

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
& Collaboration:
Companions on the Journey



Elizabeth Seton was a native of New York; she had been married, widowed and was the single mother of five young children when, at age 30, she decided to join the Catholic Church. By making this choice, she plunged herself into an entirely new social environment. Most Catholics in New York were poor immigrants looked down upon as “a public nuisance” and “the off-scourings of the people.”

By associating herself with Catholicism, Elizabeth lost the support and sympathy she might otherwise have enjoyed from family and friends, and found it difficult to maintain herself and her family.

New York



But she kept reaching out and moving forward.
When she lost the support of her friends and family,
God surrounded her with **collaborators**
who would only lift her higher.



Encouraged by the **Rev. William Dubourg** and **the Sulpician priests in Baltimore**, in early 1808 Elizabeth moved her family to what was then the seat of the only Catholic diocese in the United States in order to open a school for girls. It was here that **women from various cities** around the country began to join her. Gradually, and with the endorsement of **Bishop John Carroll**, the idea of forming a religious congregation began to take hold.

A historical map of the Eastern United States, showing the Atlantic coast and inland regions. The map is detailed with numerous place names, including New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington. Two yellow callout boxes with green circular markers are overlaid on the map. One box is positioned over the New York area, and the other is positioned over Baltimore. The map shows the coastline, major rivers, and various towns and cities.

New York

Baltimore

Circumstances began to fall into place that enabled the vision to become a reality: **Samuel Cooper**, a wealthy convert and seminarian, purchased property for an establishment near Emmitsburg where the **Rev. John Dubois** was in the process of establishing Mount St. Mary's School for boys. **Women who had joined Elizabeth in Baltimore** were willing to follow her into this rural, mountainous area. **Others** were waiting for her in Emmitsburg. The **Sulpician priests** were willing to serve as spiritual directors for the women. And finally, Elizabeth was able to secure **financial assistance from several friends**. Thus, Elizabeth Seton founded the American Sisters of Charity on July 31, 1809.

A historical map of the Eastern United States, showing the Appalachian region and the Atlantic coast. Three locations are highlighted with yellow labels and green dots: New York, Emmitsburg, and Baltimore. The map includes various geographical features like rivers and mountains, and labels for numerous cities and towns.

New York

Emmitsburg

Baltimore

Elizabeth Seton built her community of charity on the spiritual tradition of 17th-century Sts. Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, who understood that **in order to successfully serve the poor and vulnerable, you had to build strong relationships.**



Elizabeth's first contacts with Catholicism in the United States were with clergy. Through the intervention of her Italian mentor, Antonio Filicchi, she began corresponding with some of the most influential priests in the country—**Francis Matignon, John Cheverus and Bishop John Carroll.**



Fr. Matignon

Initially, these men were touched by her plight as a penniless widow with five small children, but gradually they not only recognized her for the remarkable woman she was, but also came to believe she was destined to take a great place in the United States.



Bishop Carroll



Bishop Cheverus

Gradually, Elizabeth came to know **other priests**, first through her parish in New York, and later as a result of her work in Baltimore and Emmitsburg. She respected them, honored their religious calling, heeded their advice and deeply valued their friendship. By the same token, they relied on her prayers, placed great hope for the future of the Church in the United States on her work and accepted her advice and admonitions.



When she found the **Rev. John Hickey's** sermons “unintelligible” due to a lack “of preparation and connection,” she gave him a scolding he would long remember. Her deep spiritual friendship with the **Rev. Simon Bruté** yielded a mutually enriching relationship, which prompted the young priest to refer to Elizabeth as “you whom I like to call a mother here, as I call one in France.”



