

Hundreds gather to support sisters in Kansas City

Joshua J. McElwee | Jun. 20, 2012 NCR Today

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Holding signs and eliciting honks of agreement from travelling motorists, hundreds gathered at one of the busiest city hangouts here Tuesday afternoon to show their support for U.S. sisters.

The rally, organized by local Catholics, is the latest in a series held across the nation in the wake of the Vatican's sharp rebuke of the organization representing the majority of the sisters' ranks, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

Standing near an iconic fountain next to one of the city's largest shopping districts, some 300 came Tuesday to give support to the sisters. In the crowd were members of parishes near and far, a number of diocesan priests (with and without their clerical collars), and many sisters.

Brief conversations with some present at the event about the one thing they want people to know about U.S. sisters give a flavor of the sentiment.

Leon Keens, a member of a nearby parish and a retired English professor, said he had been taught in grade school by sisters of a Precious Blood community in Sedalia, Mo.

"I'm grateful, I think that's about it, for all that they've done," said Keens. "And they have given me such great inspiration for all that they do. They're in the real world, fulfilling the obligation to love one another, practicing the corporal works of mercy and the beatitudes."

St. Joseph Sr. Rosemary Flanigan, who was attending the rally with Rachel Reeder, a friend who spent time with the Benedictine sisters' community in Atchison, Kan, mentioned that she had been in her community for 64 years.

Flanigan, who taught at nearby Jesuit-run Rockhurst University for 17 years, said she wanted people to know that "this is a very serious issue for us sisters and we appreciate every bit of support."

A person who briefly addressed those present over a simple PA system mentioned that he is friends with Sr. Mary McNellis, a member of the Sisters of Loretto of Nerinx, Ken., who at 102 years of age, wasn't able to make the rally.

Noting that McNellis had been honored with the "World Citizen of the Year" award by Kansas City's mayor at the city's United Nations Day event in 2000, the speaker said: "If we looked at all of the nuns here, many would have similar accolades."

Benedictine Sr. Slyvia Kenkel, of the Atchison, Kan., community said she's been a member of her order for 53 years, ever since she entered the community in 1957.

People, said Kenkel, should know that "us sisters are very receptive to people and a lot of our jobs have to do with helping people -- teaching, nursing, or just saying hi to people in the street. That's passing on God's love."

A photo slideshow of the gathering follows. Click through to see some images of those at the Kansas City event.

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