

FEATURE

Sisters of St. Joseph add up 1,000 years of service

Sisters of St. Joseph around the world this year are marking the 350th anniversary of their founding in LePuy, France. The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Rochester Diocese plan to celebrate this milestone Oct. 29.

Also this year, 17 Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester are marking 75, 70, 60, 50 and 25 years of religious life. The congregation will honor these women religious at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, April 30, at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse, 4095 East Ave., Pittsford.

Sister Janice Morgan, SSJ, said, "We rejoice with them as we read their extraordinary stories. They have served God and others well and continue to be vital in so many ways. We praise them and thank them for all they have given to each of us over 990 years of love and service."

75 years

Sister Mary Matthew Fennessy, SSJ, especially enjoys the fact her 75th jubilee is occurring the same year as the congregation's 350th anniversary.



"I love being a part of this congregation," Sister Mary Matthew said. "I have experienced 75 wonderful years, and during this anniversary of our founding, I hope it will encourage others to look at their own vocations with courage and joy."

Born in Wilkesburg, Pa., Sister Mary Matthew grew up in Rochester and graduated from Nazareth Academy. After entering the Sisters of St. Joseph, she immediately went into education. She taught at Holy Apostles (1926-34), St. Mary in Canandaigua (1934-36), St. Augustine (1937), St. Monica (1937-40), Nazareth Academy (1940-53), St. Francis de Sales in Geneva (1953-63), Holy Rosary (1963-68), St. Mary in Dansville (1968-70), and Our Lady of Perpetual Help (1970-85).

During this time, Sister Mary Matthew earned a teaching certificate from Nazareth Normal School, a bachelor's degree in French and English from Nazareth College, and a master's degree in science from St. Bonaventure College.

"I taught at many schools," Sister Mary Matthew said of her 59 years in education. "I found the teachers and administrators to be a tremendous help to me. And I look back over these many happy years with great pleasure."

Sister Mary Matthew retired from teaching in 1985, and now lives at St. Joseph Convent Infirmary.



"For me, there was no other choice," Sister Teresa Clare Ehrmentraut, SSJ, said of religious life. "This life was a gift, and I accepted it with joy and gratitude." "It's a glorious an-

niversary," she said. "It gives me a spirit of thankfulness that I am a member of this congregation, and as a congregation, making an outstanding contribution to the Diocese of Rochester."

Sister Teresa Clare entered the order after graduating from Nazareth Normal School. She taught at St. Monica (1926-32), and from 1932-55, she taught business at Elmira Catholic High School.

"I enjoyed preparing students to enter the business world," she said.

During this time, she also earned a bachelor's degree from Nazareth College. She went on to earn a master's degree in business education from Boston University.

In 1955, she became the secretary to the president at Nazareth College. She remained in that position for 25 years, after which she became the school's archivist.

In 1987, she went to work in the Sisters of St. Joseph Archives Department, and tutored Tanzanian sisters, who were attending Nazareth College. Four years later, she retired.

Today, Sister Teresa Clare resides at the congregation's motherhouse and focuses on her prayer ministry.

70 years

Sister Berchmans DeVos, SSJ, always knew she wanted to be a sister.



Born in Ghent, Minn., one of seven children, Sister Berchmans felt an early calling to religious life.

"I put the thought aside for a while," she said. "But I kept feeling like I needed

more. I wanted to spend my whole life and all I had for God."

"I'd do it all over again," she added. "I wouldn't do anything else."

For more than 60 of her years as a Sister of St. Joseph, she worked in convent services at the congregation's motherhouse and Nazareth Academy.

"I know every sister," Sister Berchmans said of her work. "I enjoyed that because I really got a sense of the spirit of these women and our congregation."

Noting that this year the sisters celebrate 350 years of history, she said, "I don't know how to express it. I appreciate all the generations of sisters before us and all that they have done. It makes this year extra special for me."

Sister Berchmans holds a lot of special memories from the past seven decades. She especially remembers the holiday celebrations at the motherhouse.

"On feast days of our general superiors, I remember the large number of young sisters preparing plays for the entertainment of all the sisters. Those times were always inspiring as well as a pleasure."

Sister Berchmans now resides at St.

Joseph Convent Infirmary.

Sister Mary Philip Capaldi, SSJ, remembers that as a little girl she observed Sister Estelle Holley, the sacristan at St. Aloysius Church.



Sister Mary Philip watched her wash the altar linens, maintain the candles and clean the sanctuary.

"I stopped by the church after work," Sister Mary Philip said. "Sister Estelle would always be there."

Those innocent visits soon led Sister Mary Philip to enter the Sisters of St. Joseph. Sister Estelle served as her sponsor.

"I always felt that this was where I wanted to be and where God wanted me to be," Sister Mary Philip said.

The Auburn native taught at St. Patrick in Mt. Morris (1931-32, 1956-57), St. Francis Xavier (1932-39), St. Francis de Sales in Geneva (1939-45, 1968-69), St. John the Evangelist (1945-56), and St. Michael in Penn Yan (1957-63). She went on to become principal at St. Michael, Sts. Peter and Paul in Elmira (1963-66), and St. Patrick (1966-68). She later taught at St. Stanislaus (1969-71) and Mother of Sorrows (1971-73).

