This special issue provides an overview of the Cause of Mother Mary Theresa Dudzik, the first member and the foundress of the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago. Josephine Dudzik was born on August 30, 1860, in Plocicz, Poland. She immigrated with her family to Chicago where they settled on the near Northside, in the parish of St. Stanislaus Kostka. Josephine became very involved in parish activities and became a member of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis of Assisi. Her kind heart noted the horrible plight of the homeless, needy elderly, and she began to shelter some of them in her apartment home which she shared with her aging mother.

As the city faced yet another cruel winter with sweeping bouts of influenza, tuberculosis, and diphtheria, Josephine turned to her companions in the Third Order, asking them for help in caring for the starving homeless. After a year of considering Josephine’s request, only a handful of members agreed to help. The pastor, Rev. Vincent Barzynski, however, intervened, and said he would give his blessing to the venture only if the women agreed to form a Religious community, taking on the three vows, and living a community life of prayer and shared ministry. He reasoned that without the stability of a Religious congregation as caretakers of these poor elderly, the current volunteers would gradually lose their initial fervor, leave the ministry, thus leaving the elderly abandoned.

Josephine agreed to the pastor’s proposal and, on December 8, 1894, she took the name Sister Mary Theresa, founding the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago. In the ensuing years she founded the first nursing home for the elderly in Chicago. On behalf of her Sisters she also accepted the care of orphan children, and embraced the education ministry in parish elementary schools. As Sister Theresa aged into her 50’s her health deteriorated. Her personal gifts were compassion, joy, humility, and piety, not leadership. Hence the Sisters never voted her into leadership positions, and, as the little community grew, new members never realized that the quiet older Sister working beside them, was indeed the foundress. Finally, succumbing to abdominal cancer, she died at 58 years old on September 20, 1918, in Chicago.

Rev. Henry Malak, TOR, a native of Poland and survivor of Dachau, came to the United States and had a ministry as retreat master. He preached retreats for the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago and learned of the life of the foundress. Sensing her holiness, he encouraged the Sisters to initiate her Cause. Normally, a guild or organization to promote the cause of the candidate’s sainthood is created. The guild for our foundress was established in 1962 by Sister Venantia Rec with approval of the General Minister. Rev. Henry Malak edited the *Apostle of Mercy from Chicago*, a bulletin to acquaint the public with the life and holiness of Mother Theresa.

By 1963 Rev. Malak became a researcher and advocate for her Cause, and the author of several books about her. He was the first Postulator and worked with the Chicago Archdiocesan tribunal which examined the cause of Mother Theresa.
the merits of her proposed beatification.

From 1970-1981 an exhaustive search of Mother Theresa’s writings was undertaken, a detailed biography was written and eyewitness accounts were gathered. Mother Theresa’s remains, brought to the Motherhouse of the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago in Lemont from St. Adalbert cemetery in 1972, were sealed in a granite sarcophagus in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Chapel. A special large issue of The Apostle of Mercy from Chicago bulletin carried the story in great detail, supplemented with numerous photographs. That issue which listed Sister Venantia, and Miss Ann Dudzik as co-editors, went into three printings. Sister Jeanette Golojuch took charge of the circulation.

When sufficient information had been gathered, the investigation of the candidate, Mary Theresa Dudzik, was presented by the local bishop to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, who named Theresa Dudzik a Servant of God.

Six years later, in 1987, Mother Theresa’s first promoter, Rev. Malak, died and was buried on the Motherhouse grounds in Lemont. The Cause for her beatification and canonization, however, were actively pursued by both the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago and the Archdiocesan tribunal.

Sister Alvernia Groszek was appointed editor of the Bulletin for the League of the Servant of God Mother Mary Theresa and the first issue, dated January/February 1988, was sent out to members. Sister Kathleen Melia served as assistant editor.

Witnesses were called before the tribunal to recount concrete facts on the exercise of Christian virtues considered heroic, that is, the theological virtues: faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, and others specific to his/her state in life.

Once the archdiocesan investigation was finished, the acts and documentation were passed on to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in a document called the Positio. The Positio underwent an examination (theological) by nine theologians who give their vote. Since the majority of the theologians were favor, the cause was passed on for examination by cardinals and bishops who are members of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Because their judgment was favorable, the prefect of the Congregation presented the results of the entire course of the cause to the Holy Father, who gave his approval and authorized the Congregation to draft the relative decree. Thus, because of the heroic virtues evident in her life, Mother Theresa was declared Venerable on March 26, 1994, by Pope John Paul II.

Sister Venantia, who had labored so long on her Cause was blessed to have lived to see Mother Theresa progress on the steps to canonization. Sister Venantia died less than a year later, on February 27, 1995.

For the next step in the process, the beatification of a confessor (non-martyr), a miracle attributed to the Servant of God, verified after his/her death, is necessary. The required miracle must be proven through the appropriate canonical investigation.

