

*Mother Alexia Lechner O.S.B.*



Mother Alexia Lechner



Mother Walburga Saelinger

*Mother Walburga Saelinger O.S.B. Prioress*



St. Walburg Academy and Monastery, 12th Street, Covington, Kentucky



Blessed Mother statue given to the sisters by Civil War soldiers

## Moments In Our History

- 1859** (June) Sisters Josephine Buerkle, Anselma Shoenhofer and Ruperta Albert came from Erie, Pennsylvania to Covington, Kentucky, to teach the German children of St. Joseph Parish. The superior, Sister Alexia Lechner, and Sister Salesia Haas arrived August 2. Two postulants entered in 1860. One was Helen Saelinger who became Sister Walburga and later the second prioress.
- 1862** The young community acquired property on Twelfth Street and built a monastery by the end of 1862. On December 11 Bishop Aloysius Carrell, first Bishop of Covington, solemnly blessed the new St. Walburg Monastery. Twelve community members moved in that day.
- 1863** The community established St. Walburg Academy for boarders and day students.
- 1867** St. Walburg Monastery obtained a charter of incorporation required by Kentucky law.
- Sister Benedicta Berns went to Ferdinand, Indiana with three other sisters at the invitation of the Benedictine Fathers of St. Meinrad to establish a community to take charge of schools in that area. Other foundations followed. (See Foundations)
- 1869** Purchased a 38 acre farm (called Subiaco) on Horsebranch Road. Sold when community purchased Villa Madonna property.
- 1871** Began to staff St. John Orphanage, as well as the parish school. (See Schools.)
- 1889** Sister Walburga Saelinger elected "Acting Prioress." Mother Alexia given the title "Honorary Prioress" for life.
- 1890** Built a new St. Walburg Academy building on Twelfth Street.
- 1891** (December 13) Mother Alexia died on December 13.
- 1892** Mother Alexia buried in the newly purchased space in Mother of God Cemetery.
- Remains of nine sisters buried in Buena Vista Cemetery, transferred and buried alongside her in one grave.
- (August 10) Mother Walburga re-elected prioress.

# Moments In Our History

- 1893** First retreat in English for the Sisters.
- 1903** Bought the 86 acre Collins farm and residence overlooking the Ohio River (about nine miles from Covington). An academy and eventually a new motherhouse planned for the property.  
Property named Villa Madonna, placed under the patronage of Our Lady of Good Counsel.
- 1904** Villa Madonna Academy opened in the Collins House with Sister Vincentia Dolan as Directress.  
Ten boarders from St. Walburg Academy in Covington transferred to Villa Madonna.
- 1907** New VMA building opened with facilities for grade and high school boarders and day students.
- 1916** (August 25) Monastery Chapter voted to transfer the novitiate to Villa Madonna.
- 1918** Flu epidemic. Sisters sent to various areas of Covington and the mountains of Eastern Kentucky to care for the sick.
- 1921** Villa Madonna College, a Normal School under the direction of Sister Domitilla Thuener, opened at Villa Madonna.
- 1926** Mother Walburga elected for the 11th time.  
Nine sisters sent to Notre Dame University for summer school in advanced studies.
- 1928** Bishop Howard informed the community that he wished Villa Madonna College to be a diocesan teachers' college.  
(November 28) Mother Walburga Saelinger died. First to be buried in new cemetery at Villa Madonna.  
(December 29) Sister Margaret Hugenberg elected 3rd prioress.



**1903:**  
Collins  
House  
& Farm



**1907:** VMA building



Berry Pickers (date unknown)

