

World & Nation

Pope beatifies U.S. heiress who championed oppressed

By John Thavis

VATICAN CITY (NC) — Pope John Paul II beatified Blessed Katharine Drexel, a wealthy Philadelphia heiress who founded a religious order and dedicated her life and fortune to helping blacks and Native Americans.

At a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica November 20, the pope said Blessed Drexel had recognized the "devastating effects of racism" in 19th- and 20th-century America and "set out with determination to combat it."

Blessed Drexel "was no timid soul," the pope said.

"She seemed to grasp fundamental truths which many of her contemporaries failed to grasp, for example, the truth about the equal dignity and worth of every human being, regardless of race or ethnic origin," the pope said in a sermon.

By donating her inheritance — estimated at about \$15 million in the late 19th century — she was able to take "bold initiatives to provide a high standard of education for those whom her society had neglected," he said.

She had the faith needed to "stand up courageously for the rights of the oppressed," and did so in the most effective way — by evangelizing, the pope said.

Blessed Drexel eventually founded the

Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, whose 350 members still work among blacks and Native Americans today. They are educators, nurses, home visitors, pastoral ministers and social workers.

More than 1,000 U.S. pilgrims attending the ceremony applauded warmly as the pope read the decree that elevated her to the ranks of the blessed, a step away from sainthood. A banner was unfurled above the altar, depicting her hand in hand with two children, a black and a Native American.

Blessed Drexel's beatification was considered unusual because she died only in 1955, at the age of 96. Beatification is normally a very lengthy process, but in this case, many of those in the basilica either knew Blessed Drexel personally or had graduated from her schools.

Sister Juliana Haynes, elected in 1985 as the first black president of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, gave the first reading during the Mass.

Robert Gutherman of Andalusia, Pa., who in 1974, at age 14, regained his hearing after his family prayed to Blessed Drexel, also was present and received Communion from the pope. His healing was judged miraculous by a Vatican panel, paving the way for Blessed Drexel's beatification.

Concelebrating with the pope were six



Students from St. Catherine Indian School in Santa Fe sign the Lord's Prayer during a November 20 Mass celebrating the beatification of Mother Mary Katherine Drexel.

Americans: Cardinal John Krol, retired archbishop of Philadelphia; Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York; Archbishop Anthony Bevilacqua of Philadelphia; Coadjutor Bishop Donald Pelotte of Gallup, N.M.; Auxiliary Bishop Joseph A. Francis of Newark, N.J., and Father John Vaughn, minister general of the Franciscan order.

Father Vaughn was present because three Franciscans, martyred in Ethiopia in the 18th century, also were beatified during the ceremony.

Bishop Pelotte, a Native American, said established his diocese in New Mexico when she set up a school for Navaho Indians there.

"Talk about the role of women in the Church — she had a founding role" throughout the U.S. Southwest, he said.

The Mass included what might have been the first invocation in Navaho in St. Peter's Basilica, an Offertory intention read by Arizona Navaho Indian Marie Tso Allen. Among the gifts presented at the Offertory were a ceramic chalice and hand-woven vestments and altar cloth.

Archbishop Bevilacqua said he hoped Blessed Drexel would be an attractive "role model" for a wide range of people in U.S. society today, including young professionals and the wealthy.

Education panel

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we were and what we're thinking about."

In the southeast quadrant, the planning board has formed three committees to study the topics of financial concerns, Catholic schools and religious education for public school students. Morehouse said the board's ultimate goal is to provide an affordable Catholic education at a "reasonable distance" from students' homes, although he noted that a "reasonable distance" has not been defined. The board wants to create a relatively uniform tuition for all of the quadrant's schools, he said, and is also discussing centralized Catholic schools.

Sister Janice Morgan, a representative from Assumption Church in Fairport, chairs the southeast quadrant's committee studying Catholic schools. She noted that seven of the quadrant's 14 schools might be closed, but she said none had been specifically targeted.

Money saved by such a move could be used to hire teachers for such programs as home economics, career, technical training and second languages, which would be located in cen-

tralized schools, Sister Morgan noted. Morehouse said the board will present its recommendations to the commission sometime between the end of January and the beginning of February.

According to Schaefer, the northeast quadrant — like the southeast — faces financial difficulty stemming from increasing salaries of lay teachers. Her board will make its final recommendations next February, she said, but she declined to be specific, noting that the board is still discussing its proposals with parish leaders.

Alan Taddiken, a private consultant hired to work with the southeast quadrant board, said the board has looked at creating a middle school to serve both the northeast and southeast quadrants. Tuition reforms similar to the northeast's plan have also been discussed, he said.

The southwest board will be making "very innovative recommendations," according to Hetzler, who also declined to discuss specifics, noting that her board will meet on December 12 to consider final proposals. She did say, however, that the southwest has rejected the "piecemeal approach" and plans to approach Catholic education systemically, stressing parish unity in the education of its students.

"We don't buy into all the assumptions we've been given," Hetzler said, pointing specifically to the idea of closing a school that has consistently suffered declining enrollment. She said such a move would equate to "furniture moving" and asserted that it is important to keep a financially troubled school open if it embodies a "top-notch concept."

Unlike the other quadrants, the northwest is growing, and enrollment in its Catholic schools is expected to increase, Glogowski said. But in light of closings in other quadrants, the board has no plans to build another school. Instead, the board has discussed opening a separate building to serve students in remedial and advanced-education programs, she said.

Glogowski said her board will make its final recommendations to the commission in December of 1989, with a view to implementing them by May of 1990.

The implementation committee, meanwhile,

is looking at proposals to hire more Hispanic and black teachers to serve as role models for minority students in the inner city Catholic schools, according to her chairwoman, Chris Schramm. Noting that her committee will present its final recommendations in early 1989, she said she hoped the commission would help, not hinder, a swift implementation of the school system's reorganization.

Hetzler expressed similar hopes that the commission would act promptly on any recommendations. "Our biggest concern is that their decisions be made quickly," she said, noting her board wants to begin implementing its proposals by September of 1989.

Pickett said that the commission will return its decisions within two months of receiving proposals. This would mean that the new shape of Monroe County's Catholic school system will be known by late spring of next year, he said.

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