

WOMEN & spirit
CATHOLIC SISTERS IN AMERICA

Exhibit to honor courage of women religious

By Eileen Connelly, OSU

ARCHDIOCESE — Since arriving in America nearly 300 years ago, Catholic Sisters have served as educators, nurses, social workers and in a variety of other ministries, touching countless lives with their faith and compassion.

Now the story of these courageous, committed women will be told in a new traveling exhibit — “Women and Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America” — scheduled to open at the Cincinnati Museum Center on May 16 and travel throughout the United States for the next three years.

The exhibit was developed by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), whose members represent 60,000 women religious nationwide. According to Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia Mary Dacey, a member of the committee that has worked since 2004 on the creation of “Women and Spirit,” the idea for the exhibit originated with the celebration of LCWR’s 50th anniversary.

After garnering the support of LCWR, the committee moved forward assembling an advisory panel of historians, scholars and museum and design professionals. They also enlisted the services of Seruto & Company, a consulting and management group, as exhibit producer.

Primary funding sources for the project are the Hilton Foundation and the Catholic Healthcare Association.

“I think God wanted this to happen,” Sister Mary said. “We kept going to the right people and making the right connections. People have been so enthusiastic.”

Elizabeth Pierce, vice president of marketing and communications for the Cincinnati Museum Center, said the museum was approached by LCWR to consider management of the exhibit and will be responsible for the care and registration of all the artifacts. They include more than 70 items from 400 religious communities, such as a letter from Thomas Jefferson to the Ursuline Sisters in New Orleans assuring religious freedom following the Louisiana Purchase, and a nurse’s bag, on loan from the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, who ministered to soldiers on both sides of the Civil War.

The exhibit will also feature other rare artifacts, first-person accounts, photographs, and modern and archival video, telling the story of the role of women religious at some of the nation’s dramatic turning points, including the Depression, the Gold Rush, the San Francisco earthquake, influenza epidemics, the civil rights movement and Hurricane Katrina.



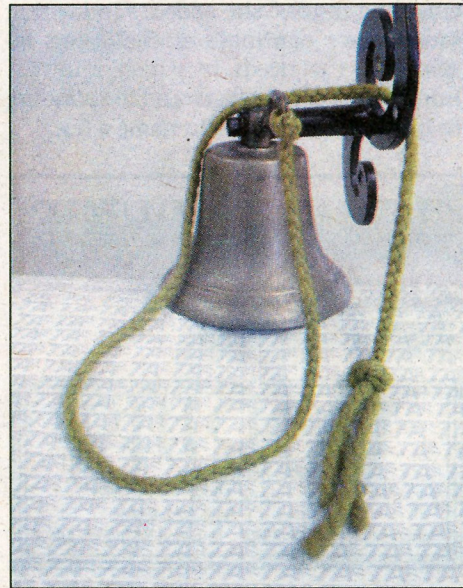
COURTESY PHOTO

The Sisters of the Precious Blood contributed a German-language primer for the exhibit.



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A home nursing bag, used by the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor (now the Dominican Sisters of Hope), will also be part of the exhibit.



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The bell at right is on loan from the Sisters of Notre Dame, is from St. Aloysius Orphanage.

Other highlights include Mother Mary Alfred Moes, who proposed to build and staff a hospital in Rochester, Minn., if Dr. Mayo and his sons would agree to provide the medical care. This collaboration was a critical milestone in the development of what is now known as the Mayo Clinic. Also significant was the work of Sister Ignatia Gavin, the “angel” of Alcoholics Anonymous, who was very influential in the designation of alcoholism as a disease.

“All of the communities have such rich histories that the opportunity to pull the objects together to tell the stories of these women is very compelling,” Pierce said. “It makes you realize the quiet determination that has really resulted in some significant contributions to our society. The exhibit will show how the Sisters have built the educational and social service infrastructure that so many people have benefited from, whether Catholic or not. What I love about the content is that this what women do every day. They hold up the world. The Sisters were like that. They identified what needed to be done and went off and did it.”

A special feature of the exhibit will be a

series of interviews with Sisters speaking about the role community and spirituality hold in their lives. In addition, said Pierce, there is an effort underway to organize panel discussions and other special programming during the exhibit. “We really want to emphasize the Cincinnati piece of it, because so many people have been touched by programs put into place by these women,” she said.

The Cincinnati piece is being organized by Sister of Charity Judith Metz, who serves as archivist for her congregation. She has been coordinating with the Museum Center and working with 24 area religious communities, 18 of which have contributed local artifacts for the exhibit. These include a statue of St. Joseph and child from the Little Sisters of the Poor; a German language primer from the Sisters of the Precious Blood; a nurse’s cap and cape from the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor; a Professor Phonics book from the Ursulines of Cincinnati; and the bell from St. Aloysius Orphanage from the Sisters of Notre Dame of Covington. Each community will also have fact sheets on hand detailing highlights of their

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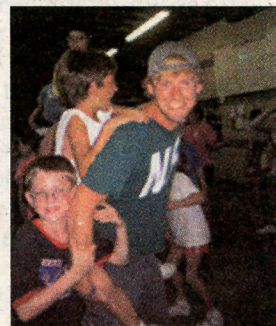
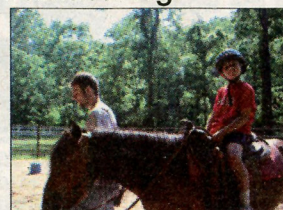
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EXHIBIT

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history and ministry.

"When people see the exhibit, I think they're going to be thrilled," Sister Judith said. "It's a long, untold story, just so inspiring and important in terms of recognizing the contributions women religious have made, not only to the church, but this country."

Also helping to coordinate "Women and Spirit" locally is a committee comprised of Sister of Charity Barbara Hagedorn, Ursuline Sister Patricia Homan and Franciscan Sister Miriam Kaeser. Sister Barbara believes the exhibit is significant for a number of reasons.

"It tells the story of the lives and spirituality of women religious since the founding of our country," she said. "The local exhibit names some of the significant contributions of the communities in our area since the early 1800s. It coincides with important anniversary celebrations of several congregations: the Sisters of Charity, 200 years; the Sisters of the Precious Blood, 175 years; the Sisters of Mercy and the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, 150 years. The fact that the exhibit tours in Cincinnati as we celebrate these important milestones in our history is wonderful time for us."

The exhibit depicts the Sisters as women of faith and courage who acted with ingenuity and managed with the little they had to begin ministries such as the Catholic school system in the United States, Catholic hospitals in Cincinnati and throughout the country and many social service agencies responding to emerging needs," she added. "Today that same legacy continues as the Sisters respond to the needs in parish ministry, ministry to immigrants and responding to human rights issues to name a few."

"Women and Spirit" will be open to the public at the Museum Center through Aug. 30. Other venues include the Smithsonian's International Gallery in the S. Dillon Ripley Center in Washington, DC. Sister Mary said LCWR is also in conversation with large cities with significant Catholic populations, such as Chicago and Philadelphia, to bring the exhibit there.

In addition to the exhibit, a lecture entitled "Sister of Charity Justina Segale and the Santa Mary Institute: Italian Immigrants in Cincinnati," is scheduled for April 17 at the Museum Center. The lecture begins at 7:30 p.m. and is free and open to the public. A reception and dinner (\$35) will be held before the lecture. For reservations, call 513-287-7021. For more information about the exhibit, visit www.womenandspirit.org. ■

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