

**A Timeline of  
The Life and work of Mary Virginia Merrick  
And the Development  
Of the Washington Chapter and the National Christ Child Society**

1866 **Mary Virginia Merrick was born** on November 2<sup>nd</sup> in Washington, DC in her maternal grandmother's home at 615 E Street, Northwest. She was the second oldest of 7 children of Richard Merrick, a prominent Catholic lawyer, and Nannie (McGuire) Merrick, whose father, an art connoisseur who was influential in establishing the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington, DC.

1874 Mary and her sisters prayed for the conversion of their mother to Catholicism and for a baby brother, both prayers are answered.

During Her Early Years, European tutors taught the girls and emphasized Catholic traditions along with fine education.

1877 At the age of 11 Mary experienced a moment of realization (a conversion experience) when she gave herself to God in a wheat field at the family summer home, "Linwood" in Ellicott City, Maryland.

1878 At the age of 12 Mary received her First Holy Communion and pledged to "serve Our Lord in the poor."

1880 At the age of 14 Mary took a fall from her playhouse at "Linwood", thus began her life of physical suffering.

1883 At the age of 17 Mary was treated for what is believed to have been Potts disease (extra pulmonary Tuberculosis.) This disease slowly paralyzed areas of her spine and her legs.

This year Christmas letters were answered for 17 children, all in the name of the Christ Child. Thus, began the Christ Child **Christmas giving program.**

1884 Both of Mary's parents die in close succession of each other. Despite of her physical handicaps and her grief, Mary assumed responsibility for the family.

It was, at this time that Mary also **began enlisting her family and friends to help her further serve the poor** and serious thoughts of Mary Virginia's vision for her Christ Child Society were developing at her family home at 1306 F Street Northwest with the help of her friend Leonide Delarue.

**The first "Layette" was distributed** to a child to be born at Christmas.

1885 The **vision of "a Society dedicated to the Christ Child"** gave Mary Virginia Merrick a personal renewal that "the world was again a place of beauty and love."

This is the first year of the Society's less formal existence., 18 layettes were distributed and 5 Christmas letters were answered.

1886 The Society is organized on a more formal basis and the Merrick home, in the city of Washington, DC becomes the early headquarters of the Christ Child Society.

1887 Mary **“officially” founded the Christ Child Society, in Washington, DC.** She remained president of the Washington, DC Chapter until her death in 1955.

1890 The **first printed Annual Report of the Christ Child Society was published.** The report stated that the object of the Society was two-fold: “To clothe children under the age of twelve years whose parents were unable to do so, and to give to the little ones a Happy Christmas.”

The requirements for membership, as stated in this report, were as follows: “An annual offering in money for the accomplishment of the work proposed, and the manufacture, or making of as many garments by members as time and circumstances will permit.”

The report states that during the first year of the Society’s existence (1885) that 18 garments were completed and distributed; in 1890 the number had increased to 390 garments, 12 layettes and 250 Christmas letters were answered.

1891 The Start of the “Fresh Air” work began for children to spend two weeks in the country in rented cottages. “To see a need is to fill it,” Mary said.

The annual report of 1891 adds to the aims of the Society: “Fresh Air, a charity whose object is to secure to those little ones for whom ill health or the unfavorable conditions of home life render it beneficial, a two-weeks’ stay in the country during the summer months.”

The **first appeal for contributions** was made and the wife of President Benjamin Harrison sent a generous check.

1893 Miss Leonide Delarue organized a group of “Friendly Visitors” who went to the homes of the poor to investigate conditions in the homes where layettes and clothes were being distributed to determine and tend to their additional needs, and report back to her.

. 1894 The annual report lists the names of a group of women assisting Mary, referred to as “My Council.” This was the forerunner of a future board spoken of for the first time in 1902 as the “Board of Managers.”

1898 The Christ Child Society headquarters was moved from the Merrick home and the first headquarters and “Settlement Center” were established at 1101 H. Street, NW and a part-time paid worker was hired to be in charge.