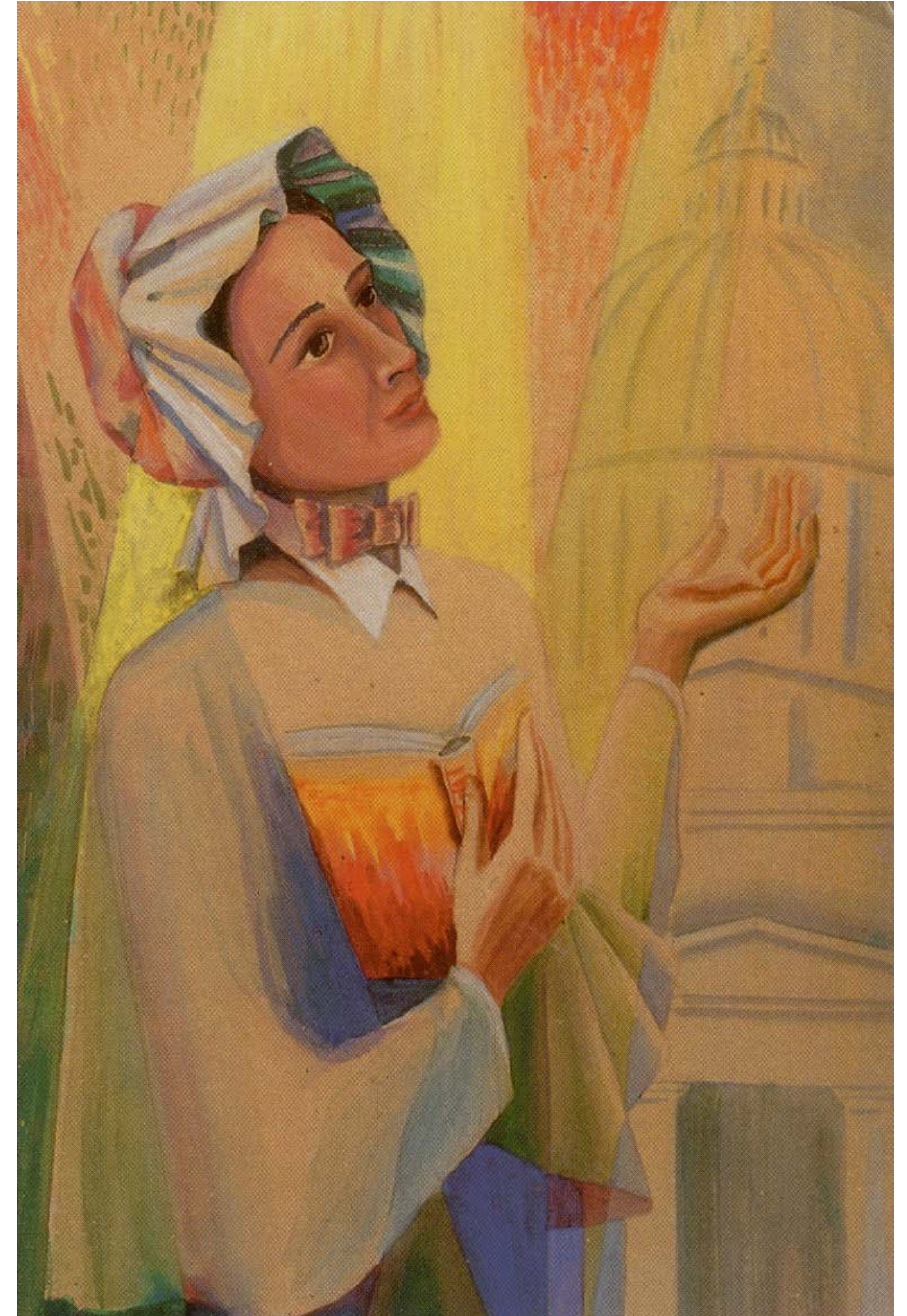
Her collaborators were not all Bishops, priests, or rich benefactors. Elizabeth Seton had a gift for sharing deep and lasting friendships with **many people** she met along her way. **Her students, their parents, and the Sisters of Charity** loved and admired her. They corresponded with her, shared their lives with her, and carried her influence to every part of the growing United States.



Accepting people as they were, she valued these relationships, writing to one friend, “The longer I live and the more I reflect and know how to value the realities of friendship, the more precious that distinction becomes.” She was willing to invest time and emotion into her relationships, as evidenced by the many hours she spent with friends in need and by her dedication to keeping in touch through voluminous correspondence.



Within one short year in Baltimore, the people she met there became deeply connected to her and she to them. They supported each other in their trials and rejoiced together in their happy times. She regarded herself and **Marie Françoise Chatard** as having “one heart,” and shared her spiritual wisdom with **George Weis** as he dealt with his wife’s illness. Elizabeth offered some **laity** the opportunity to become more involved in Church ministry and collaborated with **parents** who sent their daughters to St. Joseph’s.

