



Connecting with God ✚ *Connecting with You*

MEDIA RELEASE
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**SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA
CELEBRATE 150 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE DIOCESE OF ERIE**

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania will begin a year-long celebration of the Congregation's 150th Anniversary of service to the Erie Diocese on Sunday May 23, 2010. The celebration will include a Liturgy at 1:30 p.m. at Saint Peter Cathedral with Bishop Donald W. Trautman, S.T.D., S.S.L. as Celebrant and Homilist. The Liturgy will be followed by a reception at the Bayfront Convention Center. Both events are invitation only.

Other events planned throughout the year include wreath laying services on May 29th at the cemeteries where 455 deceased Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania are buried. Visits will be made to Trinity and Calvary Cemeteries in Erie, as well as St. Ann Cemetery in Corsica, Pennsylvania.

In June, the Sisters will host a dedication and open house of the Congregation's new administration building which is located adjacent to the Sisters' Community Living Center in Millcreek. On July 30 and 31st, the Erie Chamber Orchestra, Bruce Morton Wright, Director, will host summer concerts on the lawn at Villa Maria Academy. Wright is a 2009 SSJ Spirit of Courage honoree. Former Sisters will be invited to participate in the 150th celebration at a Homecoming event in August. The Sisters will also host "appreciation events" over the next several months at locations throughout the Diocese including Erie, Elk County, Crawford County, McKean County and Mercer County. In addition to these special events, the anniversary will also be recognized at other annual SSJ events including the Sisters' Circle of Friends Celebration in August and the SSJ Spirit of Courage dinner in October.

The anniversary theme, ***WOMEN OF SPIRIT, COURAGE AND VISION*** honors the earliest Sisters of St. Joseph in seventeenth century France; Mother Agnes Spencer, SSJ, the first superior of the Congregation in Northwestern PA; and the generations of Sisters who have ministered in the Erie Diocese. Since the Sisters arrived in northwestern Pennsylvania, they have served in the 13 counties of the Erie Diocese and in numerous foreign lands.

It was on May 24, 1860, at the invitation of Bishop Joshua Young, that Mother Agnes Spencer came to the Erie Diocese and assumed the direction of St. Ann's Academy for Girls at Corsica. Education became an important work of the Congregation and within twenty years there were more than two thousand children under the Sister of St. Joseph instruction. Next, the care of orphans and of the sick was undertaken, first in Meadville and then in Erie. The Sisters founded Spencer Hospital, Meadville; Saint Vincent Hospital, Erie; Saint Vincent school of Nursing; Saint Mary's Home of Erie; Villa Maria Academy, Elementary School and Villa Maria College among numerous other ministries. The Sisters staffed schools throughout the Diocese as well as St. Joseph Orphanage and Harborcreek Home for Boys.

The Sisters' complete history is available at www.ssjerie.org. In conjunction with the 150th anniversary, the Sisters have launched an online digital museum with thousands of photos. It can be also be accessed via the Sisters' website.

During this anniversary celebration, the Sisters look forward to connecting and re-connecting with those they have ministered with and to throughout the years. Feel free to contact the Sisters via phone, email or postal mail to share a story or memory. Contact information is available at www.ssjerie.org. You are also invited to place a prayer request via their website, or connect with the Sisters on Facebook.

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