In this year, it was reported that the Christ Child Society in Washington had 352 members, distributed 2200 Layettes, 300 Christmas gifts, and sent 30 children to the “Fresh Air” summer program.

Young people are encouraged to participate in the activities of the Society “in order that they might carry on this work of social service in later years.”

1899 The Society was being organized on a more formal basis with a “Committee on Organization” formed to put the Society on a strong business footing.

A “Sewing School” was added to the activities of the Society offered at the Center.

1899 – 1904 , due to poor health Mary Virginia Merrick spent these five years living year-round at Linwood, except for a brief annual visit to the city. Her faithful members, under the direction of Leonide Delarue, carry on the work of the Society and report to her regularly of their progress serving the poor.

Mary’s love of children led her to be invited to write a column for the Catholic World, entitled “Aunt Kate Letters”.

1900 The **Society motto, Laborare Est Orare (“To Work is to Pray”)** is adopted.

1901 The **first “Constitution” is formally adopted** by the Society and **officers were elected**.

The work of the Society expanded to include monthly mothers meetings, sewing classes, a library with a librarian, and more.

Additional Centers were established in the city of Washington in the Georgetown area and then the Southeast sections of the city.

1902 A center was established in the “far Northwest” section of Washington. The Christ Child headquarters was moved to 1104 26<sup>th</sup> Street, Northwest.

1903 The **Christ Child Society was incorporated in the District of Columbia**. The Charter stated that the “the particular business and object of the Society: to improve by useful instruction and charitable relief the condition of the poor children of the District of Columbia.”

At this time, the Society **formally adopts as its motto “Labore est orare – To labor is to pray**, the **symbol adopted by the Society** is the sacred image of the Christ Child raising His hand in benediction.

A “carriage house” was purchased in the Southeast section of Washington for an additional Center.

1904 5 Centers were now in operation in Washington in rented houses in different sections of the city, the “Centers” are eventually called “Settlements” or “Settlement Houses”. Settlement work in the city of Washington, pioneered by the Christ Child Society, was rapidly progressing as the population increased.

The first “Branch” of the Christ Child Society was founded outside of the Washington, DC area in **Baltimore MD**, this Chapter has opened and closed 3 times before being re-established in 2013

A Center was established at St. Dominic’s Church at 6<sup>th</sup> and E Street in Southwest Washington.

- 1905 Mary Virginia Merrick established The Christ Child Society as a National organization as “Branches”, now called “Chapters”, began to be formed across the country.

Another center was established in Northeast Washington to serve the families of the Italian immigrants arriving to help build Union Station.

A Chapter is officially formed in **Baltimore, MD**. This Chapter operated until 1960, closed, then operated from 1967-1972, closed in 1972 and was re-chartered in 2014 and remains active today.

- 1906 The Washington Chapter now operated 6 Centers and 4 libraries across the city of Washington.

Classes in English for adults, “Night School Work,” were established.

- 1907 A Center was opened in Glen Echo, Maryland.

The First Christ Child “Boys Club” was established.

- 1908 7 Centers were now in operation across the city as well as one in Glen Echo, Maryland.

7 additional “Branches” (now called “Chapters”) of the Society had now been established outside of Washington. These early “Chapters” were started in **Baltimore MD**, **New York NY**, this branch operated until 1962 providing 50 years of service; **Omaha NE**, which is still in operation today; **Worcester MA**, now closed; **Chicago IL**, closed and re-established in 1996 and is still in operation today; **Toledo OH**, still in operation today and **Ellicott City MD**, closed but working to re-charter.

Realizing the necessity for solidarity in the Society, Mary wrote: The scope of the work is left to each branch, but the object, motive, spirit and principles of the Christ Child Society are identical wherever established.”

The first retreat for Washington Christ Child members was held and the custom of yearly retreats or days of recollection began.

Mary wrote a children’s book, The Life of Christ.

- 1908 The library work grew and libraries were established in Jails, Tuberculosis Hospitals and a reform school in the city.

The work of visiting the sick in hospitals began. A farm is rented in Silver Spring MD for the “Fresh Air Work.”