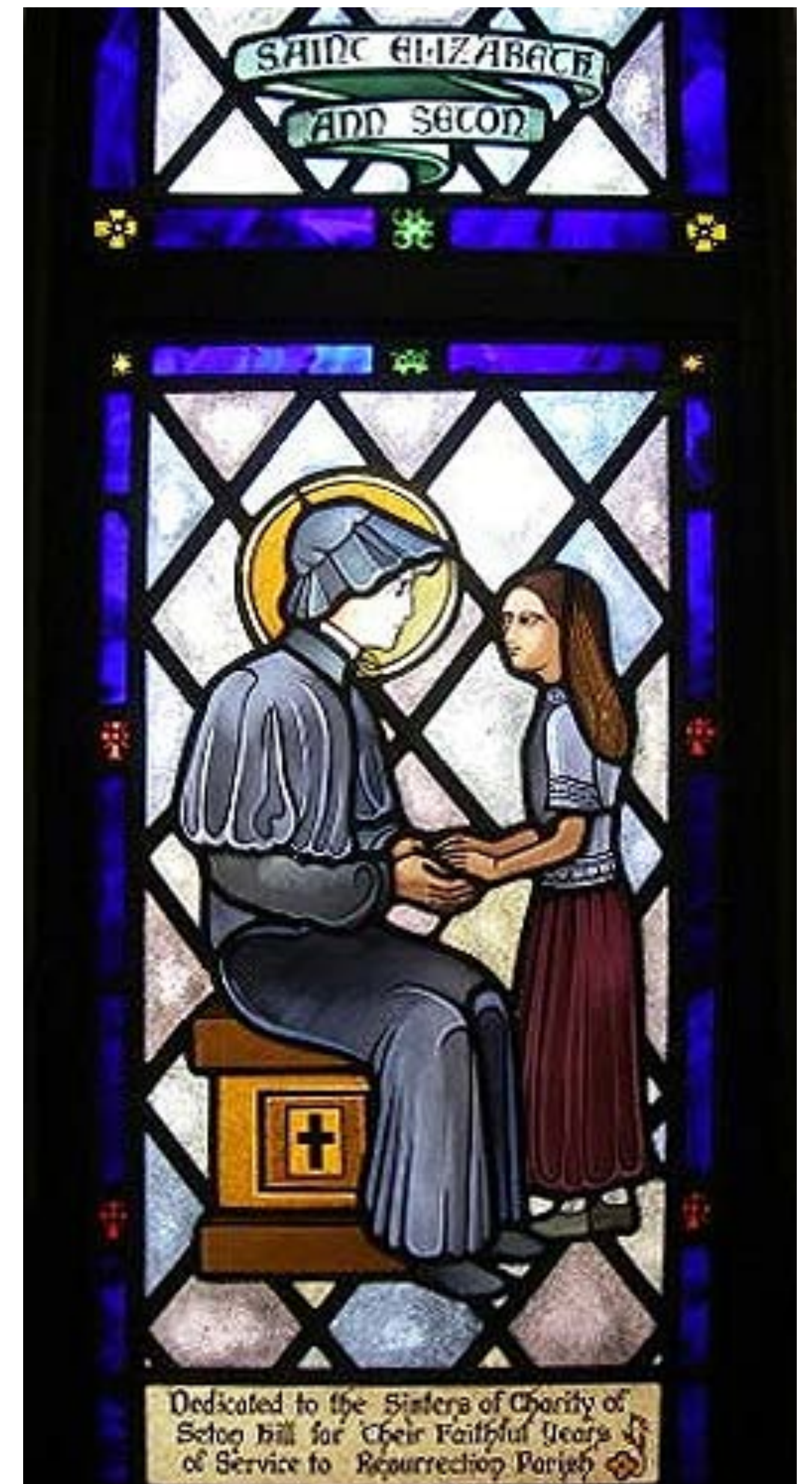


As founder of the American Sisters of Charity, Elizabeth had vision, talent and the ability to attract others' support as needed to bring projects to fruition. While plans unfolded for the establishment of the congregation, Elizabeth's loving personality, her obvious spirituality and her enthusiasm yielded the result that **“many good souls capable of seconding [her] intentions stood ready to join her.”**



The Sisters who joined her were, for the most part, educated, mature and independent. The pioneer spirit propelling the expansion and development of the nation energized them as well. Elizabeth was the heart of the group, giving the sisters instructions, leading them in meditation and forming them into effective ministers for the Church.

In the process, a spirit of loyalty and devotion to each other prevailed. They formed strong bonds of friendship which lasted a lifetime. Elizabeth wrote of **Sister Susan Clossy**, “[I]f you ever wish to find a piece of myself, it will be in this dear [one].”



She called **Sister Elizabeth Boyle**, founding mother of the New York Sisters of Charity, her “dearest old partner of my cares and bearer of my burdens,” and referred to **Sister Margaret George**, founding mother of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, as having “a heart that is truly made to be loved.”



New York

Emmitsburg

Baltimore

Cincinnati



To a friend in New York, Elizabeth described the Sisters' ties of affection as those of "a blessed family" who were "but one heart and one soul" ready "to go over our cities like a good leaven."



The ministry at Emmitsburg grew rapidly, as did the number of Sisters. The progress of their work did not escape others' notice. "Our blessed Bishop [John Carroll] is so fond of our establishment..." Elizabeth told Antonio Filicchi, "...**All the clergy in America** support it by their prayers and there is every good hope that it is the seed of an immensity of future good."



The early Sisters of Charity were a mustard seed that has produced a great abundance for our Church and our society over the last 200+ years, spreading throughout North America and beyond.



Source

St. Elizabeth Seton: Mother to Many
by Judith Metz, S.C.

<http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Jul2009/Feature2.asp>



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