The founding of Theta Phi Alpha is a story of a group of young friends, not unlike the members of today. They were faced with a myriad of challenges and issues on their campus. By joining together, they provided support and friendship to one another, to meet the challenges that they faced and to create an organization that would enable future generations to share that sisterhood. We recognize the contributions of the sisters who have gone before us and acknowledge that, without them, our experience today would be very different.

In 1912, a small, local Fraternity of Catholic women at the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, was struggling. The organization had originally been formed by Father Edward D. Kelly in 1909, when he was pastor of the student chapel at the University. He believed that there should be some kind of home life provided for the young Catholic women who attended the University and he realized that a sorority offered such society, friendship, and atmosphere. Several women students were originally very interested in joining, partly because Catholics were not always welcome in the other Greek-letter sororities on campus. By founding this new sorority, Catholic women had sorority life opened to them. Unfortunately, however, by the late spring of 1912 membership in Omega Upsilon was low and the treasury was unable to support the activities of the group.

By this time, Father Kelly had become Bishop of Grand Rapids, but he retained his dream of an organization which, in ritual and in practice, would help shape the lives of young college women. He enlisted the aid of Amelia McSweeney, an 1898 graduate of the University of Michigan and a woman prominent in educational and civic life in Detroit. She and several alumnae of Omega Upsilon felt that a fraternity for Catholic women was a pressing need and believed that many of the problems of Omega Upsilon were perhaps a result of the operations of the chapter being left completely in the hands of undergraduate members. The alumnae felt that, with their guidance in matters such as finances and housing, a new organization for Catholic women would be quite successful.
Throughout the summer of 1912, Amelia McSweeney, seven other alumnae, and two undergraduate women worked tirelessly, meeting at the home of Dorothy and Katrina Caughey, to prepare the plans for the new organization. May C. Ryan contributed the name, motto, and original coat of arms, and the membership selected the Fraternity's flower, jewels, and colors. Two undergraduate members of Omega Upsilon became members of Theta Phi Alpha. They were Eva Stroh, a sophomore, and Otilia Leuchtweis, a senior, who became Theta Phi Alpha's first Chapter President. Plans for the coming school year were completed on August 30, 1912, and Theta Phi Alpha began operation on the campus of the University of Michigan.

Otilia and Eva, the undergraduate members, proved an enthusiastic team. During the first week, they pledged Kathlyn Holmes, Theta Phi Alpha's first pledge sister, and Marie Sullivan. With the aid of the alumnae, they held their first initiation on November 16, 1912.