- 1909 A Chapter is established at **Trinity College in Washington, DC**, this Chapter is no longer operating.

- 1910 Chapters of the Society were established in **Davenport IO**, **Indianapolis IN**, and **Akron OH**. The Akron chapter is still operating and the Davenport and Indianapolis chapters are no longer providing service, no closing date on record.

1911 Chapters of the Society were established in *Dayton OH, Jacksonville FL, New York NY*, and an “Associate Chapter” at *Georgetown Visitation Junior College* in Washington, DC. The Jacksonville Branch is closed, no closing date on record. The Dayton Chapter is still in operation today and the New York city Chapter closed in 1962 after 51 years serving children, a Christ Child “service club” is active today at Georgetown Visitation High School.

The first mention of a boy’s summer program is noted.

1911-1914 7 Centers were now operating in Washington and 2,600 children a year were being served in the city.

1912 The Christ Child headquarters was moved to 2405 Pennsylvania Avenue.

A Chapter was established in *Detroit Michigan*, which remains in operation today.

The “Library Service” was now operating 4 “institutional” and 4 “Center” libraries.

Pope Saint Pius X sends a “Letter of Commendation” to the Christ Child Society.

The Society holds its first Annual Retreat.

1913 – 1922 Mary wrote monthly “Aunt Kate Letters” for the “Leader”, a Catholic publication.

1913 A Christ Child Auxiliary is established at St. Augustine’s Parish to serve the needs of the “colored” Catholic community in the city.

1914 A “Junior Membership” group was formed to involve the children of Society members and they met in the Merrick home on S Street. Lectures and seminars were offered for Society members and their families. The 1914-1915 report lists 287 junior members and 1,000 members of the Washington Chapter.

Farmland was purchased in Silver Spring, Maryland for a new home to continue the Fresh Air Work.

**WW I was declared** and many Branches turn to war-time war services or find it necessary to close.

A Chapter is established in *Lewiston IN*, this branch operates until 1965 providing 51 years of service to children.

1915 Mary wrote, Come Unto Me: Prayers Before and After Communion

Mary wrote fictional tales called “Margery Stories”.

Chapters of the Society were established in *Mobile AL and Madison WI*, both had a short tenure due to the small populations in their area, closing dates are not in the records.

Mary was awarded the **Laetare Medal** by Notre Dame University in recognition of her distinguished service.

The Society celebrates 25 years of service and Mary writes:

*“The work of these years running like a golden thread from its first beginning to the present time, shows the same spirit of love for the Christ Child which gave birth to the Society and still actuates its members in their devoted work for Christ and His needy little ones.”*

A Chapter was established in **Madison WI**, this Chapter is no longer in operation with no closing date available.

- 1916 At this time, Mary **incorporated the Society’s Chapters into the “National Christ Child Society” and national officers were elected**, she served as the National President until poor health forced her to resign in 1948 and she served as “Honorary National President” until her death in 1955.

Chapters are established in **Cleveland OH, St Paul MN, Philadelphia/Sharon Hill PA and Lewiston ID**. The St Paul Branch operated until 1990 providing 74 years of service, the Philadelphia Branch operated until 1985 providing 69 years of service, the Lewiston Chapter closed in 1965 having served children for 51 years, the Cleveland Chapter is still active today.

During this period of development, Chapters had been established in 24 cities outside of Washington, DC as well as programs in 3 colleges, and one high school. The following Chapters are no longer in operation, and there are no records as to when they closed:

**Canton OH**

**Charleston SC**

**Davenport IO**

**Dubuque IO**

**Indianapolis IN**

**Jacksonville FL**

**Oil City PA**

**Trinity College, Washington DC**

**New Rochelle College, New Rochelle NY**

**Georgetown Visitation Junior College, Washington DC.**

There were now 7 Christ Child Centers in operation in Washington DC.

- 1917 Due to World War I the Society adjusted its program to meet the war emergency, however due to lack of volunteer workers, limited means and acute housing problems, the Society Centers in Washington are now restricted to 3 and the Italian and other settlements were consolidated into “Settlement House.” Many of the established Branches across the country were forced to cease operating due to the ongoing war efforts, some never opened again.

