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Celebrating the nuns who heal a troubled nation

The fifth annual National Catholic Sisters Week takes place March 8-14, 2018

ST. PAUL, Minn. – [National Catholic Sisters Week](#) (NCSW), the fifth annual celebration of women religious, announces a record number of events planned across the country to celebrate the remarkable contributions of Catholic sisters, in tandem with National Women’s History Month.

The week is intended to honor the nation’s 45,605 Catholic sisters and all who have gone before – founders of schools and hospitals, missionaries and contemplatives, artists and activists, spiritual guides for all walks of life. “To meet a Catholic sister is to be inspired,” said Molly Hazelton, director of NCSW headquartered at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. “Shining a light on their ministries can move the masses, and that’s what we’re aiming to do. In a time when there isn’t much good news, we need more than ever to hear stories of how they help and heal a fractured country.”

Nationwide events – small and large – are being planned for the week of March 8-14 to celebrate the profound impact of Catholic sisters. The gatherings include panels, pilgrimages, progressive dinners and retreats. Many are grassroots; others are formally organized, funded by 89 mini-grants of up to \$1,000 each awarded by Hazelton to enable the message of NCSW to travel in broader, more robust ways. Grant recipients range from Detroit to Dallas, from D.C. to Dubuque, honoring a host of religious communities, from the Adrian Dominicans to the Ursuline sisters. In Mendham, N.J., the Sisters of Christian Charity are coordinating a nun run for young women to tour four different convents. In New Orleans, Sisters of the Presentation will participate in a service day at soup kitchens and homeless shelters.

Dr. Kirk Gaddy, a religion teacher at St. Francis International in Silver Spring, Md., a Catholic school with a large African American population, is [taking middle-school girls to nearby Mount Providence Convent](#) to see Catholic sisters who share their ethnicity. “It’s important for African American girls and other girls of color to see sisters that look like them so that, if they feel they might be called to religious life, they will believe they can achieve the vocation,” Dr. Gaddy said.

A deliberate cross-country effort was made this year to engage diverse groups, introducing them to the possibility of religious life by fostering friendships with Catholic sisters. Spanish-speaking School Sisters of Notre Dame, for instance, are hosting a canvas-painting party in Texas to reach out to teenaged Hispanic girls. “[Pintar Y Orar](#)” is designed to invite the girls to tap into their spirituality – and provide a natural conversation starter, painting alongside sisters.

Sister Bridget Waldorf, SSND, event organizer, said we need the influence of Catholic sisters now more than ever – a balm for troubled times. “Because so many consecrated sisters are engaged in ministries where deep reverence for others is fundamental to who they are in mission, they are ready to help heal and listen and engage,” Sister Bridget said. “There are many examples of ways in which religious are trying – through daily and intentional prayer, adding their voice to legislative or congressional issues, advocating on behalf of the marginalized, being witnesses of unity through interactions with ‘others’ – whomever the ‘others’ may be – educating, listening, companioning, washing feet and being persons of hope and trust. The places vary but the goal seems to be universal: to love one another.”

Since NCSW launched, Hazelton has heard again and again from young adults astounded by the connections they have forged with women religious, expressing a deep admiration and a ready kinship. “Many of the causes that drive Catholic sisters resonate with Millennials: social justice, sustainability, simple living and authenticity, when your daily life matches your core values. Sisters have so much to teach us.”

NCSW is intended to amplify the rich legacy of women religious, to illuminate their current ministries and to spotlight the young women who are continuing to pursue religious life. More than 100 entered in 2017, ranging from 24 to 86-years-old. The average age was 36, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

To learn more about NCSW, visit www.nationalcatholicsistersweek.org. Follow NCSW on our social channels and use #NCSW2018 to engage.

About National Catholic Sisters Week

National Catholic Sisters Week is headquartered at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minn., and supported by a grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. Everyone is invited to participate in National Catholic Sisters Week through local community events and outreach, volunteer opportunities and social media. National Catholic Sisters Week also features community-submitted content through its Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest channels. Learn more at nationalcatholicsistersweek.org and follow the campaign on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Pinterest](#).

About the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

The [Conrad N. Hilton Foundation](#) was created in 1944 by international business pioneer Conrad N. Hilton, who founded Hilton Hotels and left his fortune to help the world’s disadvantaged and vulnerable people. The Foundation currently conducts strategic initiatives in six priority areas: providing safe water, ending chronic homelessness, preventing substance abuse, helping children affected by HIV and AIDS, supporting transition-age youth in foster care, and extending Conrad Hilton's support for the work of Catholic Sisters. Following selection by an independent international jury, the Foundation annually awards the \$1.5 million Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize to a nonprofit organization doing extraordinary work to reduce human suffering. From its inception, the Foundation has awarded more than \$1 billion in grants. The Foundation's current assets exceed \$2.2 billion.

About Saint Mary's University of Minnesota

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota awakens, nurtures, and empowers learners to ethical lives of leadership and service. At Saint Mary's, students find in every classroom—whether in person or online—a relationship-driven, person-centered education. Through intense inquiry, students discover the truths in the world and the character within. Founded in 1912 and accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota enrolls 5,800 students at its residential undergraduate college in Winona and its Schools of Graduate and Professional Programs, based in Minneapolis but extending worldwide. Saint Mary's offers respected and affordable programs in a variety of areas leading to bachelor's, bachelor's completion, master's, certificate, specialist, and doctoral degrees. Learn more at www.smumn.edu.

About Alverno College

National Catholic Sisters Week is headquartered at St. Catherine University and funded by a Conrad N. Hilton Foundation grant awarded to Alverno College, which works in partnership with St. Catherine. Alverno is a four-year independent, Catholic, liberal arts college for women, exists to promote the personal and professional development of its students. The college has earned accolades and respect internationally for its highly effective ability-based, assessment-as-learning approach to education, and has consulted with three U.S. presidential administrations on accountability and outcomes in higher education. For the last seven years, Alverno College has been ranked one of the top five schools in the Midwest doing “the best job of educating undergrads” by *U.S. News & World Report*.

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