



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Sisters of Mission Service celebrate 60th anniversary of religious community

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

For 60 years, a prairie order of women religious have lived and served in communities across western Canada and in missions abroad, walking with the people in parishes, schools, and hospitals; in retreat houses and in domestic service; in social services and care homes, in communities and organizations.

The Sisters of Mission Service, a home-grown Saskatchewan religious order founded in July 1951 at Battleford, Saskatchewan, held a 60th anniversary celebration Aug. 23 at Queen's House in Saskatoon.

As recordings of SMS singing beloved hymns and other songs from decades past played in the background, the sisters spent time reflecting their history and service, their traditions and milestones, mission and values – one part of a day of commemoration and celebration.

Members described the excitement and hard work of being a small fledgling order on the prairies. Laughing, they recalled how in the early days they were known as the “lipstick and nylons” sisters, since they wore modern clothing, reflecting the era in which they were founded – noticeably different than the traditional habits worn by older orders in the pre-Vatican II days of the 1950s and early 1960s.

Challenges and hard work over the years – especially in domestic service, and at times in isolated settings – was also recalled, along with the joy and blessings experienced in walking with the people they served.

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“I think that we were blessed to be able to minister in so many places,” said one of the SMS sisters, reflecting on the Order’s impact over the past 60 years. “But I also think we were blessed by the people that we met. It was a two-way street.”

“One of the things (founder) Fr. Kukartz stressed was the importance of personal contact,” said another, describing the “prairie charism” of the Saskatchewan order.

Born and raised in Saskatchewan, Rev. Godfrey W. Kuckartz, OMI, envisioned a modern religious congregation, whose garb, manner and lifestyle would make them accessible to people in missions at home and abroad.

“His dream was to found a new religious order of women, missionary in outlook and suited to the mentality and needs of the Church on the prairies,” stated a presentation prepared for the 60th anniversary by Sr. Marie Gartner and Sr. Joan Kuffner.

In 1951, Kuckartz asked Mary Catherine Cannon to assume the role and responsibility of leadership in this congregation. Founded in Battleford, the Sisters of Mission Service began with five members: Catherine Cannon, Barbara Gette, Anne Schamber, Catherine Schamber and Pauline Stang.

The order moved to Prince Albert in 1953. As the SMS members continued to serve as nurses, in domestic service and in catechetical programs, novice mistresses from the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary came from Montreal to assist with formation process, with the novitiate beginning Feb. 2, 1954.



The first five members of the community.

By the time that 10 SMS members made their first vows in August 1956, the Order had moved again, this time to Saskatoon.

In Saskatoon, the sisters provided domestic service to Queen’s House, at a number of rectories and residences, including St. Pius X seminary, St. Thomas More College and “Maryhall,” a university residence for women.



First vows in Saskatoon in 1956.

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In addition, nine SMS served as teachers in Saskatoon over the years, at a number of Catholic schools and at the School for the Deaf. Another 10 members were nurses in Saskatoon settings, including all three hospitals, the Saskatoon Sanatorium and the public health region.

Pastoral care, home care, group homes, prison ministry and social work were other areas where SMS served over the years in Saskatoon. Vocation ministry, retreat ministry and therapeutic healing ministry were also provided by SMS sisters.

Sisters of Mission Service also served in parish ministry in a number of settings for many years, and in such diocesan ministries as the Marriage Tribunal and the Lay Formation program.

The first SMS mission undertaken outside Saskatoon was at Unity, SK. where sisters served as teachers and nurses from 1959 to 1968.

Other Saskatchewan communities where the SMS served included Major, Kindersley, Lloydminster, Rosetown, Humboldt, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Regina, Prince Albert, La Loche, Delisle, Vanscoy, Asquith, Arlee, Canoe Narrows, Radisson, Langham, Dodsland, Elrose, Beechy, Milden, Kyle and Forgan.

In 1969, the sisters extended their missionary service to Calgary, followed by other Alberta postings in Spirit River, Claresholm, Edmonton, St. Albert, Pincher Creek, Brocket Peigan Nation, and Trochu.

Service in British Columbia included Iskut Talhtan Nation, as well as service at Enderby, Vavenby, Terrace, Clearwater, Merritt, Logan Lake, Barriere, Chu Chua North Thompson Indian Band, Salmon Arm, Kelowna, McBride, Hope, Sooke, Victoria, Vernon.

Northern service in the Yukon at Whitehorse, Watson Lake, and Upper Liard, included domestic service, teaching, nursing, parish ministry and service as a probation officer.

In Winnipeg, Sisters of Mission Service have been serving since 1995, in home care, pastoral care and in ministry to women in transition (including immigrants and refugees.)

In 1971, the SMS community began to discern the possibility of undertaking a mission elsewhere in the world, opening a mission in Papua New Guinea in 1973, with sisters serving there until 1985.

In 1993, after another discernment process, the SMS undertook a mission in Brazil, where two SMS, Srs. Jeannine and Marie-Noelle Rondot, (*pictured at right*), are still serving, proving a “ministry of presence” to the people in Alagoas, Brazil.



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Over the years, the community has suffered loss and underwent change – the first SMS deaths were in 1965, and co-founder Catherine Cannon left the community in 1969. Over the years the order moved to an elected leadership structure, and changes to the constitution and governance model were also undertaken. The order now operates with an elected Leadership Team.

In 2003, the members gathered to revisit their mission, charism statement and values. The order’s mission statement says: “We, the Sisters of the Mission Service, are committed to caring for and promoting life in all our relationships in a spirit of joy, generosity and simplicity.”

In addition to the two sisters serving in Brazil, the SMS presently has two sisters in British Columbia, one in Winnipeg, as well as in Allan, SK., Killaly, SK., and Prince Albert. Ten sisters presently live in Saskatoon.

SMS members say that their Community continues to be inspired by their motto: “I came that they may have life and have it to the full. (John 10:10).”