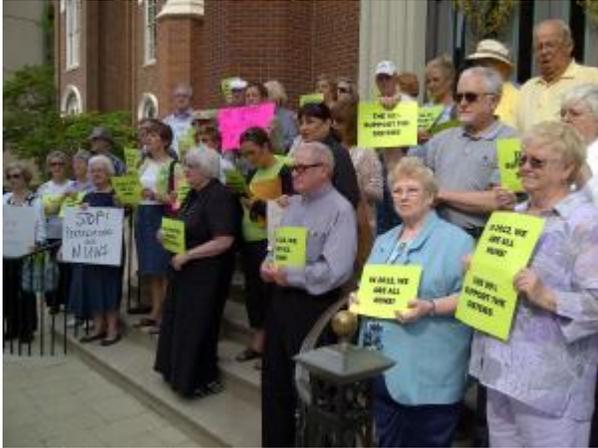


Louisville, Ky., vigil: 78 observe silence for Catholic sisters

Alice Popovici | May. 9, 2012



(Photo by R. Brayton Bowen)

Protesters observed an hour of silence Tuesday evening in front of the Cathedral of the Assumption in Louisville, Ky., during the first of a series of vigils planned in May to support Catholic sisters, an effort led by the Nun Justice Project. Then, said organizer Helen Deines, "everyone went forth to live just as the sisters would want us to."

Deines, a retired professor of social work, wrote the following prayer, which was read at the start of the vigil:

We members of this Archdiocese of Louisville stand here on our cathedral steps today to express our solidarity with our sisters, the women religious of this archdiocese and our country.

We do so on this Tuesday and the coming Tuesdays of May from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m., and we do so in solidarity with other concerned citizens around the U.S., who are also gathered in prayer. It is natural that we pray for the sisters, because "above all" the women religious of this country have been those we asked to pray for us! Sisters, this evening we return the favor.

Through the years "centuries, in fact" of their presence in this archdiocese, we have experienced these dedicated women as the founders of our Catholic schools and universities, and then as our teachers in them, and as scholars, women who lead the church to recognize the divine presence in our lives.

We have recognized women religious as the founders of our hospitals and hospices, and then as our doctors, our nurses, and our healers from all kinds of ailments of mind, body, and spirit. We saw them lead these institutions, serving rich and poor alike, unfailingly respecting life, long before federal funding made Catholic health care institutions wealthy

We have watched them establish social agencies of all kinds "in the cities, in the country, in the hollows,

in the deserts?and then serve the poorest and least valued of our community, offering clothing, food, warm places to stay, and most important?dignity and hope to all God?s children.

We have seen them serving as administrators and pastoral ministers in so many of our parishes, ?keeping the place going? and being the personal ?listening ear? of the church for us as we needed to talk over private concerns, family life issues, how to cope with a sick family member, losing a job or a house, or an empty nest, or a teenage daughter. ?Sister? has always been there for us.

We have experienced women?s religious congregations demonstrate leadership in advocating for peace and justice, even facing arrest, harassment, and imprisonment while doing so.

We have seen them serve as lawyers representing migrant farm workers, as policy experts testifying about poverty and care of the planet in Frankfort and Washington, and as model caregivers for our elders and those with disabilities.

We have turned to them for guidance as spiritual directors, clinical psychologists, and theology professors.

We have honored them (or averted our eyes) as martyrs. They have fed our spirits and challenged us as artists, speaking of the divine without words.

We have watched them leave their convents and serve global missions for long periods of time, often returning with sisters from those countries to minister in new ways.

In whatever they do, the women religious of this country have worked with quiet humility, asking for little in return. These are the women who model what it means to live our faith!

So we ask you now to go deep into your own hearts, recalling the women religious who have drawn you here. Use this silence in your own way to lift up and support women religious. I will return at 10 minutes before 6 to send us forth. And remember, during these vigils our silence loudly proclaims again and again: In 2012, we are all nuns.

As Deines reflected on the vigil Wednesday, she described it as ?an ever-widening circle of really building up the church in the way that the church needs to be built up.

?It wasn?t a vigil against something, it was a vigil for something,? she said, ?a time of solidarity and to demonstrate our respect for women religious.?

Read about [more vigils held in support of women religious here](#) [1].

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