

THE SISTERS OF ST. FELIX OF CANTALICE

They must have been exhausted, but at least they weren't cold. Mercifully, the autumn of 1874 was mild in Polonia, Wisconsin. For nearly a month, they struggled to cross a troubled Europe, a stormy Atlantic Ocean, and an enormous cultural divide, but they finally arrived.

What compelled five courageous and faithful women to leave behind their beloved Poland to start a new life in the "new world"?

They came because children and families needed them. It's what Felician Sisters do.

Even before she founded the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Felix of Cantalice in Poland in 1855, Mother Mary Angela Truszkowska had made it her mission to take care of children, especially those abandoned by society. She was the daughter of a juvenile court judge, and she knew firsthand the daily struggles of poor and marginalized children. She couldn't ignore them – *she had to help*.

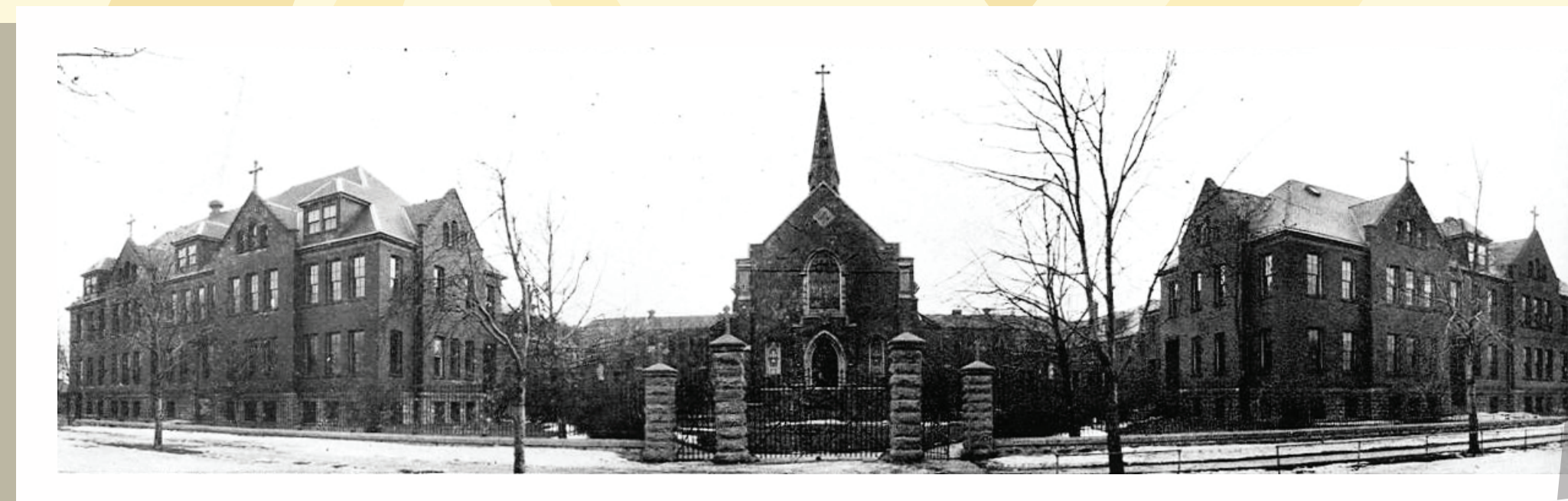
In 1855, a time when communities of women religious were typically cloistered, it was a radical idea to leave the isolated life of the convent, integrate with the broader society, and be of service out in the world. But Mother Angela decided the Felician Sisters would be both a contemplative and an *active* congregation. They would combine a life of prayer with a life of service to children.

Decades later, when thousands of Polish immigrants began to set up new communities in America, they quickly realized they needed teachers to preserve their native language and nurture their Catholic faith. The plea went back to Krakow: send us Felician Sisters!

And so five brave women boarded a crowded ship and journeyed to Polonia, Wisconsin. Pioneers with a "heroic love of God and neighbor," they taught and prayed and served the community. Their congregation expanded to other regions, and in 1881 the first three sisters came to Buffalo, New York. Seventy-five years later, the Felician Sisters founded the Cantalician Center for Children, ever advancing Mother Angela's mission to take care of children.



Father John Pitass first asked Felician Sisters to come to St. Stanislaus School in Buffalo in 1881 to teach girls how to sew, but Mother Monica, the provincial superior, wouldn't hear of it. Her sisters were fully trained teachers and would only be sent if they could serve in their full capacity. He relented, the sisters moved to Buffalo, and they quickly became some of the most sought-after educators in Western New York.

