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New documentary tells post-Katrina story of New Orleans sisters

Monica Clark | Sep. 19, 2012 NCR Today

Although Hurricane Katrina destroyed convents, schools and social service centers in New Orleans on Aug. 29, 2005, it did not wipe out the determination of six communities of Catholic sisters to continue their ministries in the city where they have served, some through three centuries.

A new documentary, "We Shall Not Be Moved: The Catholic Sisters of New Orleans," tells the stories of these women as they faced personal and congregational challenges and struggled to recover and rebuild after the hurricane's destruction. Produced through NewGroup Media in South Bend, Ind., the hourlong program premieres on some ABC affiliates Sept. 23. (See station listings at interfaithbroadcasting.com [1].)

The film uses archival photos, television footage of Katrina and extensive interviews with sisters from each of the six featured congregations -- Ursuline Sisters, who arrived in New Orleans in 1727; Congregation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (1835); Sisters of the Holy Family of New Orleans (1842); Marianites of Holy Cross (1849); Congregation of St. Joseph (1854); and the Teresian Sisters (1915).

It takes viewers back to the flooding and the sisters' heroic efforts to care for stranded residents and those too frail or ill to evacuate. It recounts their discernment about whether to rebuild and their determination to raise the funds to do so.

It also celebrates their resilience and the rebirth of their ministries, including a new all-girls high school that opened in January 2011 after several years in modular classrooms.

"Their choices were not uniform, simple or immediate," said Sister of St. Francis of Sylvania Judith Ann Zielinski, the film's writer and producer, in announcing the film's release. "However, all six congregations reconfirmed their commitment to the city and its people."

The film's title comes from the Gospel song "We Shall Not Be Moved" and is performed in the film by the Gospel choir of St. Gabriel the Archangel Church and the chorus of St. Mary's Academy High School, both in New Orleans.

The film project was coordinated and led by the SC Ministry Foundation in Cincinnati and funded by several Catholic foundations and congregations of women religious.

"People will be uplifted by these inspirational stories," said Sister of Charity Sally Duffy, president and executive director of SC Ministry Foundation and one of the film's executive producers.

ABC is making the film available to its affiliates for broadcasts through Nov. 18 as part of its "Vision and Values" series in partnership with the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission.

The documentary can also be purchased as a DVD for $16 at weshallnotbemovedmovie.com [2] or 1-800-354-3504.

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[1] http://www.interfaithbroadcasting.com
[2] http://www.weshallnotbemovedmovie.com