

The Beginning of a New Century and a New Women's Organization



The Catholic Daughters of the Americas (CDA) was founded in Utica, New York in 1903 by John E. Carberry and several other Knights of Columbus as a charitable, benevolent and patriotic sorority for Catholic ladies. It was originally called the "National Order of Daughters of Isabella," and is dedicated to the principles of "Unity and Charity," the order's motto. They were originally called the national order of the Daughters of Isabella, and Carberry served as the first Supreme Regent. The Knights established our two standards of Unity and Charity. CDA had 90 courts by 1908 and had grown from a membership of less than 100 to more than 10,000. The membership encompassed 69 cities in 18 different states. In March of 1913, the Daughters of Isabella purchased a building in Utica belonging to the Knights of Columbus for use as its official headquarters.

Catholic Daughters Support the World War I Effort



The Daughters became very involved in overseas duty during World War I. They acted as nurses, did clerical work, conducted sewing and knitting classes for the Red Cross, and staged parties to entertain the servicemen. They also helped the Knights of Columbus raise \$3 million for recreational activities for the enlisted men. When the war ended, Supreme Regent Genevieve Walsh was named to the newly formed National Catholic War Council. The CDA was a part of the restoration of the University of Louvain's ravaged library in Belgium. It was also during this time that a youth society called "War Service Plan for Girls" was formed. This group later evolved into the Junior Catholic Daughters.

Expansion and Change



At a biennial convention in 1921, the order changed its name from the Daughters of Isabella to the Catholic Daughters of America (CDA). In 1925 the first court outside of the United States was established in Cuba. It was during this time that the Knights of Columbus severed its ties with CDA, allowing it to become an independent organization. In 1926, the national headquarters moved from Utica to its current location at 10 West 71 Street in New York City. By 1928, the membership of the CDA had swelled to 170,000 members in courts that spanned 45 states, Panama, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Canada.

Supreme Regent Mary Duffy led the organization into becoming involved in community life, social work and services, literary endeavors, and missionary work. CDA supported the Catholic press, and they protested the Oregon Compulsory School Law and the Cummins-Valle Birth Control Bill. The organization kept a close watch on adverse legislative matters across the nation, and its members engaged in legislative discussions. The CDA became associated with the Legion of Decency and took a public stand against mercy killing (euthanasia).

CDA Patriotism During World War II



CDA contributed money to the war effort during World War II. They bought war bonds and defense stamps, helped to fund chapels, camps and food necessities, and provided entertainment for those in the service. The membership also became involved in making bandages, sewing, conducting first aid classes and donating blood across the country. The statistics of the efforts of the CDA are staggering. Various court purchased \$1.6 million worth of war bonds, individual members bought \$4.7 million and sold \$3 million more to others. More than 8,314 members served as instructors for the Red Cross, and 15,061 members made four million surgical dressings. Contributions to the USO exceeded \$100,000. During this time the CDA were still involved in many important issues, such as juvenile delinquency, democracy, peace, postwar America, labor and the war, women in industry, help for students in China, racism, the Equal Rights Amendment, and federalized education.

The 1950's and the "Challenge "by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen addressed the delegates at the 24th Biennial Convention held in 1952. He said, "You are the Catholic Daughters of America; I would like you to become Catholic Daughters of the World." He urged the CDA membership to extend their charity to the needs of the poor and to the ends of the world. In December 2015, under National Regent, Shirley Seyfried, the first "world" court was instituted in Kandisi, Kenya. In June 2016, three courts were instituted in Peru. The membership hit it's peak in 1962 with 215,000 in over 1400 courts. In 1954, the order changed its name to the Catholic Daughters of the Americas. At that time, we had approximately 68,000 members in 1250 courts in the United States, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Guam, Kenya, and Peru. Its international headquarters are located in New York City. It donates generously to several charitable causes, provides scholarships, works with Habitat for Humanity, and supports our Aging Religious and infirm retired Catholic clergy, and CDA are very active in pro-life, and since January 22, 1974, CDA have participated in the March for Life in D.C.

Since the inception of SOAR! (Support Our Aging Religious!) in 1986, the Catholic Daughters has been one of its largest supporters providing seed money to help religious communities with immediate needs such as repairs on buildings and vans to transport sick and disabled religious

"Something Beautiful for God"

Mother Teresa, founder of the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, spoke to an audience of Catholic Daughters in October of 1972 in Washington, D.C. to mark National Catholic Daughters Day. She asked the CDA members to continue to "give to our brothers and sisters throughout the world as if once more Jesus had come into the world cold, hungry, and alone." Through annual donations to the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa's challenge and that of Bishop Sheen are being met, as we become "Catholic Daughters of the world."

A History of Support to Priests and to the Church



The Catholic Daughters of the Americas continues to live out its motto of "Unity and Charity" today. In 1976 CDA presented a bicentennial gift of \$750,000 to the Catholic University of America to establish a Chair in American Catholic History.

CDA donates generously to the seminary training programs for priests at the North American College in Rome, and at the American College at the University of Louvain in Belgium. In 1990 the bishops approached the organization to take a "leadership role" in support of the Papal Foundation, citing CDA's committed support "of the Church at the highest level." The national office gave a gift of \$500,000 to be used by the Holy Father to help Catholic Churches in Third World countries. John Cardinal O'Connor, Archbishop of New York, stated in a letter to National Regent Rayola McLaughlin that, "The Catholic Daughters has a rich tradition of loyalty and generosity to the Church. Your willingness to step forward at special moments of need is

well chronicled in the great works you have accomplished, not only in your parishes but also in your support of the American bishops."

The Third Millennium



Catholic Daughters has a continuous working relationship with Habitat for Humanity International in building affordable housing for the poor. CDA was one of the first women's organizations to complete a house in Habitat's seven day "Blitz Build." To date, Catholic Daughters of the Americas have assisted in building more than 40 Habitat homes. More recently they have also help to build and financed refurbished houses with Habitat.

As National Regent Susan Moné holds observer status at the NCCB meetings. She also served on the boards of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC, Morality in Media, and of the Labouré Society. Grace Rinaldi, Past National Regent, attended the World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1990's and was a part of a delegation of women in a follow-up study. The Catholic Daughters of the Americas is a member of the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW). Catholic Daughters take great pride in the work and many accomplishments of the Junior Catholic Daughters of Americas with girls and young ladies ages 6 to 18. These girls give Catholic Daughters of the Americas hope for our future. Currently, there are members in 115 JVDA courts. Catholic Daughters also have Campus Courts at 5 Colleges and Universities.

At the National Convention July 2024 in New Orleans, LA the Catholic Daughters of the Americas delegates voted on a major change as they voted to discontinue the wearing of the ceremonial robes. The new look voted on is black skirt/slacks, white blouse and white shoes. Medallions on a ribbon were designed displaying the symbol of each office the same as what was on the robe sleeve of each officer.



The 2-fold purpose has always been Spirituality and Service as the largest Catholic women's volunteer group. With Mary as our exemplar, CDA continues to make a difference in our parishes, communities, our Country and the World. We continue in the rich legacy of women of Faith serving Our Lord wherever He shows us the needs.

Today, under the leadership of National Regent Susan Moné, the Catholic Daughters of the Americas has nearly 53,000 members in 1,050 local and territorial courts in the United States including Puerto Rico and the territories of, Guam, and Mexico.