

## Sisters of Mercy celebrate 150 years in Calif.

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A Mass of Thanksgiving, with Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Sartoris presiding, marked the Sisters of Mercy's celebration of 150 years in California.



Held Sept. 25 at St. Rita Church, Sierra Madre, the event was attended by numerous friends and colleagues of the Sisters, whose history and work here covers a multitude of service and ministry.

### Yesterday

Not everyone who ventured to Southern California in the 19th and early 20th centuries came in search of a fortune or the silver screen. The Sisters of Mercy were drawn by the needs of others, especially those who suffered from the boom and bust economy of the early Southland.

Established in 1831, the Sisters of Mercy endured months of travel from Kinsale, Ireland, to debark at a dock in San Francisco in 1854. Mary Baptist Russell and seven others planted the seeds of community in California, opening St. Mary's Hospital as their first institution. Sisters came to Los Angeles with only 50 cents in their pockets, but quickly founded Saint Martha's Home for Working Girls at Second and Main in Los Angeles in 1890. They followed by sheltering elderly women and then establishing a school for orphans, the Home of the Guardian Angels at 333 South Figueroa Boulevard.

Within 20 years in addition to these institutions, the Sisters had built a convent and novitiate; opened a home for aged men; and founded three institutions in Bakersfield --- St. Francis School, Our Lady of Guadalupe School and Mercy Hospital.

Bishops and pastors requested that the Sisters fill more needs. In Oxnard, Father John Laubaucher's request and \$21,000 donated by the local people spurred the Sisters from San Diego to found St. John's Hospital in 1912, now a regional medical center.



Schools were opened in a four year period and staffed by Sisters of Mercy. In 1919 St. John's Military Academy was founded and served the needs of its young students until it closed in 1968. St. Aloysius was established in 1921 in Los Angeles and is still an active school today. In 1923 Bishop Conaty High School opened with Sisters of Mercy in charge of the business department; a Mercy Sister has been on the staff ever since.

In the 1950s the Sisters staffed St. Pius X, **St. Bruno in Whittier** and St. Paul High School in Santa Fe Springs. Sister Bea Garcia teaches religion at St. Paul.

Through the '30s, '40s and '50s, the Sisters taught catechism at the parishes and staffed summer programs in catechetics.

## Today

Sister Kathleen Marie (Katie) Kinney's classroom at Bishop Conaty-Our Lady of Loretto High School in Los Angeles features a small collection of angels on a table by the window. They are pottery, painted ceramic, glass, glittery winged creatures who look quite unlike the sturdy, multi-ethnic girls who sit in red herringbone skirts and red sweaters at their desks.



What do these students from immigrant families need most? After remedial education, they need a sense of belonging as they grow up in families with both parents working. Sister Katie cajoles, encourages, and disciplines them all at once in her classroom.

"After 46 years, teaching still energizes me," says Sister Katie who teaches religion. "You get energy from the kids. When I'm no longer effective, I will stop."

Sister Katie is just one of approximately 30 Sisters of Mercy working in Southern California today. Sister Gloria Mary Avila has her finger on the pulse of advances in medicine as a Cancer Surveillance Technician. Sister Yvette Perault is a social gerontologist who acts as a care manager for frail elderly who have no one else to oversee their health or their legal affairs. Sister Helen Santillan counsels the mentally frail. Sister Ana Law teaches new teachers at Loyola Marymount University, building on her years in Catholic education.

The Mercy roles are many today, but all are focused on ministry with the poor, the marginalized and especially women and children. As the Constitution of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas states:

We rejoice in the continued invitation

To seek justice, to be compassionate

And to reflect Mercy to the world.



## Ministries

The Sisters of Mercy in Southern California serve or sponsor the following ministries today:

**Schools:** Bishop Conaty-Our Lady of Loretto High School, Los Angeles; Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles; Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles; Puente Learning Center, Los Angeles; St. Paul High School, Santa Fe Springs.

**Healthcare:** Alma Via Assisted Living, Oxnard; Cancer Surveillance program, Los Angeles; Didi Hirsch Community Center, Culver City; St. John's Regional Medical Center, Oxnard and Pleasant Valley.

**Housing:** Mercy Housing California, Orange, an affordable housing provider with 358 units built in Southern California for families, seniors and those with special needs.

**Parishes:** St. Justin the Martyr and St. Boniface, Anaheim.

**Other:** Archdiocesan Special Services Office, Los Angeles; Life Services, Glendale.

