

**Little Sisters of the Assumption
Family Health Service**

Mission Handbook





The LSA Family Health Service logo is a daisy on a rough-edged background. It represents the beauty and tenacity of life, even among the hardest conditions, like a flower that grows and thrives in the cracks of pavement on a city street.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I want to welcome you to Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service, and invite you to join in the journey of service, compassion and community that characterizes our work.

This mission handbook is not just words on a page, but principles that define the way we work with families, communities, and colleagues. These words are meant to inspire as well as articulate an ideal that we continually strive to achieve.

On behalf of the Board, staff and families of East Harlem, I thank you for joining us in service of the mission of LSA.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary S. Carter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Gary S. Carter, LCSW
Executive Director

WE BELIEVE IN . . .

- The uniqueness and dignity of each person
- The strength of families
- The power of relationships
- The richness of diversity
- Justice as a right for every person
- The creativity of the human spirit
- The importance of the spiritual search

And so we choose to . . .

- Be respectful and caring in all our relationships
- Accept people as they are and help them build self-esteem and confidence
- Support the whole family (as defined by the family themselves)
- Maintain high-quality professional service in all of our programs
- Collaborate with others in the building of community
- Welcome diversity
- Advocate for just solutions to problems faced by families
- Strengthen families' ability to advocate for themselves
- Support groups who gather for sharing prayer or spiritual activities

OUR HISTORY



The Beginning

The Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service, Inc., founded in 1958, has grown out of a long tradition of love and service that continues to this day. Our history begins with the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, founded in 19th-century France by Father Étienne (Stephen) Pernet and Antoinette Fage. These two visionaries dedicated their lives to serving God and loving the poor and marginalized. The congregation grew and spread worldwide, and its work with families in poor communities eventually led to the establishment of the LSA Family Health Service.

The Founders

Stephen Pernet was born into a farming family in France in 1824. He left the farm to enter the seminary, becoming a priest and teacher. At that time, rural families were moving off the land and into crowded, inadequate housing in the cities to find work. When Stephen began running a club for working-class children, he was shocked by the poverty he saw and moved to respond. His vision was to found a religious congregation of women who would serve the poor directly, in their own homes, at the heart of the family.

Antoinette Fage grew up with hardship and instability, having lost both parents at a young age. A serious fall as an adolescent caused her lifelong pain. With no family, Antoinette was taken in by her mother's friends and went to work as a seamstress. This early suffering and exposure to poverty created in Antoinette a sensitive heart and deep compassion for others. She was working as the director of an orphanage in Paris when she met Stephen Pernet in 1864.

This meeting proved life-changing for both of them. Stephen was convinced that Antoinette was the leader he had been seeking to guide his new community of women. And in 1866, Antoinette, taking the name Mother Mary of Jesus, became the first General Superior of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. Their mission was to serve God by nursing the sick poor in their homes.

Growth and Expansion

From the beginning, the Little Sisters believed that their dream would be best realized by working together with like-minded people of the community. Several lay groups were organized to pursue a collaborative mission. Affluent men and women volunteered to help the sisters in their efforts, and the fathers and mothers of the poor families banded together to support one another and improve their conditions. This spirit of partnership continues to inform the work of the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the organizations they have founded.

Many mission houses were established, first in France, then England, then the United States. Today, there are mission sites in 24 countries worldwide. The work of each site has developed in response to the specific needs of the community, but has always been driven by a commitment to the family, to poor and working-class people, and to changing the social order to create a more just, loving and equitable world.

LSA in NYC

In 1891, the Little Sisters came to New York City, settling in the Lower East Side to continue their work of home nursing. By the 1950s, they had moved up to Yorkville, caring for families on the East Side, in Harlem and in the South Bronx. The sisters soon realized that it would be important to focus their work on a specific neighborhood, and after much community consultation, decided on East Harlem. Here, they could continue their work with families and launch important partnerships with East Harlem Interfaith and Mount Sinai's Department of Community Medicine. In 1958, five Little Sisters of the Assumption — four nurses and a social worker — set up shop on East 115th Street, across from the NYC Department of Health.

Soon, the organization grew, adding new staff, students and volunteers and launching new initiatives. Their community organizing work expanded. The agency continued to collaborate with East Harlem Interfaith and began the East Harlem Nurses Association, influencing national legislation on health, welfare and housing policy. In 1970, the Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service was established as a non-profit corporation with an independent Board of Directors.





“We are together as we reshape the world so everyone has a place to call home.”

Sr. Susanne Lachapelle, LSA

LSA Today

In 1974, LSA Family Health Service moved to East 119th St., taking over a deteriorated brownstone owned by Holy Rosary Parish. Over time, the work started by the nursing sisters expanded in direct response to the needs of the community, eventually developing into the programs and holistic model of delivering services to families that prevails today. When the visiting nurses found that the kitchens of their patients were empty, they started the food pantry. When new immigrants began to come to East Harlem in large numbers, GED classes gave way to ESL.