- 1918 A “Christ Child Society War Committee” was established.

A free Dental Clinic was established in part of the Settlement House.

- 1919 The first Christ Child Boys Club was established.
- 1920 Mary wrote a book for children called, The Altar of God, this book was an introduction to the meaning of the Mass.
- A building that was being rented at 324 Indiana Avenue, Northwest was purchased to use as the Washington Headquarters and a Center, which included a fully equipped Dental Clinic.
- The first paid “Executive Secretary” was hired.
- A Branch was established in *Norfolk VA*. This Branch closed in 1995 after providing 74 years of service.
- 1921 The farm in Silver Spring was sold and property was purchased on Norbeck Pike, Rockville MD.
- A Branch was established in *Brooklyn NY* which operated until 1987, providing 66 years of service to children.
- 1922 The Christ Child Society assisted with the training of social workers at Catholic University.
- Rummage sales began being organized in Washington, DC to support the Chapters programs.
- 1923 The first National Newsletter, “The Voice of the Christ Child” was printed.
- Chapters were established in *Annapolis MD* and *El Paso TX*, both Branches remain in operation today.
- 1924 Chapters were established in *Council Bluffs IO*, this Branch operated until 1973 providing 49 years of service to children; *Richmond VA*, this Branch operated until 1979 providing 55 years of service; and in *Portsmouth/Tidewater VA*, which operated until 2002, providing 78 years of service to children.
- 1925 An “Associate Chapter” is established at the School of the Holy Child in Suffern, NY. This Chapter is not in operation today and there is no closing information.
- 1926 A farm was purchased on Edson Lane in Rockville Maryland to use for the Fresh Air Work.
- 1927 The Edson Lane Farm was converted to a Convalescent Home.
- A Chapter was established in *Utica, NY* and remains in operation today.
- 1926-1929 The Christ Child Society of Washington became a founding member of the Community Chest in Washington.
- 3 Centers in Washington were now located at 324 Indiana Avenue Northwest and 1600 Gates Street in Northeast and 28<sup>th</sup> and Dumbarton Streets in Northwest.

- 1928 The Washington Chapter purchased property for a “Fresh Air Farm” for Colored Children in Bel Alton, MD, the first season was in 1929.
- 1929 A Chapter was established in *Summit, NJ* and operated until 1999, providing 70 years of service to children. This Chapter was **re-established in 2010** and remains active today.
- 1930-1931 The Property on Indiana Avenue was sold to the city and a new property was purchased at 608 Massachusetts Avenue Northeast for a new Settlement House.
- 1932 **The Christ Child Society “Branches” (Chapters) are now serving in 33 cities.**
- Mary received the **Cosmopolitan Club of Washington’s Medal as “Washington’s Outstanding Citizen.”** She was the first woman to be awarded this medal.
- 1933 Washington Board members were asked to raise \$10 each per month to finance the layette program and “keep it going”.
- A property at 3212 P Street Northwest was rented to operate as a rummage Shop and the name **“Christ Child Opportunity Shop”** was formally adopted. This shop still operates today.
- A Chapter was established in *Pasadena CA* and remains in operation today.
- An “Associate Chapter” is established at *Convent of the Sacred Heart, Eden Hall, Philadelphia PA*. This Associate Chapter ended when the school closed its doors in the early 70’s
- 1934 A Branch was established in *Portland OR*, this branch operated until 2010 providing 75 years of service to children.
- The last issue of “The Voice” was printed, it resumed in 1940 and a twice a year newsletter publication was printed every year..
- 1936 A branch was established in *Boston MA* and remains in operation today.
- A new Gymnasiun was completed at the 608 Massachusetts, Ave, NE site.
- 1937 The **Society celebrated 50 years of “dedicated service to the physical needs and religious guidance of countless children** and youth in Washington and across the country. “A two- day celebration was planned and it opened with the celebration of a Mass at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Washington.
- The crowning event was the announcement from Rome of the bestowal of the distinguished **Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice Medal**, on our founder, Mary Virginia Merrick for her “labor in exemplary fashion for the Catholic Church.”
- Land was rented in Annapolis Maryland for the Merrick Girl’s Camp, and the “Merrick Boy’s Camp Committee” was formed to work to establish a boy’s camp.
- A summer camp for diabetic children was held at the Convalescent Home.