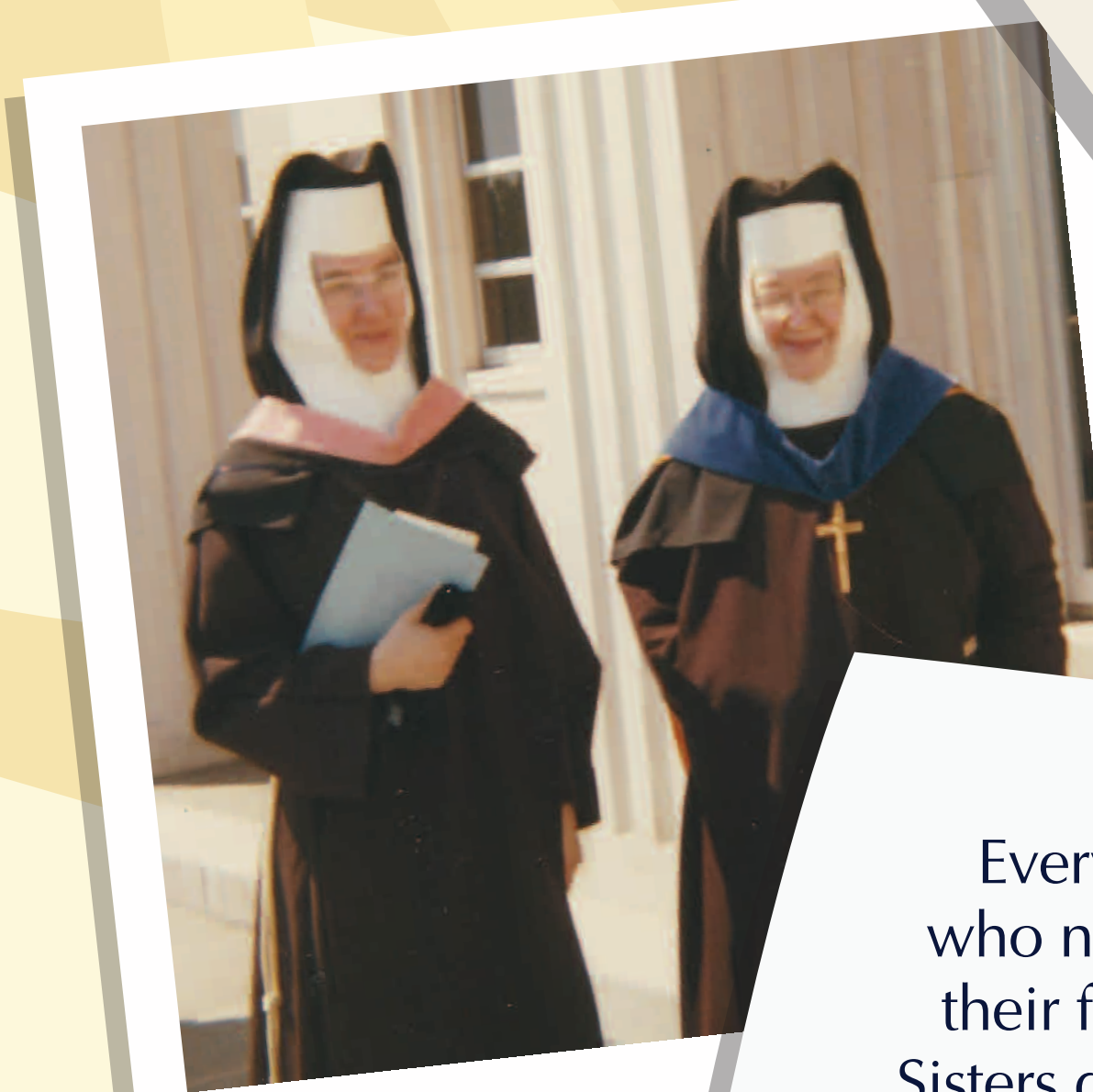


Experiences at three facilities prepared the sisters to create Cantalician Center. In 1924, they created classes for children with disabilities at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Home for Children in Cheektowaga. In 1942, the sisters opened St. Rita's Home in Getzville, the first facility in the region for children with severe developmental disabilities. And in 1943, Sister Mary Angela Betke opened the Felician Sisters Psychological Clinic to evaluate children with developmental delays.



"Simplicity, humility, union with God, joy & kindness, heroic love of God and neighbor."

— Sister Raphael Marie



Every endeavor was an extension of the Felician mission to take care of children who needed them most. Continuing the work of Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska, their founder, and Sister Mary Wenceslaus and the Polonia pioneers, three Felician Sisters directed Cantalician Center for its first 52 years: Sister Mary Angela Betke, Sister Raphael Marie Ochocinski, and Sister Mary Patricia Tomasik. With "heroic love," they and 48 other devoted sisters helped create the Cantalician Center we know today.