

Holy cards making a comeback

Joe Bollig/CNS

KANSAS CITY, Kan. — Ursuline Sister Marcella Schrant is a card-carrying Catholic, and proud of it, too. She got her first holy card in 1935 and has been collecting them ever since.

That old St. Anthony card she received as a child is part of a collection of more than 400 owned by Sister Marcella, who works at the St. Lawrence Campus Center at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

If you've grown up Catholic, it's almost a given that you've received a holy card. Like scapulars, miraculous medals and little bottles of holy water, holy cards were standard equipment for the pre-Second Vatican Council Catholic.

Sister Marcella figures she must

have given away a ton of holy cards during her teaching career, from 1947 to 1990. There was a time, particularly in the 1960s, when their popularity waned. But holy cards are making a comeback.

Not all of the appeal of holy cards is Catholic grade-school nostalgia, however, said Michael Podrebarac, consultant for liturgy for the Archdiocese of Kansas City.

"In their original sense, they were an affordable way for common people to have images of their patron saints when they couldn't afford a statue or a great piece of artwork," he said.

There's less emphasis on holy cards today, but they remain popular.

"I think they're still relevant," he said. "Part of the story of (the period)

after Vatican II is that sacramentals, which had been in the forefront of lay spiritual lives, did kind of get replaced by the Bible, liturgy and witness in the world. But it's not because they didn't have value. People just saw the need to do more — not to just wear a medal, but also to live virtue."

Some collectors have set up their own Web sites through which they buy, sell and trade the cards. Retailers offer to sell electronic holy cards online, or software to print them. Collectible holy cards are often sold on eBay, the online auction service.

The most common holy cards depict saints and are about the size of a playing card. Some feature prayers on the back, and others are made from plastic and feature a 3-D image that shows movement or change when the card is tilted.



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Ursuline Sister Marcella Schrant displays a handful of her collection of 400 holy cards.



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