At this time, the **Washington Chapter membership was approximately 1,000 members.**

1938 Property was purchased in Namenjoy, in Sothern Maryland, to establish the Merrick Boy's Camp.

1939 **Mary was the recipient the Sienna Medal**, an award given yearly by Theta Phi Alpha Sorority to the "Outstanding Catholic Woman of the year".

1941 The annual report for Washington states that the total number of Christ Child participants who came "through the door" to participate in programs in Washington was 159,740.

Property was purchased at Wild Rose Shore, MD to establish a girls camp.

1943 A Branch was established in **San Mateo CA**, this Branch operated until 1977 serving children for 34 years.

1947-1948 The work in Washington continued and Society records show that 158,261 children and youth "came through the doors" of the Centers, the summer camp for girls serviced 204 and 1,923 children received Christmas gifts.

Branches were established in **South Bend IN**, which remains in operation today and in **Rome NY**, which operated until 1992, providing 45 years of service to children.

1949 **Mary was bestowed an honorary degree by Georgetown University.**

Chapters were established in **Milwaukee WI**, which is still in operation today and in **Dunkirk/Fredonia NY**, this Chapter operated until 1998, serving children for 50 years.

1949-1950 The original property on Edson Lane was sold and a larger property was purchased at Edson Lane and Rockville Pike to establish and build a larger Convalescent Home.

1951 The "Wild Rose Shores" camp property was sold and the camp was relocated to Island Creek MD. This property was donated to the Society by the Archdiocese of Washington to establish a permanent Christ Child Camp for girls.

The Norbeck Road property was sold.

1953 The name "Christ Child Convalescent Home" was changed to "Christ Child Convalescent Hospital." At that time, it was a facility for convalescent care.

1955 **Miss Mary died** on January 10<sup>th</sup> of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 88. The Apostolic Delegate to the United States, Most Rev. Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, presided at the funeral, Archbishop Patrick Aloysius O'Boyle sang the Pontifical Requiem Mass and three other bishops joined them in the sanctuary, Bishops George L. Leech of Harrisburg, Joseph McShea, Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia, and John McNamara, Auxiliary Bishop of Washington at her home parish, the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament, with Internment at Oak Hill Cemetery located in the Georgetown section of Washington.

1957 A Chapter is established in **Akron OH**, which remains in operation today.

The Christ Child Convalescent Home begins taking children with emotional problems, as well as convalescing children.

- 1959 The first “Junior Guild” was established in the Washington Chapter and was called the “Mary Virginia Merrick Guild,” gradually other Guilds were formed in the Washington Chapter and the name was changed from “Guild” to “sub-Chapter” and they are now once again called “Guilds.”
- 1960 The Convalescent care program was phased out at the Convalescent Hospital and the program became a 24 hour program for emotionally disturbed children. The name was then changed to the “Christ Child Institute for Children.”
- 1963 A Chapter was established in *Appleton WI*, this Chapter operated until 2007 serving children for 44 years.
- 1964 A Chapter is established in *Sea Girt NJ*, this Chapter operated until 1990 serving children for 20 years.
- 1965 Chapters were established in *Western Washington Stat*, this Chapter operated until 2000, serving children for 35 years, and *Austin TX*, this Chapter operated until 2000, serving children for 35 years. The Austin Texas Chapter was re-established in 2001 as the Texas Capital Chapter.
- 1970 A Chapter was established in *Palm Springs CA*, this Chapter operated until 1978 serving children for 8 years.
- 1971 A Chapter was established in *Tucson AZ*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1973 A Chapter was established in *Albany NY*, this Chapter remains active today.
- The *Council Bluffs IL* Chapter closes after serving children for 49 years..
- 1974 The last remaining Settlement House in Washington, DC was closed, due to a declining downtown population and neighborhood changes. This property was sold in 1977.
- A Chapter was established in *Mansfield OH*, this Chapter operated until 1997 serving children for 23 years.
- 1977 The Settlement House, on Massachusetts Ave was sold, which led to the end of Settlement work for the Washington Chapter.
- The Chapter in *San Mateo CA* closes after serving children for 34 years.
- 1978 A Chapter was established in *Geauga County OH*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1979 A Chapter was established in *Stuart FL*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1981 A Chapter is established in *Columbus OH*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1982 The “Christ Child Institute for Children” closes which ends the Washington Chapter’s work as a health care provider.