*Sister M. Margaret Hugenberg S.A.B.*

**1928:**  
Mother  
Margaret  
Hugenberg



**1937:**  
St. Walburg  
Monastery,  
2500 Amsterdam  
Road

# Moments In Our History



1931: Mother Lioba Holz

*Mother M. Lioba Holz, O.S.B.  
Prioress*



1931: Stone gates at Villa Madonna grounds



1937: Flood at St. Benedict's School, Covington, Kentucky



1943:  
Mother  
Domitilla  
Thuener

*Mother M. Domitilla, O.S.B.*

- 1929** First mention in Council minutes of suggestion to adopt the Divine Office in place of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.  
Villa Madonna College became a diocesan college under Bishop Howard. Three religious communities in the diocese shared administration and teaching functions.
- 1931** Community Chapter voted to close St. Walburg Academy in Covington.  
Stone entrance pillars erected at entrance to Villa Madonna grounds.  
(December 26) Sister Lioba Holz elected the 4th prioress.
- 1932** Community Council voted to transfer the Motherhouse to Villa Madonna.  
Preparatory school opened for Villa students interested in religious life.
- 1934** Community Diamond Jubilee (75) years, Mass of Thanksgiving in the Covington cathedral.  
Community newsletter, Inter Nos, established to keep the sisters informed of life on missions and record progress in building and financing the new motherhouse at Villa Madonna.
- 1935** Chapter voted to build new monastery at Villa Madonna.
- 1936** Bishop Howard gave the community permission to recite the Latin Divine Office instead of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary "in so far as it will not interfere with teaching."  
Bishop Howard gave permission to build new monastery.  
(June 11) Groundbreaking for new monastery.
- 1937** Villa Madonna became Red Cross flood relief station.  
(May 31) New building, St. Walburg Monastery, on Amsterdam Road, dedicated.  
Sister Lioba received written permission from Bishop Howard for the community to join the Congregation of St. Scholastica and to adopt the organization's constitution on trial basis for three years.
- 1938** Community began praying the Divine Office in June.  
Chapter decided that the 15 decade rosary beads were not part of the Benedictine habit.  
(July 7-10) Community sponsored first retreat for women.
- 1943** (July 10) Sister Domitilla Thuener elected 5th prioress to succeed Sister Lioba Holz who resigned.

# Moments In Our History

- 1943** Community Chapter voted to join the Congregation of St. Scholastica.  
Community formally joined April 4, 1944.
- 1945** Bishop Mulloy asked sisters to undertake hospital work in Hazard, Kentucky. (See Schools and Hospitals.)  
Mother Domitilla and Sister Lioba visited Duluth, Minnesota to learn about hospital work. Three sisters sent to study and train.
- 1946** Community received permission from Rome to undertake hospital work for 10 years.  
Chapter voted to accept St. Joseph Hospital in Florence, Colorado.  
Two sisters sent to transform Colonial Poultry Farms into St. Joseph Hospital.
- 1947** Chapter voted to accept Bishop Mulloy's request to staff hospital in Hazard, Kentucky.
- 1949** Chapter voted to accept and staff Sante Fe Hospital in La Junta, Colorado.
- 1955** (September 17) Sister Hilda Obermeier elected 6th prioress.
- 1956** Sister Hilda received permission from Rome to borrow one million dollars to build new Villa Madonna Academy building.
- 1958** Chapter voted to staff Estill County Hospital in Irvine, Kentucky.  
(April 27) New Villa Madonna building dedicated.
- 1959** February 25, Feast of St. Walburg, Community celebrated Pioneer Day, opening day for centennial celebration.  
(September 9) Marcum and Wallace Hospital opened in Estill County, Irvine, Kentucky. Opening planned for September 10, but a baby was born on the 9th.

**1955-1958:** Million dollar mortgage and new VMA high school building



**1949:** St. Joseph Hospital, Florence, Colorado, before (left) and after (below)



**1955:** Mother Hilda Obermeier

*Mother M. Hilda Obermeier, S.B.C., Prioress*

**Villa \$1 Million Mortgage Filed**  
1955

The largest mortgage ever filed in Kenton county was recorded Friday when a \$1,000,000 mortgage was filed by the First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Covington in the office of William Bauereis, Kenton county clerk. The mortgage was made by St. Walburg's Monastery of Benedictine Sisters of Covington in connection with the building program now underway at the Villa Madonna Academy, near Crescent Springs. The mortgage was signed by Mother M. Hilda Obermeier, S. B., as president of the Benedictine Sisters.

# Moments In Our History

**1961:**  
Mother  
Benedict  
Bunning



*Mother M. Benedict Bunning, O.S.B. Prioress*



**1964:**  
Madonna  
Manor



**1965:** First sisters missioned to Peru  
(left to right, back: Srs. Stephanie Manning,  
Janine Walther, Annita Schirmer;  
front: Sr. Nicholas Jones)

**1968:**  
Barn  
Program



- 1961** (August 12) Sister Benedict Bunning elected 7th prioress. Community membership at its peak of 271 members.
- 1962** Chapter voted to say Divine Office in English.
- 1963** Villa Madonna Preparatory School discontinued.
- 1964** (January 7) Community began praying the Divine Office in English.  
(December 2) Madonna Manor opened.
- 1965** (August 23) Four sisters left for Pomata, Peru to serve the Altiplano Indians in Diocese of Juli until 1971.
- 1967** Farming discontinued on monastery property.
- 1968** Groundbreaking for new infirmary wing.  
Barn and playground areas used for inner city children summer camp.
- 1969** (June 23–July 28) Community held Summer Renewal Program to study and implement changes suggested by Vatican II.  
Over fifty sisters chose to return to their baptismal names.  
First motherhouse and St. Walburg Academy buildings in Covington razed.  
Portion of monastery land leased for \$1 a year to the city of Villa Hills for ball fields.



