

Chapter 1: BEGINNINGS

In a sense there was not a time before Holy Redeemer. In Jeremiah 9:11 the Lord says this about His foreknowledge: *“For I know the plans I have for you; plans for welfare and not calamity to give you a future and a hope.”* There were two women who loved the Lord, loved His Church, and wanted to be in the center of His will and His plans for them. They just needed to find out what He had in mind.

Barbara Seiple was a member of the Indianapolis parish of the Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC), and Paula Callen was a member of the EOC parish in Kokomo, Indiana. They learned that there was another woman who had approached the diocesan bishop about the possibility of pursuing an intentional, dedicated religious life within the communion of churches. As a communion, the EOC was without any experience of a dedicated religious community of men or women, and the Indianapolis bishop agreed to consider her request. Then the Holy Spirit spoke to Barbara and Paula individually about this as a possible choice for them. There followed a gathering of interested women with the Bishop. Beginning in 1981, over the course of three years, six women made initial commitments to pursue a more structured, focused lifestyle as single women of God. To mark this new chapter in their lives they chose to take on new names. Among them Barbara became Sister Paula. Paula began this new journey as Sister Pilar. The EOC communion of churches wanted to see how this “religious life” would unfold, what fruit it would bear in the women individually, and what impact it might have on the diocese and the rest of the communion.

The Indianapolis bishop assigned one of the local priests who had a Catholic seminary background to direct this group of novices. The first woman to enter the program eventually dropped out to pursue married life, so then there were five. Sr. Pilar moved to Indianapolis, and she, Sr. Paula, and another of the women lived in the home of the family of the married priest who was overseeing the novices. There were two additional women from one of the EOC churches in Illinois who made plans to move to Indianapolis to press out community together in a more tangible way. By 1986 the Illinois women had also withdrawn, and then there were three.

On the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, June 29th of that year, the remaining three said to each other, “If you could do whatever you most want, what would you do?” Could they stay within the EOC and find a more expanded expression of the religious life? Was there an established religious order or monastery somewhere else that they might join? Sr. Paula was at the age where she would have to decide soon if she wanted to be accepted as a candidate somewhere else. None wanted to leave the EOC. One of the women wanted to stay within Indianapolis to continue to pursue her volunteer work among the neighborhood poor, believing that was the calling on her life. Then there were two.

Sr. Paula and Sr. Pilar wanted a monastic life within the EOC communion if it was at all possible. How could that happen? It says in Proverbs 15:22, *“Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed.”* In Proverbs 16:3 is the promise: *“Commit your works to*

the Lord, and your plans will be established". Both being convinced of the necessity of prayer in this matter, the Sisters met with a number in the local parish who were known to be prayer warriors, and the prayers began to ascend. The next step was to put in writing a specific proposal for their bishop to consider, briefly outlining a five-year plan for establishing a monastery for women and a place of spiritual retreat for others. He and his clergy council made the request a matter of prayer and deliberation. By the end of the summer, one of the outlying parishes had offered a potential rental property, and the Bishop gave his blessing to try for the creation of a monastery. "If the Lord doesn't bless your attempt, you can always come home."

All were listening for the Holy Spirit's leading. The extent of the eventual ministry of the monastery was unknown, but one thing seemed certain. The monastery was going to be involved in redemption, the redeeming of the lives of the women who lived there, and the redemption of the lives the monastery touched, especially other women within the Church. Remembering that there was that wonderful icon of Christ the Redeemer, and knowing full well that all redemption is His work, the name HOLY REDEEMER was chosen.

Psalm 37:4 says, "*Take delight in the Lord and He will give you your heart's desires.*" What were the desires of the Sisters? They had been living together for four years and knew something of what was important to each other. They both loved the Lord. They both loved His Church. They both loved the part of the Body of Christ to which they belonged. They both wanted to live out the Christian life as fully as possible. And, they hoped, if they made a beginning, there might be other women who would want to join them in this expression of religious life based on historical monastic traditions.

One of the earliest pieces of advice they got from an abbot of a monastery they visited in New York was, "Just do it. You can read about the monastic life all you want, but the only way to learn it is to just start living it." So, with little idea of what might be ahead, the Sisters set a date to leave the EOC neighborhood on the west side of Indianapolis and move 45 minutes west into a rented farmhouse outside of the small town of Ladoga in Montgomery County, Indiana.

The priest of the local EOC parish lived across the road from the monastery farmhouse built in 1860. His wife's parents, who lived next door, owned the property. At one time in the 19th Century, the house had been an inn on a stage coach route, which gave it character. It had in the immediate past been the habitat of bachelors and their animals, which gave it a character of a different sort. With much elbow grease, grace, and assistance from church members, the Sisters moved in on October 11, 1986, and Holy Redeemer was officially founded.

This was the vision:

- Development of a place of residence for those women called by God to the monastic life who share the same intention of the Holy Redeemer community.

- Development of an environment conducive to the contemplative life, using traditional monastic tools of silence, solitude, chastity, poverty, obedience, manual labor, prayer, almsgiving, simplicity, and hospitality to nurture the spiritual life.

- Development of a location for the monastery that aims to be non-materialistic, ecologically sound, and harmonious with God's creation. The purpose of this environment is to nurture the sisters' pursuit of God and to provide a place of retreat and reflection for anyone of any faith who wishes to visit.