



Our Spiritual Heritage

Benilde-St. Margaret's School is deeply rooted in three vibrant traditions. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and the Benedictines have all shaped our history and our character. Each of these orders has blessed us with its charism – a unique character and mission, a gift entrusted to them by God to share with the world. Today, Benilde-St. Margaret's faculty and staff unify the spirit of these founding traditions, and continue to bring forth their character and mission by offering an educational community rooted in faith.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet

The Sisters of St. Joseph began in Le Puy, France, in 1650. The original six members felt called to a life of prayer combined with active ministry outside the convent – an unusual mission for women at that time. They searched the city to discover its greatest needs, and their early efforts focused on caring for the sick and orphaned and giving impoverished women skills to become self-sufficient.

The sisters' reputation for hard work, diligent prayer and active ministry led the bishop of St. Louis, Missouri, to invite them to come to America, where they established a motherhouse in nearby Carondelet in 1837. Fourteen years later four sisters traveled up the Mississippi to St. Paul, where they faced overwhelming hardships of cold, hunger, discrimination and lack of material resources. They responded with characteristic courage and generosity, bearing vibrant witness to the wishes of their founders to live in "profound love of God and the dear neighbor without distinction." A century later sisters in the five-state area numbered more than a thousand, founding and serving in 57 elementary and secondary schools, five hospitals, two orphanages and the College of St. Catherine.

St. Margaret's Academy began in 1907, housed in a charming old mansion. There the sisters taught their students to "do all of which a woman is capable." Although there is little formal documentation, alumnae and current sisters explain that St. Margaret of Scotland (1046-1093) was chosen as their patron because of her dedication to women's independence through education. Not only did St. Margaret of Scotland educate her own children, because of her belief in the power of education, but also she took care of poor and orphan children. A school for girls, St. Margaret's Academy, merged with Benilde High School in 1974.

A well-loved poem by Father Marius Nepper describes the Sisters of St. Joseph and their charism, their gift to the world: "Eyes open on a world..., hearts attentive..., spirit alert..., sleeves rolled up for ministry..., in continual joy of spirit."

Prayer in the Spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph

Inspired by the Holy Spirit of Love and receptive to the Spirit's inspirations, we seek always to move toward profound love of God and love of neighbor without distinction. Help us to follow Jesus as we work toward unity of neighbor, with neighbor and neighbor with God, in prayer and in service to our world.
Amen.

Adapted from the Consensus Statement of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet



The Christian Brothers

In 1681, just 30 years after the Sisters of St. Joseph began their life together, St. John Baptist de La Salle founded the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rheims, France. A wealthy young man, he left the seminary to care for his brothers and sisters when his parents died. Later ordained, he took on the project of opening a parish school for boys, moved by the plight of poor children who grew up largely on their own. He attracted, educated and spiritually formed a small group of men who dedicated their lives to educating boys of the streets in tuition-free schools. Their numbers grew and their work eventually spread to 87 countries around the world.

The Founder, as St. John Baptist de La Salle is commonly called, instituted powerful educational reforms. He taught children in French rather than Latin, integrating literacy and mathematics with everyday life, teaching practical skills that could help lift students from poverty. He prohibited physical punishment and encouraged a loving, respectful relationship between teacher and student at a time when children had no legal rights and were often treated brutally. He established the first teachers' schools and articulated a spirituality of education, calling others to recognize teaching as a vocation and a ministry. De La Salle was canonized in 1900 and proclaimed the patron of all teachers of youth in 1950.

LaSallian Prayer

Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.

Jesus, you led St. John Baptist de La Salle to give up all he owned and live among the poorest of the poor.

He was faithful to you in success and in hardship, through understanding and confusion.

He spent his days among students and teachers, inspiring and challenging all he encountered.

Bless our school and those who enter its doors. Give us the grace to love one another and to grow in our understanding of ourselves and our place in Your world.

Help us follow the example of those who have come before us, to seek you faithfully in all that we do.

St. John Baptist de La Salle, pray for us.
Live, Jesus, in our hearts forever.

The Christian Brothers have maintained their focus on education throughout their history. They established Benilde High School in 1956. The Christian Brothers named their school after one of their own, Brother Benilde Romancon (1805-1862). Benilde was faithful to the charism of his fellowship, offering leadership in schools unheard of in his days. He was honored for his ability to remain forever faithful to the same round of duties, recurring troubles and the daily grind, "for doing the common things uncommonly well," as was stated during his beatification in 1948. Benilde was canonized in 1967, 11 years after Benilde High School opened, and thus the school was not called "Saint" Benilde.

Some years ago the Christian Brothers recognized that their numbers were declining. They saw that if their philosophy and spirituality of education were to endure, they would need to engage lay people in partnership and pass on to them their vision. They developed a unique formation program for passing on the LaSallian mission, which is now embodied by lay partners, as well as brothers, and continues to shape Benilde-St. Margaret's School.



The Benedictines

St. Benedict of Nursa began his life as a hermit at the beginning of the sixth century. The monastic movement produced many who fled the decadence of the times and escaped to the desert to a life of prayer and penance. Benedict's holiness soon attracted others, and his distinctive Rule expressed a balanced and humane combination of prayer, reading and service. Coincidentally, the first Sisters of St. Joseph were inspired by the "ora et labora" Benedict described so many years before.

Benedict's twin sister, St. Scholastica, joined the convent at a very early age. They were only able to meet once a year, but their love for one another and for God was legendary. Benedictine monasteries are self-governing; each community defines its mission and character uniquely but under the guidance of the Rule. Benedictines have worked in a variety of ministries over the centuries, coming to serve in Minnesota in the 1850s. Members of St. John's Abbey and St. Benedict's Monastery began many schools and medical and social service agencies. They joined Benilde High School during a critical time in the early 1970s. The Christian Brothers were leaving Benilde, and the school was faced with declining enrollment and escalating costs. However, prayers were answered when St. John's Abbey agreed to provide an administrator and faculty, officially introducing the Benedictine charism to Benilde High School, allowing it to remain open.

A joint statement by the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University describes the characteristic values of a Benedictine educational institution: a sacramental view of the world, reverence for all persons and for creation, listening with the ear of the heart, seeking the common good, and making decisions in common. Other observers of Benedictine life note a particular emphasis on hospitality and on stability, or a sense of rootedness in a place.

Prayer to St. Benedict

Holy St. Benedict,

You inspire us from across the centuries.

Teach us to show hospitality to all we meet; live simply, with reverence for your creation; honor our heritage, which gives us stability; be mindful of the welfare of each and the welfare of all; pray constantly; work for justice; and always to listen with the ear of our hearts.

Amen.

Today, BSM continues to grow from the roots of these founding traditions by educating young people with the "profound love of God and the dear neighbor," the powerful educational reforms attentive to the critical relationship between student and teacher, and the essential balance of prayer, reading and service. We are grateful for those who have gone before us to make Benilde-St. Margaret's School what it is today. We humbly express our honor to the founding traditions by continuing to bring forth their character and mission through an educational community rooted in faith.

