Congressional Record S. 7022 - St. Mary College (Golden Jubilee)

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, as a Senator from the State of Montana, one might wonder why I am interested in St. Mary College in Leavenworth, Kans. It just happens that a great many of the students attending St. Mary College come from Montana. Since the early days when Montana was a territory, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth have contributed much to development of our State in the fields of education, health, and in other areas. So we look upon Montana as being St. Mary College West. I happen to be a member of the Presidents' Council of St. Mary along with my distinguished colleague, the Senator from Kansas (Mr. PEARSON).

I should like at this time to make a few remarks about this outstanding educational institution.

St. Mary College in Leavenworth, Kans., is celebrating its golden jubilee year as a private, Catholic, liberal arts college for women. Owned and operated by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, St. Mary is the only women's college in Kansas. It is distinguished by its outstanding faculty.

Although St. Mary as a college is celebrating its 50th year, St. Mary as an educational institution dates back to 1859.

In 1858, Bishop John Baptist Miege, Vicar Apostolic of the Indian Territory, asked a handful of Catholic Sisters to set out by boat from Nashville, Tenn., up the Missouri River, to open a school for the education of the young ladies in the Indian Territory. In Kansas, on the banks of the Missouri, was Leavenworth—a vital pioneer town, gateway to the New West. The Sisters, who organized as the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, decided this would be the ideal place for their school. In 1859, the doors opened to the St. Mary Academy for Young Ladies.

From the origins of the academy came St. Mary College—first as a junior college in 1923 and then as a 4-year liberal arts college in 1930, still for women. Now there are nine major buildings with excellent modern facilities, on a 240-acre campus that is one of the most beautiful in the country. Majors are offered in 20 fields, taught by 54 outstanding faculty members, over half of whom hold doctorates. Sisters of Charity and priests make up about half of the faculty; lay men and women the rest. Nearly 3,000 undergraduate degrees have been awarded by St. Mary College in its 50-year history.

Since their beginning as a religious order in 1858, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth have established nearly 100 institutions—elementary and secondary schools, homes for children and the aged, and hospitals—in the United States and in Bolivia and Peru. Over 700 Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth still serve the people of the world through their work in schools, hospitals, homes, and social services.

In 1889, the Sisters of Charity came to Montana and established one of their first missions outside of Kansas. Since that time they have served the people of Montana in health care and educational apostolates. Also 25 percent of the total Sisters of Charity community is made up of Sisters from Montana. Montana students were among the first to attend St. Mary College and since its inception in 1923 some 750 Montana women have enrolled in St. Mary College.

The dedicated service of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth has made St. Mary College a hallmark in the education of women. We offer our congratulations and salute the Sisters of Charity, the administrators, faculty, students, and alumnae in the golden jubilee year of St. Mary College.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record an article published in the Kansas City Star of April 28, 1974, entitled "Saint Mary: Oldest School For Girls in Kansas."

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD ST. MARY COLLEGE IS STILL A FRONTIER SCHOoL

(By Sara Baker)

On the southern edge of the city of Leavenworth, 14 miles north of the Kansas Turnpike on U.S. 73, a small, green and white sign points to one of the state's oldest institutions.

A quick left turn takes you through the gates of Saint Mary College, an educational institution that has its origins in a time when Kansas was called "bloody" and statehood was more than three years away.

Today, a winding drive, partly paved with brick, leads to an administration building erected in 1970. The 240-acre campus is dotted with large trees. Grassy lawns, sprinkled lakes, formal gardens and turn-of-the-century gazebos add a picture-book dimension. Buildings are a compatible blend of old and new, mostly of red brick.
On a spring day, groups of young women laden with books enjoy a warm spot on the sidewalk of a building on campus. They are wearing faded blue denim, cut-off jeans or long skirts. In the halls, clusters of girls chat, laugh, and enjoy the happy attitude of relaxation, openness and optimism.

One of 480 of these girls and they attend the oldest school for girls in Kansas and the state's only remaining 4-year college for women. Saint Mary is 115 years old, founded in 1859.

In 1859, Bishop John Baptist Miege, Vicar Apostolic of Indian Territory, realized the need for Christian education on the frontier. His call to "come North as soon as possible" was heard in Tennessee by Mother Xavier Ross, superior of the Sisters of Charity of Nashville.

By Nov. 1, 1859, five professed Sisters, two postulants, a novice and an orphaned girl, left the general house of Nashville for a frontier town filled with hunters, traders, soldiers and "border ruffians" who exploited the pro and cons of the situation.

After an 11-day journey over frozen ground and up an ice-choked Missouri River, the little group of women arrived in Leavenworth, attracting scant attention from the wharf-side loungers. But by the end of the first year, the 30 or so students were known by the townspeople.

Stranded on the steamer, "Ella," in the frozen Missouri River below Jefferson City, the sisters found the weather so severe that they decided to spend the night on the deck. They finally arrived in Leavenworth, Feb. 3, 1860.