**1969:** Demolition of Original Monastery

# Moments In Our History

- 1970** (November 27) Sr. Ruth Yost elected 8th prioress.
- 1972** Barn renovated into classrooms to begin Villa Madonna Montessori.
- 1977** House at 505 Russell Street in Covington began as a house of hospitality.  
Villa Madonna Elementary School became co-educational.
- 1978** (April 8) Sister Justina Franxman elected 9th prioress.  
Internal community newsletter revived and named *Word Within*.  
Newsletter called *Leaven* established for relatives, friends, benefactors and general public.
- 1979** Boarding school at Villa Madonna Academy discontinued.  
Senior House became the Guest House and dormitories used for hospitality and various other purposes.  
Facility became known as Villa Madonna Center.
- 1980** Community celebrated the Sesquimillennium Year of our Holy Father Benedict (480 C.E.)
- 1981** Villa Hills Day Care opened in Center Building.
- 1983** VMA Board of Directors expanded to include lay members.
- 1984** (February 25) began 125th anniversary of St. Walburg Monastery
- 1985** VMA High School became coeducational.  
(November 16) Community approved Benedictine Associates (now known as Oblates) Program.
- 1986** (February 17) Madonna Manor opened its personal care wing.  
(March 10) Tornado irreparably damaged the Manor Sisters' house.

**1984:** 125th Anniversary of St. Walburg Monastery (Srs. Justina Franxman, Benedict Bunning and Ruth Yost)



**1970:**  
Sr. Ruth  
Yost



*Sister M. Ruth Yost O.S.B.*



**1978:**  
Sr. Justina  
Franxman

*Sister Justina Franxman, O.S.B.*



**1980:** Sesquimillennium banner  
(Sr. Emmanuel Pieper)

# Moments In Our History

**1986:**  
Sr. Mary  
Catherine  
Wenstrup



*Sr. Mary Catherine Wenstrup, P.S.*

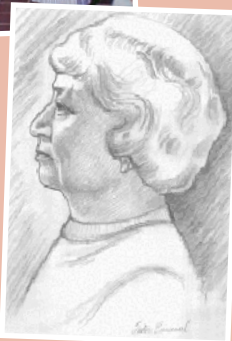


**1987:** Benedictine Associates Program



**1994:**  
Blessing  
the  
renovated  
monastery

**1994-95:**  
The Social  
Needs Fund



- 1986** (April 6) Sr. Mary Catherine Wenstrup elected 10th prioress.
- 1987** (March 21) Twenty-eight women and men began the Benedictine Associate Program with Sister Martha Walther as Program Director.  
Eleven sisters from St. Scholastica Priory in Covington, Louisiana chose to transfer to St. Walburg Monastery. Eventually thirteen transferred.
- 1988** (October 22) Community approved plans for renovation of chapel.
- 1989** (August 19) Committee established to produce new Liturgy of the Hours/Divine Office books.  
(December 2) First Vespers of Advent celebrated in renovated chapel.
- 1990** (February 4 and 11) Open House for renovated chapel.  
(February 25) Dedication of renovated chapel  
Upon recommendations from Chapter of the Federation of St. Scholastica, community undertook a Revitalization Program focusing on community life, ministry, formation/vocation, temporalities and governance.
- 1991** Community began using new Liturgy of the Hours books.
- 1992** Renovation Survey Committee distributed survey to the community based on suggestions received concerning renovation of motherhouse.
- 1993** (September 25) Community voted to renovate motherhouse and to study need for renovation of Infirmary wing.
- 1994** St. Walburg Monastery received large bequest from estate of Margaret Hay Edwards, a VMA alumna.
- 1995** (November 11) Community affirmed proposal to use a portion of the income earned from Margaret Hay Edwards Trust for social needs such as housing, hunger, health and education.



