Her sister, Annie Cromwell, may have also lived at Saint Elizabeth’s, because she left $100 to the Home in her will. The remainder was left to Sister Leonarda. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Sister Mary Gray, *Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore: A Brief History, 1868-1999* (Unpublished: AFSB, Baltimore), 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Sister Assisi Jackson, Congregation Records RG I, Box 108, Folder 7, AOSP, Baltimore, MD.; Sister Gemma Owens, Congregation Records, RG I, Box 68, AOSP, Baltimore, MD.; Sister Mary of Nazareth, Congregation Records, RG I, Box 46, Folder 1, AOSP, Baltimore, MD.; Sister Regis Bacon, Congregation Records, RG I, Box 107, Folder 39, AOSP, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Thelma Marie (1913-1991), Congregation Records, RG I, Box 46, Folder 1, AOSP, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Congregation Records, RG I, Box 46, Folder 1, AOSP, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Martindale, S.J., *An Untold Tale*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Martindale, S.J., 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Sister Mary Gray, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Curley succeeded Cardinal Gibbons in 1921. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Spalding,336. This move was not without controversy. President Robert Biggs and many member groups protested vehemently. Despite their protests, the change occurred. After that time, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul became “little more than a volunteer force for the implementation of decisions made in the bureau’s office.” [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. The Archbishop’s Plan. RG I, Box 18, Folder 3, AOSP, Baltimore, MD. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. The Oblate Sisters of Providence were given the responsibility of schools for African American children. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Summary of Work, Saint Elizabeth’s Home, October 1947-May 1953. (Unpublished: AFSB, Baltimore) [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Women’s Housing Coalition. http://www.womenshousing.org/ Accessed on April 5, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Saint Francis Center. http://www.stfranciscenter.org/welcome.html Accessed on April 5, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Jacques Kelly, “Chestnut Hill Renovations Affirm Its Space in the Heart of Baltimore.” *The Baltimore Sun*, January 15, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Saint Elizabeth School. www.stelizabeth-school.org Accessed on April 5, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. “Pioneer Franciscan Sister Dies After Sixty Years on Negro Mission,” The Colored Harvest, Vol. XXIX, No. 5, October/November 1941, p 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)