**The LADIES of CHARITY**

The Ladies of Charity were founded in 1617 by St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marilliac. The Ladies of Charity is an organization of Catholic lay women volunteers that helped change the way the world viewed charity and the less fortunate.

St. Vincent de Paul was a parish priest at Chatillon-les-Dombes in 1617. When he first arrived, he found the church largely deserted, and the citizens of the town huddling in their homes for fear of the Black Plague. On a special Feast Day, he was approached by a female parishioner who told him that a local family was in dire need of help. The entire family had fallen gravely ill, leaving no one capable of caring for anyone else. St. Vincent de Paul delivered a sermon in which he spoke of the great need of the family, and about how desperate their situation was. History records that St. Vincent de Paul’s sermon elicited a great, spontaneous out-pouring of charity that soon saw the family overwhelmed by gifts of food and visits from their neighbors seeking to help. When St. Vincent de Paul saw this great out-pouring of charity, he believed this spontaneous out-pouring of charity could be turned into something more permanent, that could help far more families in need. A few days later, on August 23, Vincent called a meeting of the women of the area and suggested that they band together to carry out this good work. They agreed to form an association in which each would take her turn in serving the poor corporally and spiritually. Thus was the founding of the first of the Confraternities of Charity.

The seeds that were planted at Chatillon-les Dombes flourished and the spirit of charity St. Vincent de Paul cultivated began to spread. To maintain the spirit of charity and unity among them, St. Vincent chose Louise de Marillac, his devoted charity partner, to visit the various new charity associations to help them organize effectively, and to help nurture what we would know as the Vincentian spirit. On March 11, 1934, Pope Pius Xl canonized Louise and proposed her as a model for the Ladies of Charity.

Throughout the world, the Ladies of Charity are known as members of the AIC (International Associations of Charity). In the United States this group is popularly known as the Ladies of Charity USA