

# A History of Foster Care in Philadelphia

The Catholic Church has deep roots caring for the city of brotherly love's most vulnerable children. But, despite decades of experience providing foster homes for these children before the government ever got involved, Philadelphia officials decided to kick the Catholic Church out of foster care. Travel through this timeline to see how Catholics pioneered foster care in Philadelphia and how we got to where we are today.

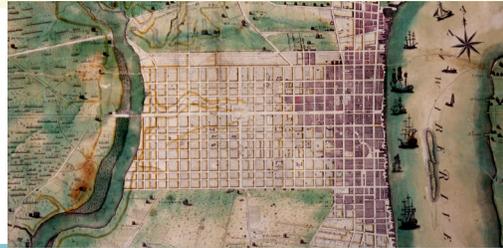
1729

## Nuns Establish First Orphanage in the New World:

Three years after arriving in America from France, Ursuline nuns in New Orleans established the first orphanage in the new world. In addition to serving orphaned children in New Orleans, they established one of the first hospitals in the city and started numerous schools.



Wikipedia



Library Company of Philadelphia

1797

## Yellow Fever and Philadelphia's First Orphanages:

The yellow fever outbreak of 1793 prompted the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Catholic Women's League to establish the Roman Catholic Society of St. Joseph for the Maintenance & Education of Orphans in Philadelphia. This ministry—an early precursor to our modern foster care system—helped find homes for orphaned and neglected children.

1806

## Responding to the Growing Need to Help Children in Philadelphia:

After the yellow fever outbreak was contained, the need to help children continued to grow. In 1806 the Catholic Church established St. John's Orphan Asylum, a home for destitute and orphaned children.



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1855

## The Catholic Church Expands its Ministries across Philadelphia:

St. Vincent's Orphan Home is founded in Philadelphia with help of St. John Neumann and Drexel family funds (now called St. Vincent Homes). The Catholic Church in Philadelphia established six other ministries serving children through the end of the 1800s.



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1917

## Coordinating Efforts to Better Help Children:

Following the growth of numerous Catholic ministries focused on serving children in need, the Catholic Church established the Catholic Children's Bureau to coordinate and consolidate its efforts to find homes for orphaned and neglected children.



Archdiocese of Philadelphia

1921

## Pennsylvania Government Makes First Forays into Foster Care:

The Pennsylvania Department of Welfare is first established, marking the government's first step toward regulating foster care and adoption.



Wikipedia

1964

## Catholic Church Unifies Efforts to Help Children and Other Vulnerable Populations:

In 1964, the Catholic Church unified its ministries caring for children and other vulnerable populations under the umbrella of Catholic Social Services.



Archdiocese of Philadelphia

1951

## Pennsylvania Government Begins Regulating Foster Care:

A commission of the state legislature first recommends creating mandatory licensing criteria for private foster care and adoption agencies.



Wikipedia

2018

**Philadelphia Kicks Out Catholic Foster Care:** The Philadelphia government blocks foster care placements with families certified by Catholic Social Services. Sharonell Fulton, a single foster mother certified by Catholic Social Services, has been prevented from taking in foster kids by Philadelphia officials since March 2018.



Beckel

# A History of Foster Care in Philadelphia

## Centuries of Services

*The Catholic Church's care for the poor has deep roots in the city of brotherly love*

Responding to the devastating yellow fever outbreak of 1793, Philadelphia Catholics established the "Roman Catholic Society of St. Joseph for the Maintenance and Education of Orphans." This ministry—an early precursor to our modern foster care system—helped find homes for orphaned and neglected children. But even after the yellow fever outbreak was contained, this need continued to grow. Accordingly, in 1806, the Catholic Church established St. John's Orphan Asylum, a home for destitute and orphaned children. Eight years later, in 1814, responsibility for this home was given to the Sisters of Charity, a religious order founded by St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first American saint canonized by the Catholic Church. St. John's was just the first of many ministries founded by the Catholic Church in Philadelphia to care for children in need throughout the 19th Century. At least six other Catholic ministries serving children in need were founded over the next 75 years.



*St. Elizabeth Ann Seton*



*Guardian Angel Home in Philadelphia, c. 1960*

But Catholics were not the only ones providing care for those in need. Quaker groups founded the "Association for the Care of Colored Orphans" in 1822, and in 1855 Jewish philanthropist Rebecca Gratz created the Jewish Foster Home Society to help ensure that Jewish children could find loving foster homes within the Jewish community. Gratz understood that, without this crucial ministry, Jewish foster children removed from their homes could lose important community ties and be unable to practice their faith.

These ministries continued to grow and develop throughout the 20th Century. In 1916, the Catholic Church established "St. Edmond's Home for Crippled Children," a ministry for young polio survivors. And, just a year later in 1917, the Catholic Children's Bureau was created to coordinate the Church's existing child welfare efforts, including its foster care ministry. This organization continued to grow and, in 1964, was renamed Catholic Social Services.

Building on over two centuries of service, the Catholic Church's foster care ministry in Philadelphia has provided loving homes for tens of thousands of foster children, and in modern times (before the city closed it down) cared for over 100 foster children on any given day.