

HISTORY

The University of Providence was founded in 1932 by the Most Reverend Edwin V. O'Hara, Catholic Bishop of Great Falls, in collaboration with the Sisters of Charity of Providence and the Ursuline Sisters. Named Great Falls Junior College for Women, the two-year college was originally located in the Ursuline Academy on Central Avenue. The faculty consisted of several sisters, a few priests, and one lay woman. A year later, Great Falls Normal School was established by Sister Lucia Sullivan, S.P., and combined with the Junior College to address the need for prospective teachers in the area.

In its first year, 14 women enrolled. In 1935, the registration for both the Junior College and the Normal School totaled 105 women. In 1937, the first male student enrolled, and the year following there were 19 men in attendance. There were really two schools, each operating under a different Catholic religious community. The union of the two schools was one of convenience and legality. In 1942, Great Falls Junior College for Women was discontinued because of declining enrollment. Great Falls Normal College was renamed the Great Falls College of Education. By the early 1950s it became simply the College of Great Falls under the direction of the Sisters of Providence. Classes were held in the old Columbus Hospital. In September of 1995, the College was renamed the University of Great Falls.

In 1944, land was purchased south of the city by the Sisters of Providence and in the 1950s plans were made to move the College of Great Falls to the new campus. The new campus opened in 1960. At that time there were eleven buildings. Faculty offices were in the north end of the Classroom Building. Administration offices were in the Library. Emilie Hall was a women's residence hall. A ballroom was located on the lower floor of the Student Center, where the office of the Student Activities Director, UPward Grounds Coffee Shop, and Student Health Clinic are currently located.

Compassion for the poor, the sick and the vulnerable brought the first Sisters of Providence to the West in 1856. With courage, Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart and four other sisters made the treacherous journey from Montreal to the untamed Washington Territory. Thanks to their caring, more than 30 hospitals, schools and homes for orphans, the elderly and the sick were founded to ease the harsh frontier life in what would become Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and southern British Columbia. These pioneer sisters traveled by horse-back, steamer, stagecoach and rail to wherever God's people had a need. The sisters used their simple tools to build and went door to door, begging for funds to support the orphans and works of charity. Today, the seeds they planted have grown and flourished along the coast from Alaska to southern California, as well as in El Salvador, and inland to Idaho and Montana.

In 1992 Providence Services was established by the sisters as the parent corporation, under lay leadership, for the sisters' ministries in eastern Washington, Idaho and Montana (St. Ignatius Province), paralleling Providence Health System, the parent corporation for western Washington, Oregon, California and Alaska (Sacred Heart Province).

On January 1, 2000 the two Provinces of the sisters united to form Mother Joseph Province and on January 1, 2006 the parent corporations, Providence Health System and Providence Services, merged to form Providence Health and Services which serves as the parent ministry for the University of Great Falls.

On July 6, 2016, Providence Health & Services and St. Joseph Health merged to create Providence St. Joseph Health, a not-for-profit health and social services system that will serve as the parent organization for more than 106,000 employees across seven states. In July 2017, the University was renamed University of Providence.