**1991:**  
New Liturgy of the  
Hours Books

# Moments In Our History

- 1996** Committee began to study sponsorship issues concerning Madonna Manor and Villa Madonna Academy.  
(September 21) Community voted to renovate infirmary wing.
- 1997** (December 6) Community indicated support for feasibility study to be undertaken at Villa Madonna Academy for future planning.
- 1998** (April 19) Sister Rita Brink elected 11th prioress.  
First recipients of the Social Needs Fund grants were announced. Fifty thousand dollars awarded in grants.  
Madonna Manor Board authorized signing of management agreement with Benedictine Health System, Duluth, Minnesota.  
Madonna Manor hired Susan McConn, first lay administrator.  
Sr. Rita announced Internal Monastic Renewal Program for community.
- 1999** Community received a report on VMA's capital campaign plans and athletic building project.  
Committee began work on Liturgy of the Hours books' revision with addition of more music.
- 2000** Community welcomed new millennium with special activities and prayers.  
(April 15) Community received overview of strategic planning at Madonna Manor and reports from consulting agencies.  
The Center of Spirituality held its first day of reflection.  
VMA athletic building completed.
- 2001** Community received reports on Trends in Health Care affecting Madonna Manor, the facilities assessment study and review of the market feasibility study.  
Michael Whalen became Villa Madonna Academy's first president.  
Sisters Mary Catherine Wenstrup and Martha Walther traveled to Namibia, Africa to assist Benedictine Sisters there.



**1998:**  
Sr. Rita Brink

*Rita A. Brink, OCB*



**2000:** Millennium Celebration



**2000:** Dedication of the VMA athletic center

*Below:* Center of Spirituality  
Day of Reflection





# Moments In Our History



**2006:**  
Sr. Mary  
Catherine  
Wenstrup

*Sr. Mary Catherine Wenstrup, R.S.M.*



**2002:**  
Cemetery  
renovation



**2007:** L to R: Srs. Cathy Bauer and Martha Feder present Namibian Srs. Justina Ndahafa Ita & Mary Immaculate Ipinge with a designer cheeseball at their farewell "graduation" party.



**2008:** Groundbreaking ceremony for the House of Blessing

*L to R: Barbara Biehl, President of HONK Board of Directors; Sr. Mary Catherine Wenstrup, Prioress of St. Walburg Monastery; Sr. Rita Brink, ACUE Executive Director; Bennie Doggett, President of the Eastside Neighborhood Association, Sr. Henrietta Seiler, member of St. Walburg Monastery; Mr. Butch Callery, then Mayor of Covington; and Sr. Margaret Mary Gough, chairperson of SWM Sesquicentennial Committee.*

- 2002** Completion of cemetery renovation.
- 2004** (February 21) Community expressed its support for seeking a relationship with a healthcare system that would take over facilities and operations of Madonna Manor with little or no involvement by the monastery.
- 2006** (April 23) Sister Mary Catherine Wenstrup elected 12th prioress.  
Committee appointed to work on the 2009 sesquicentennial celebration.  
(November 16) Community voted to authorize administration of St. Walburg Monastery to sign a Definitive Agreement with Franciscan Care Centers and Franciscan Services Corporation regarding transfer of Madonna Manor.
- 2007** (February 9–August 4) Two sisters from Namibia came to St. Walburg Monastery to study English, budgeting, financial planning and management, the psalms and to learn about monastic life in United States.  
(February 15) Madonna Manor, Inc. was transferred to Franciscan Sisters of Sylvania, Ohio to become a member of the Franciscan Care Centers.  
(December 15) Community voted to replace windows in main monastery building and air condition areas not yet air conditioned.
- 2008** (June) A/C and window replacement project in monastery building completed.  
(October 3) Groundbreaking ceremony for sesquicentennial House of Blessing project with Housing Opportunities of Northern Kentucky.



"The Meaning of Monastic Life" stained glass window in monastery gathering space, designed by Sr. Emmanuel Pieper.

---

# Foundations

## First Daughter-House: **Monastery Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand, Indiana**

FOUNDED: 1867  
PIONEERS: Four young sisters; **Sr. Benedicta Berns** (age 22) superior.  
Later elected first prioress.  
INDEPENDENCE: 1871



## Second Daughter-House: **St. Scholastica Priory, Covington, Louisiana**

FOUNDED: 1870  
PIONEERS: Eight sisters; Sister Teresa Timmers, superior; **Sr. Scholastica Hoeveler**, first prioress.  
INDEPENDENCE: 1873



2nd Group: 1873 from Covington, Kentucky to New Orleans, Louisiana.

