

Inaugural Catholic Sisters Week set for March

Colleen Dunne | Feb. 7, 2014

The first [National Catholic Sisters Week](#) [1] will kick off March 8-14 at [St. Catherine University](#) [2] in St. Paul, Minn., as part of [Women's History Month](#) [3]. By bringing together college-age women and women religious from a variety of congregations, St. Catherine will honor Catholic sisters who have served faithfully as an integral part of American history.

"Women's History Month is something people know about and is utilized by schools, universities and organizations to highlight contributions women have made," said Dominican Sr. Mary Soher, who is helping lead the project. "And within this group there are contributions specifically women religious have made to society."

Soher said she is excited about the potential for this project to lead people to think of both the contribution of women who are no longer living and those who have stories yet to tell.

Among the events planned at St. Catherine are opportunities to engage young women in conversations about religious life and discussion about the use of social media in promoting vocations. On March 8 broadcast journalist Soledad O'Brien is scheduled to moderate a panel discussion on discernment called "Sister Stories: How Did I Know?" The university also plans to launch a website that includes resources from religious communities across the country.

In an attempt to record untold stories by women who have served for decades in challenging ministries, St. Catherine is sponsoring a student-led initiative. Students are producing interviews or short films about sisters they know to create an extensive oral history.

"As a student producer I will connect with a sister and hear her story," said St. Catherine student Dominique Caya. "Not by just asking her in an interview style, though that will be part of it, but more, getting to know her on a personal level. While doing this I will blog about it, either in writing or video, and post my sister's story on social media."

Caya also admits this project is helping her to determine whether she might also have a call to religious life.

"In short, I think this project is about breaking the stereotype: reviving and re-establishing what it is to be a sister," she said, and "letting people know that being a Catholic sister is a viable vocation in the 21st century. There are so many orders devoted to so many things and the sisters are very active people."

St. Catherine's National Catholic Sisters Week is the first project of a larger three-year effort to increase vocations, called Sister Story. This project is made possible by a \$3.3 million grant from the [Conrad N. Hilton Foundation](#) [4]. (The foundation also has awarded the *National Catholic Reporter* a grant for a global reporting project about women religious.) As Soher and others at St. Catherine expand programming, there are plans for other efforts, including a documentary with Minnesota Public Television in 2016. Overall, the university and the foundation hope to bring greater visibility to the contributions of women religious and increased attention to

young people discerning vocations.

"The Hilton Foundation's vision is to create a movement that ignites national awareness around the lives and profound contributions of sisters, inspiring girls and women to be open to a potential call to religious life," School Sister of Notre Dame Rosemarie Nassif, Hilton's Catholic Sisters Initiative program director, said in a press release. "Launching National Catholic Sister Week in conjunction with Women's History Month will leverage the respect of an already nationally recognized campaign to highlight a unique and spirited band of women."

Soher agrees that the week is a real opportunity to encourage young people to think about their vocations and to explore how to use the tools of the day to reach out to them. She said she hopes National Catholic Sisters Week expands beyond St. Catherine in years to come.

"We think there are people out there who have a vocation to religious life, but I don't know how easy we have made it for people to find us," Soher said. "There are so many different ways of being a sister, different community charisms, ministries and locations. This is a way to encourage people to highlight who they know who are sisters and what sisters have done. Maybe people who have a call to religious life would think out of the box and see there is a community out there for them."

[Colleen Dunne is an *NCR* Bertelsen intern. Her email address is cdunne@ncronline.org [5].]

Editor's Note: The *National Catholic Reporter* is embarking on a groundbreaking project to give greater voice to sisters around the world. To learn more about this project or sign up for email alerts visit, <http://ncronline.org/sisters> [6].

Support independent reporting on important issues.



Source URL (retrieved on 07/20/2017 - 08:09): <https://www.ncronline.org/news/sisters-stories/inaugural-catholic-sisters-week-set-march>

Links:

- [1] <https://www2.stkate.edu/ncsw/home>
- [2] <http://www.stkate.edu/>
- [3] <http://www.nwhp.org/>
- [4] <http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/initiatives-a-programs/sisters>
- [5] <mailto:cdunne@ncronline.org>
- [6] <http://ncronline.org/sisters>
- [7] <https://www.ncronline.org/donate?clickSource=article-end>