



**Mother Marie Therese (Almaide) Duchemin, I.H.M.  
(1810-1892)**

Born in Baltimore to Anne Marie (Betsy), a free woman of color, Almaide was raised by her mother's guardians, the Duchemin family. She was immersed in the French language and culture of the Haitian refugee community and received an education uncommon to most women of the time. She was a favorite pupil in the school operated by Elizabeth Lange and Marie Magdaleine Balas, in the Fells Point neighborhood of the city, and soon came under their care. At age 19, she became a founding member of the Oblates of Providence, the first congregation of women religious of color in this country, taking the religious name of Marie Therese. The Oblate Sisters soon opened St. Frances Academy, the first Catholic school for children of color in the country. Duchemin served as the fourth superior general of the young community. During this time, she met Rev. Louis Florent Gillet, a Redemptorist who wanted to establish a teaching community in Monroe, Michigan. In 1845, she left the Oblates and set out for Monroe with Father Gillet where they founded the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to educate the daughters of the French-speaking community.

In 1858 she accepted Bishop John Neumann's invitation to serve in the Diocese of Philadelphia. The community opened its first school in Susquehanna. A request for a second school led to the division of the community into two foundations: Monroe and Philadelphia. A third foundation was later established at Scranton. Mother Duchemin was living at the Philadelphia community's motherhouse in West Chester at the time of her death in 1892.

Over their history, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary have opened private academies and colleges and staffed parochial elementary and high schools around the country. In recent years, the community's ministries have become more diverse, to include pastoral care in health care facilities, parish and prison ministries, and social outreach programs to serve the poor and marginalized.