PIONEERS: Five sisters; Sister Gertrude Bauer, superior.

INDEPENDENCE: 1877

MERGER: 1877

Named St. Benedict Convent, New Orleans, Louisiana. Later moved to Covington, Louisiana and named St. Scholastica Priory.

PRIORY CLOSED: 1998

## Third Daughter-house: **Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman, Alabama.**

FOUNDED: Tusculumbia, Alabama, 1881  
PIONEERS: Five sisters; **Sr. Evangelista Pfraengle**, superior.

Given to the Benedictine sisters from St. Leo Monastery, Florida in 1900.

2nd Group: 1886 from Covington, Kentucky to Birmingham, Alabama.

PIONEERS: Seven sisters; Sister Evangelista Pfraengle, (sent from Tusculumbia) superior.

INDEPENDENCE: 1902. Two communities from Florida and Kentucky united and became Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman, Alabama. Sister Otilia Haas from Covington, first prioress.



# Schools and Hospitals



1880: Holy Guardian Angels School  
(Srs. Gertrude Menges and Martina Kelly)



1921: St. James School, Brooksville  
(Sr. Agatha Fischer)



1931: One of the last graduates of  
St. Walburg Academy

## SCHOOLS

- 1859 St. Joseph School, Covington, KY
- 1863 St. Walburg Academy, Covington, KY
- 1867 Several Schools in Ferdinand, IN
- 1870 Holy Family School, in Trinity Parish, New Orleans, LA
- 1871 St. John's Orphanage, Fort Mitchell, KY
- 1873 St. Boniface School, New Orleans, LA
- 1875 Annunciation Parish, Paris, KY
- 1880 Holy Guardian Angels School, Sandforttown, KY
- 1881 St. Scholastica and St. Joseph Schools in Tuscumbia, AL
- 1885 St. Benedict School, Covington, KY
- 1886 St. Rose School, Fulton, OH
- 1886 Holy Angels School and St. Paul's Elementary School in Birmingham, AL
- 1891 Holy Cross School, Milldale (Latonia), KY
- 1899 St. Henry School, Erlanger, KY
- 1904 Villa Madonna Academy established
- 1906 Ground broken for new VMA building
- 1907 VMA building ready for occupancy—both grade and high school
- 1916 St. Anthony School, Forest Hills, KY
- 1918 St. Joseph School, Crescent Springs, KY
- 1921 Blessed Sacrament School, Fort Mitchell, KY
- 1921 St. James School, Brooksville, KY
- 1921 Villa Madonna College founded by Covington Benedictines at Villa Madonna
- 1923 St. Paul School, Florence, KY
- 1927 St. Therese School, Southgate, KY
- 1929 Villa Madonna College moved to 12th Street in Covington—became diocesan
- 1931 St. Walburg Academy, Covington, discontinued

*continued on next page*

# Staffed by Benedictine Sisters

## *(SCHOOLS CONTINUED)*

- 1947 Catechetical work began in Hazard while preparations are made for Mount Mary Hospital to open
- 1948 Good Counsel Center and Kindergarten, Hazard, KY
- 1948 Sts. Peter and Paul School, Danville, KY
- 1948 Sts. Peter and Paul School, Twelve Mile, KY
- 1949 All Saints School, Walton, KY
- 1951 Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Patrick Schools, La Junta, CO
- 1953 St. Ann Parish, Manchester, KY
- 1954 St. Francis Xavier School, Falmouth, KY
- 1954 St. Pius X School, Edgewood, KY (Holy Guardian Angels Parish closed)
- 1955 Special education classes began at St. Aloysius (later became Good Counsel School, then Riverside-Good Counsel School)
- 1957 Mary, Queen of Heaven School, Erlanger, KY
- 1967 St. Joseph School, Covington, became Bishop Howard Non-Graded School
- 1977 Villa Madonna Elementary School became coeducational
- 1985 Villa Madonna High School became coeducational

## *HOSPITALS*

- 1948 St. Joseph Hospital, Florence, CO
- 1948 Mount Mary Hospital, Hazard, KY
- 1950 Santa Fe Hospital, La Junta, CO
- 1959 Estill County Hospital, Irvine, KY (later named Marcum Wallace Hospital)



1949: All Saints School Walton pioneers (Srs. Immaculata Campbell, Adelgunda Platz and Paula Kurry)



1953: Srs. Aurelia Rensing and Irene Schwartz at St. Ann's parish



1959: Estill County Hospital (Srs. Joan Gripshover and David Ruschmann)