- Chapters are established in *Cape May NJ* and *Northern Michigan*, both Chapters remain active today.
- 1983 A Chapter was established in *Western Reserve OH*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1984 A Chapter was established in *Palm Beach FL*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1985 A Chapter is established in *Phoenix AZ*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1987 **The Christ Child Society celebrates 100 years** and establishes a scholarship at Catholic University of America School of Social Work, called the “Christ Child Scholars Program” and the recipients each year are called “Mary Virginia Merrick Scholars.”
- 1990 A Chapter was established in *Toledo OH*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1991 A Chapter was established in *Boca Raton FL*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1992 A Chapter was established in *Pittsburgh PA*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1993 A Chapter was established in *San Diego CA*, this Chapter remains active today.
- 1996 A Chapter was established in *Door County WI* and the *Chicago IL* Chapter is re-established, both Chapters remain active today.
- 1997 Chapters are established in *Fort Wayne IN*, *Naples FL*, and *Oshkosh, WI* and all Chapters remain active today.
- 2000 A Chapter was established in *Fond du Lac WI* and this Chapter remains active today.
- 2001 The *Austin TX* Chapter is re-established as the *Texas Capital Chapter*, and this Chapter remains active today.
- 2002 The **first National Office is opened** in shared space in the Washington Chapter’s Offices.
- 2003 **Mary Virginia Merrick was declared a “Servant of God”** by the Church.
- Chapters are established in *Atlanta GA* and in *Sarasota FL* and both Chapters remain active today.
- 2004 A Chapter was established in *San Jose CA* and this Chapter remains active today
- 2005 Chapters are established in *Central IL* and in *Quad Cities IL* and both Chapters remain active today.
- 2010 The Summit, NJ Chapter is re-established and remains active today.
- 2011 On Easter Monday, Cardinal Donald Wuerl decreed in the Catholic Standard, the publication of the Archdiocese of Washington DC, that he is “**initiating the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God, Mary Virginia Merrick**”.

2012 **The Christ Child Society celebrates 125 years of service to Children, in the name of the Christ Child.**

The Baltimore Chapter is re-established.

2015 The *Duluth MN* Chapter is chartered.

2016 The *Denver CO* Chapter is chartered.

A *Monterey Bay CA* Chapter begins formation.

Present - There are 43 Christ Child Chapters across the country with 6,000 plus members.

One of the most memorable and moving tributes paid to Miss Mary at the time of her death was that of the late Cardinal Patrick A. O'Boyle, of Washington, to whom she was known not only through her words but through her works:

*“Miss Mary Merrick’s long life was an inspiring expression of the power and beauty of Christian charity. She saw the image of the Infant Savior in every poor child and it was the Christ Child who conferred upon her a long life of amazing successful activity that defied an almost lifelong infirmity. It was inevitable that she establish the Christ Child Society. Both in spirit and accomplishment, no society has better deserved the sublime name. Miss Merrick from her bed of pain – perpetually dynamic and devoted has a lesson for everyone who professes to be a follower of Christ.”*

Bishop John J. McNamara delivered Mary’s eulogy and in his eulogy stated:

*“She took her cross and out of it fashioned a bridge over which she and others could walk on their way to God.”*

This humble, sincere woman, our Founder, is our model. She reminds us that love of a poor child is love of the Christ Child, that this love is an honor and that to serve either is a privilege. She saw the Christ Child in every child served.