

Mother Cecilia Kapsner

Prioress from 1901–1919



Mother Cecilia (Mary) Kapsner was born in Dambrau, Prussia, on October 20, 1859. In 1874, she came to the United States with her parents, Frank and Theresia. The family settled in Pierz, Minn. Two years later, she entered Saint Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minn., where she became a novice in 1877. She professed her first vows on May 19, 1878, and made her final profession on July 14, 1881. For 18 years before she was elected prioress on July 27, 1901, Sister Cecilia served her community as teacher, mistress of novices, subprioress and bookkeeper. Mother Cecilia was the first prioress who originated in Minnesota and received her formation at Saint Benedict's Convent. Gifted with keen perception and ready judgment, she provided leadership under which the community prospered and grew.

During Mother Cecilia's three consecutive terms as prioress, there was considerable material expansion. This included the establishment of an infirmary at the motherhouse (1904), an addition and laundry at St. Joseph's Home in St. Cloud, Minn. (1910), a new St. Alexius Hospital in Bismarck, N.D. (1914), the Sacred Heart Chapel and the addition of a new wing (Teresa Hall for the college) (both in 1914), plus many other improvements at the motherhouse.

During Mother Cecilia's years as prioress, the Benedictine influence in the Midwest was extended. The growing community accepted 28 new missions, mostly in Minnesota, but some in North Dakota and Wisconsin, as well. The continuity and deepening of this influence was assured by the establishment of a four-year college in 1913. After serving as prioress, Mother Cecilia continued to exercise her personal influence on the formation of the younger members of the community by serving as mistress of the sisters in first vows from 1921–37. She died on August 16, 1952, at the age of 92, in the 75th year of her religious profession.