While teaching, Sister Mary Philip also accepted the role of student. She earned a teaching certificate from Nazareth Normal School, a bachelor's degree in education and a bachelor's degree in English and social studies, both from Nazareth College.

In 1973, Sister Mary Philip taught remedial reading at St. Joseph's Villa. She remained there for nine years, before volunteering in the STAR program at the St. Joseph Convent Infirmary. In 1986, she became a volunteer in the congregation's communications office. She retired in 1994, and now lives in the St. Joseph Convent Infirmary.

Sister Marie Joseph Helfrich, SSJ, said of her career, "Remaining in the teaching field for so many years has allowed me to meet with 50-year class reunions."



"The adults have shared with me how much my teaching meant to them in grammar school. It

just means the world to me to have connected with so many young students."

Sister Marie Joseph entered the Sisters of St. Joseph after graduating from Spencerport High School. She soon earned her teaching certificate from Nazareth Normal School, and went on to teach in the Diocese of Rochester.

She taught at St. Ambrose (1931-34), St. Agnes Institute (1934-35), Nativity in Brockport (1935-39), Corpus Christi (1939-47), St. John the Evangelist in Spencerport (1947-51), St. Anne (1951-52), Sacred Heart (1952-55), Blessed Sacrament (1955-56), St. Anthony in Elmira (1956-58), and St. Patrick in Corning (1958-62).

Sister Marie Joseph later became a full time classroom assistant at Our Lady of Perpetual Help (1963-71) and Holy Rosary (1971-1997) schools.

For the past few years, Sister Marie Joseph has also volunteered at Holy Rosary Parish.

"After retiring from teaching, I have had time to visit parish shut-ins," Sister Marie Joseph said. "To bring the Eucharist was a joy to them and to me. You become part of their family."

Her 70-year jubilee, which she will celebrate with friends, family and sisters, serves as a time for celebration and a time for reflection.

"The call was so strong that I didn't have another choice that would satisfy me," she said of religious life. "Any other plans that I may have had were abandoned, because I knew I wanted to be a sister. I also lived in-

a wholesome family environment, so the support for me was always there."



Born and raised in Rochester, Sister Helen Louise Kirby, SSJ, entered the Sisters of St. Joseph after completing the eighth grade. She attended Nazareth Normal High School and continued on to earn a teaching certificate,

and to teach at St. Alphonsus in Auburn (1931-39), Immaculate Conception in Ithaca (1939-47) and St. Aloysius in Auburn (1947-56). She later became a principal at St. Aloysius and at St. Bridget in Rochester (1956-57).

During this time, Sister Helen Louise earned a bachelor of science degree in education from Nazareth College.

She remained in education until 1957, when she was named local superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse. She served in that position for six years, and then worked at St. Ann's Home, Nazareth Hall School and St. Joseph's Hospital.

From 1988 to 1994 she greeted visitors and callers as the motherhouse receptionist. And for the past five years she has worked in the congregation's archives.

"I'm just so happy that God has given me this life," Sister Helen Louise said. "I'm grateful that I could live this long for him."

Sister Helen Louise knew at the age of 7 that she wanted to enter religious life.

"I decided to become a sister after learning from a Protestant deaconess," she explained. "She had gone to China to teach children about God. I decided right then that religious life was for me. That was what I wanted to do."

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester have missioned sisters to Brazil to educate, advocate for the poor and provide health care.

Sister Rosalma Hayes, SSJ, knows the work in Brazil firsthand, because she was one of the mission's founders.



"We answered the appeal of the Holy Father," she said. "North American women religious were asked to help the church, especially women religious

in Latin America. I answered that call." The Waverly native figured that because she was fluent in Spanish, she could help in Latin America.

"I thought we'd be going to a Spanish-speaking country," she laughed. "Instead, we went to Brazil, which speaks Portuguese. Needless to say, I learned Portuguese quickly!"

Sister Rosalma fondly recalls her time in Brazil. However, she also remembers her other ministries.

"I can't single out any one," she said. "Each one as they came along had its own special graces."

Sister Rosalma taught at Nazareth Academy (1931-41) and DeSales High School in Geneva (1941-50). She went on to serve as dean of residents at Nazareth College (1950-51, 1960-63) and superior/principal at St. Agnes High School (1951-60).

During this time, she earned a bachelor's degree in Latin and English from Nazareth College and a master's degree in Spanish from Western Reserve University. She taught Spanish at Nazareth College for one year, before volunteering to go to Brazil.

In 1969, Sister Rosalma returned from Brazil to serve as councilor on the congregation's central administration. She remained in administration until 1979, when she became the resident service coordinator at St. Ann's Home and The Heritage. Two years later, she returned to the motherhouse, working on special projects and in research.

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HOW DO THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH LIVE IN TODAY'S WORLD?



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