Sister Mary Francine Labus was appointed liaison to the Postulator in Rome and took on the task of collecting information about favors granted through the intercession of Mother Theresa.

On March 6, 2002, Mr. Andrea Ambrosi, Postulator
for the Cause of Beatification of Venerable Mother Theresa Dudzik, came from Rome to interview several witnesses regarding the case of Jerry Lisiecki, a young man who was injured severely in the Illinois Central train crash in October 1972. Jerry had been in a coma and not expected to recover. Physicians had declared he would remain in a vegetative state for the rest of his life.

Jerry’s mother visited Our Lady of Victory Motherhouse during the holidays because of a “dream” she had. She took poinsettia leaves from a plant atop the sarcophagus of Mother Mary Theresa Dudzik and placed them on Jerry’s five senses while she continued the Novena to Mother Theresa. At the conclusion of the nine-day novena, while she was visiting Jerry, he responded by opening his eyes and recognizing her.

The marvel, however, did not meet the requirements of the Vatican process, and in 2010 the process for the beatification of Mother Theresa stagnated.

To reach more people who might develop a strong devotion to their foundress, the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago appointed Sister Jeanne Marie Toriskie as the next liaison for the Cause. She composed multimedia presentations and began to travel to various parishes and organizations who desired to learn more about this new American saint-to-be.

Sister Jeanne Marie maintained her relationship with St. Stanislaus Kostka for whom she had given several presentations to enthusiastic audiences. After several meetings with Rev. Anthony Bus, he invited her to use his radio station to broadcast the holy foundress’s story throughout the tri-state area that is Chicagoland. In the fall of 2012 Sister told the story of the humble woman whose compassionate heart led to founding of a Congregation of Religious and of a ministry for the poor and needy which spans the Midwest and serves thousands of people to this day.

As St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish, Mother Theresa’s first home parish in the United States, planned their 150th anniversary in 2017, they determined to feature their famous parishioner. Pastor Rev. Anthony Bus, C.R., engaged artist Stefan Niedorezo to carve an original statue of Mother Theresa which would have a permanent place as a shrine in the church. At the conclusion of the anniversary Mass Cardinal Cupich blessed the statue of Venerable Theresa.

In anticipation of the 100th death anniversary of Mother Theresa which occurred on September 20, 2018, Sister Jeanne Marie designed a series of monthly guides to help prepare for this day. Each guide included an historic image from the life of Mother Theresa, an excerpt from her Chronicle detailing a spiritual challenge that she encountered, a quotation in which she gives her response to the challenge, together with reflection questions and suggested activities which bring her spiritual treasures to current application of life 100 years later.

The Franciscan Sisters of Chicago invited all to use these guides found on their website, http://www.chicagofranciscans.org. The pastors at St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish (Rev. Anthony Bus, C.R. at the home parish of Mother Theresa) and St. Rene Parish (Rev. Thomas Bernas at his parish, due to his role as a member of the Archdiocesan Tribunal for her Cause) made these guides available to their parishioners as inserts to their Sunday bulletins from September 2017 through September 2018. Sister Diane Marie Collins who worked in campus ministry used these guides with the students at the University of Illinois Chicago campus. The guides were also used at all the facilities of Franciscan Ministries, the corporate sponsored ministries of the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago, through their Pastoral Care Departments.

Today there is technology available to share the story of Mother Theresa Dudzik with the entire global community. The Franciscan Sisters of Chicago have established their own website which publicizes their foundress. In addition, they have a website solely
devoted to her Cause at mothertheresadudzik.com. Mother Theresa also has her own Facebook page.

For those who would wish to further their knowledge and devotion to Mother Theresa, her website makes a number of materials available:

- A short biography of her life entitled “A Heart for Jesus”
- A novena prayer and beatification prayer leaflet
- A brochure summarizing the major events in the progress of her Cause,
- A prayer card containing an original prayer composed by Mother Theresa.
- A medallion containing soil from the grave of Venerable Theresa from her original interment at St. Adalbert cemetery in Niles, IL.
- A spiritual enrollment card which assures the petitioner of Masses and the prayers of the Sisters for their loved one for an entire year. The card features Mother Theresa.

Among the beautiful treasures of the past, however, is the original diary of Mother Theresa, written in her own hand in her native Polish language. The Chronicle was translated into English under the direction of Rev. Malak and the Sisters. In 2015 the English version was transferred into a digital format and is currently being prepared for publication and dissemination via the Internet. The target date for its release is the 125th anniversary of the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago, December 8, 2019.

Venerable Mary Theresa Dudzik is a model of compassionate care for the poor and needy, regardless of age, race, color, creed, or legal status.

Venerable Mary Theresa Dudzik, pray for us!