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‘*Like a windmill, the first Institute Chapter hopes to:*

- *gather spirit-blown dreams from the wide skies of Mercy;*

- *reach down into the wells of 150 + years of Mercy living;*

- *and transform this gathered wisdom into the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. ’*

Logo design by Sister Estelle Martin, FSM

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

Two years ago, when the Rochester Sisters of Mercy were considering a merger with the other Mercy communities in the United States, one sister came to Sister Kathleen Milliken filled with fear.

“She was afraid that some of those people would be telling her how she should live her life and how she should worship,” recalled Sister Milliken, assistant to the major superior for the Rochester Mercy community.

“And I said, ‘Who do you mean by those people? They are Sisters of Mercy — they are just like us.’”

The prospect of a merger concerned other members of the Rochester congregation as well. Some sisters feared losing the ability to relate to people on a “down-to-earth” level, said Sister Milliken, who noted that such relationships are the hallmark of the Sisters of Mercy.

Nevertheless, the Mercy sisters of Rochester and of 24 other regional communities brought plans for the merger to fruition

his daughter. But he died when Catherine was 5-years-old, leaving the young girl to fight for her beliefs amid relatives who rejected the Catholic faith.

As a young adult, McAuley inherited a large sum of money, which she used to build a home for women engaged in Catholic social work. Her efforts drew the attention of Dublin’s Archbishop Daniel Murray, who soon suggested that McAuley found a religious community in Ireland.

Most religious communities of McAuley’s time were cloistered, but McAuley wanted to continue serving the poor. She expressed her concerns to the archbishop, and eventually gained Vatican approval to found a community of sisters who were soon dubbed the “walking nuns” because of their work outside of the convent.

Although the first Sisters of Mercy numbered only three, other women quickly joined them. Within 10 years, Sister McAuley had set up 12 religious foundations in Ireland and two in England. But the physical demands of her work became too much for her, and the foundress died at the end of the order’s first decade.

The Mercy congregations persevered,

Sisters unite Mercy institute combines strengths of communities

tion on July 20, 1991. Meeting in Buffalo that day, 3,000 U.S.-based Sisters of Mercy who live and work in North, South and Central America, Guam and the Philippines formed the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

And, Sister Milliken noted, the event established such a strong sense of unity that it dispelled many early fears.

“When we went to the founding event, it was just such a thrill to be there with so many others who believed the same that we did and had the same founders — the same spirit,” explained Sister Milliken. “You felt very connected with them.”

Only one of the U.S. Mercy congregations — a Mercy community in Maine — declined the invitation to join the institute, according to Sister Milliken.

Sister Patty Beairto, another Rochester Mercy who attended the founding event, agreed that the founding created a bond among the 7,400 Mercy sisters who serve in various locales throughout the country.

“There was something about when we all assembled,” she said. “There was just such a sense of energy and power in the group of women.”

At one time, however, the Sisters of Mercy could not profess strength in the solidarity of thousands.

In fact, when Catherine McAuley established the first Mercy community in Dublin, Ireland, in 1831, she was accompanied only by two other women.

McAuley had been raised in Dublin where James McAuley’s faith and generosity created a strong impression on

however. By 1854, Irish Sisters of Mercy had settled in New York City, Pittsburgh and San Francisco. Soon their service began to spread throughout the country. Sixty Mercy motherhouses and 140 convents had been established in the United States by 1928.

Although they shared Sister McAuley’s founding vision, the 60 motherhouses originally operated as independent congregations under the direction of their own local superiors. The first Mercy merger occurred in 1929, when 39 motherhouses came together under the name Sisters of Mercy of the Union.

In 1965, all of the Mercy congregations in the United States aligned themselves under a federation known as the Federation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

In 1981, members of Mercy communities who live and work throughout North America, South America, Central America, Guam and the Philippines began 10 years of discussions among themselves and with the Vatican Congregation for Religious and Secular Orders. That process led to the July 20 merger, which brought the 25 regional communities under a single organizational structure.

Sister Beairto observed that effecting the merger was only a matter of time.

“The coming together as an institute sort of formalizes what I think for a lot of us has already been a reality — that somehow we are one as Sisters of Mercy,” commented the 38-year-old sister.

Sister Beairto said the previous federation

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