

Catholic Sentinel

Sisters of Holy Names to mark 150 years of service in Oregon



St. Mary's Academy in 1890.

Sentinel illustration

In 1859, 12 Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary left all that they had known in Quebec, Canada, to begin a new mission: educating the children of Catholic French voyageurs who had settled in pioneer Portland.

From the start, they faced adversity in the frontier town. The house they were to convert into a school was “the lowliest hovel” – shovels would have been more useful than brooms, they wrote in their journal. Yet they opened St. Mary’s Academy just two weeks after their arrival.

This year, the Sisters of the Holy Names and St. Mary’s Academy mark their 150th year here.

Through the years, they established schools elsewhere, cared for smallpox victims, boycotted businesses that supported the Ku Klux Klan, and fought to save Catholic education in Oregon. These days they also teach and provide pastoral care in parishes, minister in hospitals and prisons, and provide elder care.

“From our very beginnings, our Sisters have worked with lay men and women who assisted us in our schools, as well as in our parish-based ministries and spiritual development programs,” said Sister Joan Saalfeld, Province Leadership Team Member for the Sisters. “This year-long

celebration gives us an opportunity to thank the people who have supported our service in the Northwest, and to celebrate the continuation of our legacy into the future.”

While a variety of activities will celebrate the sesquicentennial, two major events will be presented jointly by the Sisters and St. Mary's Academy.

Honoring the academy's long tradition of musical excellence, a complimentary choral and orchestral concert at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall is set for 4 p.m., Sunday, April 26. It will feature students and alumnae of St. Mary's Academy and guest schools, including the Holy Names secondary schools in Seattle; Oakland and Alhambra, Calif.; Tampa, Fla.; and Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Musicians from Marylhurst University also will perform.

The program will include the debut of two commissioned works by alumna Amy Burgess, a 2002 graduate. Before the concert, a reception for concert attendees will begin at 1 p.m. at St. Mary's Academy.

On Sunday, Oct. 25, at 10:30 a.m., Archbishop John Vlazny will preside at a Mass at the Oregon Convention. A reception will follow.

“As Oregon celebrates its Sesquicentennial it is appropriate that we honor the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary,” said Archbishop Vlazny. “Holy Name Sisters and Associates have been a vital presence in the Portland Archdiocese and the state for all of these 150 years.

“Through the years they have walked with the Church and been extraordinarily attentive to its changing needs.

“We are grateful for their faithful presence and ministry and honor their commitment and service on this historic occasion.”

The public is invited to share memories of either organization and to make reservations for these and other events by replying to www.st.maryspdx.org/150th .