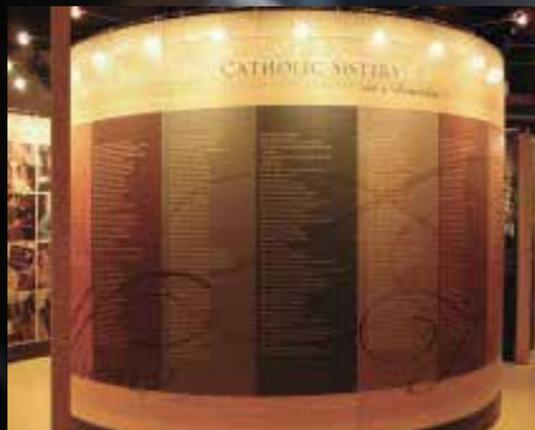




“Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America,” is a traveling exhibit that tells the collective story of the impact Catholic Sisters have made throughout U.S. history.

Women & Spirit

Catholic Sisters in America



The project was undertaken and sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) as a way to commemorate their 50th anniversary. “We began to organize the exhibit in 2004,” explains Sister Annmarie Sanders, director of communications for LCWR, “and wanted to focus on the sisters’ contributions as a whole, the untold story of the unsung sisters who did so much without recognition.”

The exhibit is a history lesson that begins in 1727 as the first Sisters, the Ursulines, arrived in New Orleans when it was still French territory, and spans nearly 300 years of devotion, service, caring and compassion. “We would hope the exhibit would tell the story of the contributions the sisters made and we also wanted to give people a greater understanding of what religious life is all about,” Sanders adds.

Sisters from many different Orders traveled from Europe to America in the 1700’s, some even braving treacherous seas and pirates. Once here, they helped shape America, building hospitals and schools and even developing an early form of health insurance for loggers in the Midwest. They founded new Orders, they challenged stereotypes, stood their ground against injustice and tried to change the world for the better. They designed the prototype for the first incubator, helped discover DNA and helped found the Mayo Clinic. Sure they’ve established the largest private school system in the country; but they have done so much more. “It brought tears to my eyes. I’ve always been proud, but to see the contributions that have been made over the years, it’s mind boggling,” raved Sister Mary Assumpta, C.S.Sp., Sisters of the Holy Spirit.

The most recent stop on the exhibit’s nine city tour is the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Cleveland, Ohio. Even though an exhibit on Catholic nuns in a Jewish museum may seem out of place, Judi Feniger, executive director at the museum insists it’s not. “The exhibit gives us a chance to step back and remember that faith has all sorts of dimensions. It traces the story of history, immigration and women through the works of the Sisters.” Each museum will have the opportunity to customize the exhibit. The Maltz Museum added a section that focused on local Catholic women’s Orders and a “Women with Spirit,” exhibit that profiled important women of every race, religion and ethnicity throughout history. As Feniger puts it, “the mission of the museum is to build bridges with people of all cultures. We’re all more alike than we are different.”

There are plans to produce a full length documentary, with a tentative release date in 2011, which will include the content from the exhibit as well as additional interviews from Sisters, historians and others.

“Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America,” gives the public an inside glimpse of what religious life is about and according to Sanders, “the story is not over, it continues. People are still coming to the life and vitally engaged in the mission.” With all the contributions these Sisters have made over the last three centuries, one can only imagine what they will accomplish in the next three centuries! ☼

For more information on the exhibit, visit womenandspirit.org.

Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America Schedule

September 24, 2010 - January 22, 2011

Statue of Liberty National Monument / Ellis Island Immigration Museum (Liberty Island, New York)

February 18, 2011 - May 22, 2011

The National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium (Dubuque, Iowa)

June 17, 2011 - August 14, 2011

Mount St. Mary’s College (Los Angeles, California)

September 2, 2011 - December 31, 2011

Center for History in association with the University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary’s College (South Bend, Indiana)