

Mother Scholastica Kerst

Prioress from 1880–1889



Mother Scholastica (Catherine) Kerst was born in Meuringen, Prussia (now a part of Belgium), on June 21, 1847, to Peter Joseph Kerst and Margarethe Girgen Kerst. Her family immigrated to the United States in 1852 and settled near St. Paul, Minn. At the age of 11, Catherine received her First Holy Communion, at which time she resolved to become a sister. She entered St. Gertrude's Convent in Shakopee, Minn., on October 11, 1862, two days after it was established. She became a novice on January 6, 1863, and professed her first vows on April 24, 1864.

Because the newly-founded convent was not ready to provide a solid novitiate training, Bishop Thomas Grace required that Sister Scholastica be sent to Saint Joseph Convent in St. Marys, Penn., for a year of strict novitiate. She spent two years there and professed her perpetual vows on January 6, 1869, in Pennsylvania. A few years after her return to Shakopee, Sister Scholastica became discontented there and requested a transfer to another convent. Her request was granted and on August 30, 1877, she was admitted into the then-named Saint Joseph's Convent and Academy in St. Joseph, Minn.

In April of 1880, she was appointed prioress of Saint Benedict's by Abbot Alexius of Saint John's Abbey, deemed an unwise choice by the sisters since she was so new to the community. She held this office until 1889. During her first year as prioress, she negotiated the suppression of the Shakopee convent and its subsequent amalgamation with the community in St. Joseph. During that same year, the cornerstone was laid for a new convent-academy building. At the time of the new building's blessing, the convent's title was changed to Saint Benedict's Convent and Academy.

During Mother Scholastica's nine years as prioress, the community expanded in membership, buildings and ministries. Besides staffing schools, Mother Scholastica opened three frontier hospitals: St. Alexius in Bismarck, N.D. (1885); St. Benedict's in St. Cloud, Minn. (1886); and St. Mary's in Duluth, Minn. (1887). After her term as prioress, she taught elementary grades in Perham, Minn., and Moorhead, Minn. In 1892, Mother Scholastica became the foundress of a new foundation in Duluth, Minn., where she was again appointed superior by the local ordinary. She died in Duluth on June 11, 1911, and was buried in the convent cemetery there.