As we responded to the community by adding programs, we grew out of our home, which had come to occupy a patchwork of two brownstones, two storefronts and borrowed school classrooms on and around East 119th St.

In March 2004, LSA opened our doors to a beautiful new building at 333 East 115th St., uniting our mission and programs together under one roof.

In addition to the site in East Harlem, the Little Sisters of the Assumption founded two main centers in the US, in Massachusetts: Project Hope, in Dorchester, and Pernet Health Services, in Worcester. Here and worldwide, the Little Sisters of the Assumption and the organizations they founded continue a legacy of love and service.



“Love others by sharing life with them.”

Sr. Carol Costello, LSA

OUR VALUES

Commitment to the poor and marginalized

- Our services will always target the poorest and most needy families in our communities.
- We strive to alleviate poverty by helping families gain the skills and resources they need to cope with and improve their economic situation, and give their children a chance at greater success.
- We address poverty of spirit as well as material poverty by providing opportunities for enhancing self-esteem, education, socialization and community-building.
- We educate ourselves about the effects of race, class, gender and culture on the lives of our families, and work to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all.
- We grow in our understanding of the root causes of poverty and advocate for social justice — locally, nationally and globally.

*“I found among Little Sisters...
a commitment to create a more just and
loving environment for families struggling
against the odds of poverty.”*

Sr. Margaret Leonard, LSA

Support for the family and promotion of its strengths

- We believe in the strength of families of all kinds, and that healthy families are the basis for a healthy society. Therefore, our services primarily target families, however they choose to define themselves.
- We recognize the family as a system; what affects one member affects all.
- We believe that the caregiver and child relationship is crucial, and work to strengthen this bond.
- We support child development and believe it lays the foundation for future success.





*“You become part of every family
you work with.”*

Sr. Eleanor Cavistan, LSA

Mutuality in our relationships with families and staff

- We respect, learn from, and depend on each other.
- We accept people without judgment, seeing the dignity in everyone. Everyone has a place, and is called by name.
- We recognize the strengths, capacities, and expertise of each person.
- Our relationships are based in the principles of trust, equality, and dialogue, rather than in the power of one over the other.
- We work together to find solutions.
- “The power of growth is in relationship.”



Empowerment

- Families are active participants in our work and have a real voice.
- We welcome their feedback on our services, their opinions, and their participation in our work together.
- We support our families' growth and ability to improve their conditions.
- We provide opportunities for learning and leadership, and help families better advocate for themselves.
- We encourage families to gather together, support each other and create community.

FAMILIES' ROLE

The concept of **mutuality** is what makes LSA unique within the field of human services. The staff person and the family (our clients) both grow through the process of developing a relationship with each other. Families are active participants in identifying their own needs. The staff person and the family together develop a working plan to build on the family's strengths.

Families can influence staff or the agency by:

- participating in the planning of their home visits and groups
- providing feedback about services, including the initial meeting
- engaging in dialogue with staff about what is and isn't working for them

When problems arise between a staff person and the family, their relationship should allow for a process of negotiation that works through the problems to a satisfactory solution.

One of LSA's goals is to help families develop their own voice and advocate for their own needs and rights. **We encourage families to:**

- volunteer at agency events and in programs
- be active participants in their programs and services
- help plan group activities and carry them out
- attend roundtable discussions with staff
- be involved with organizing events
- engage in opportunities to develop leadership skills
- participate in community events as members of LSA
- represent the agency at events



Families and staff co-create community by:

Caring

Learning

Working

Celebrating

TOGETHER!

THE POWER OF GROWTH IS IN RELATIONSHIP EL PODER DEL CRECIMIENTO RADICA EN LA RELACION

The power of growth
is in relationship.
Even when life seems frail –
 when there is
 darkness
 and pain,
 confusion
 and complexity –
the loving and caring
of a human person
can be
 sunlight
 and warmth
to the growth power
of another human person:
helping another
 creates
 meaning and hope
in both persons;
being sunlight and warmth
to another's life
nurtures growth in both.
To this growth we are pledged.

*El poder de crecimiento
radica en la relación.
Aún cuando la vida parece frágil –
 cuando nos rodea
 la oscuridad
 y el dolor,
 la confusión
 y la complejidad –
la capacidad de amar y cuidar
de un ser humano
puede ser
 el rayo de luz
 y el calor
para el crecimiento
de otro ser humano:
ayudar a otro
 crea
 sentido y esperanza
en ambos;
ser el rayo de luz y calor
en la vida de otro ser
nutre el crecimiento en ambos.
A este crecimiento estamos comprometidos.*



Sr. Maureen O'Keefe, LSA



The Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service, Inc., founded in 1958, is a nonprofit community-based organization working with the families of East Harlem to address the physical, emotional, educational, and spiritual dimensions of family health.

Its home-based and center-based programs are designed to empower those who are most vulnerable and who have least access to the basic necessities of life, in the conviction that the entire community grows when individuals and families are affirmed in their own dignity.

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