Although the original Sisters were already teaching a group of young boys, Mother Xavier, with the help of Bishop Miege, rented a small cottage on Kickapoo Street. This was to be the boarding school, "St. Mary's Academy for Young Ladies." The process of educating girls and young women has been continued by the Sisters of the same name ever since.

By 1860, a new brick building was ready to house the boarders, who came from Montana, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri and Kansas. She said, "We were so eager to get the school started that we went ahead with the construction."

When the school was erected for $6,000 and tuition was $60 for a 5-month session, the school remained in operation as the academy until 1870. The academy was moved to the campus where Saint Mary College now stands.

If your vision of a Catholic women's college includes tolling of bells, the swish of black dresses, and long hair falling straight across the back of a neck, then you are in for a shock. Saint Mary College is a modern, progressive institution.

"We are concerned today with intellectual development of the student, at the same time emphasizing moral character," Sister Jim McCollin, the gentle yet dynamic 49-year-old president, "In a teaching and learning community, students need to know how to interact in that community."

Sister Mary, whose brown hair, touched with gray, frames a youthful face, calls herself a Kansas transplant. A native of Wisconsin and a graduate of Kansas City's College of St. Teresa and Mrs. James P. McCollin, she attended St. Teresa's College, now Avila, but received her bachelors' degree from Mizzou with majors in English and drama. She earned a master's degree in English from Boston College and a PhD in English literature from Fordham University, New York.

Saint Mary College is still a church-oriented school, the president pointed out. "We do not see education as a tool of the Church."

Today, it may be reversed a little bit," she said, her eyes twirling.

From a course in tapestry to one in trans- actional analysis is a long way. To fulfill the continuing needs and demands of more students, Saint Mary became a 4-year, co-ed college in 1930 with programs of studies leading to the B.B.A., B.A., M.A., B.S., M.S. in Arts, Science, Music and Music Education.

"One of the many things we have going for us is the 100-year tradition of Saint Mary's," Sister Mary Janet said. "But we can't be complacent. We must re-examine our goals and shape them to the new world of living and coping. We can't just sit back and say that everything is all right, but we are still strong on the old values."

The president believes there should be a variety of options open to the college-bound woman and being able to attend a woman's college should be one of them.

What is the key to the success of a woman's college? Sister Mary Janet said, "I believe that the one thing that really helps is to get to know and like one's self and to develop self-confidence through the friendships that can be made on a single-sex campus."

It's a concept, of course, that lasting friendships with other women are made on co-educational campuses, but we notice this factor is especially strong at a college for women.

"There is some validity to the criticism that there are not many men in a woman's college, so it is an artificial environment, but is any campus a part of the real world? The dating game and pressures of marriage are a way to avoid the mating ritual. But more than anything is the need to be real and authentic. If students have a sense of identity, the professional staff members acting in positions of importance provide crucial role models. When a young student sees an older woman in a role she believes in and has dedicated her life to, the student finds a source of strength that is important to her future as a person, or a person to be of service to others."

"Statistics indicate there are 27 professional women to every 1,000 women students compared to 149 professional men to every 1,000, so the role model is more visible in a college like Saint Mary."

Each student feels the school has its share of normal social problems that can be dealt with on the counseling level. In her nine years here she has "seen it all." A changing, expanding curriculum makes Saint Mary an outgrowth of innovation.

This past year was a busy one for the student body of the prison, the four weeks after the Christmas holidays, students under the guidance of Sister Carol Hill met once a week to prepare for the Kansas State Prison at Lansing.

"The class was held in the administration building of the prison and the girls went straight out and the girls went half-way in," Sister Carol, an English instructor, ex-
plained. "We studied literature written by men who were prisoners themselves including Dostoevsky, Dickens, a. cummings and Eldridge Cleaver.

"I'm not sure how much the men got out of the course, but the girls seemed to think it was a rewarding experience."

Other interim courses have included study abroad and in Mexico, New York City, Arizona and New Mexico as well as work in Maine, as well as work in nearby communities and in Kansas City's inner city. Some of these interim programs often lead to summer jobs.

Music is a big part of life at the school. Students and teachers perform in groups that play everything from the classics through the gamut of jazz, swing and rock.


Sister Ernestine pointed out that Saint Mary has long been influenced by the University of Kansas.

"From the beginning," she said, "the curriculum was based on that of the University of Kansas. We were guided by the university, aided in selecting teachers and we used the same textbooks."

Like other small colleges, Saint Mary is having difficulties. Rising and declining enrollment are the big problems.

"Saint Mary has always operated in the black," said James T. Hux, a Kansas City lawyer and vice-chairman of the President's Council, an advisory board to the school.

"It's because of conditions set by the nuns, but as the number of lay faculty increases the harder it will be to meet our budget."

Burke is optimistic, nevertheless, about the future of the college.

"With a broadening curriculum in liberal arts and a strong recruitment program," he said, "I'm confident this school will continue to meet the needs of young women for years to come.

Why do young women choose Saint Mary? Diana Furrow, 18, a freshman from Gladstone, said it was because it was not too far from home, the campus was small and the tuition reasonable.

"The thing that really made up my mind, even after visiting coed schools, was the friendliness of the girls. I felt right at home immediately."

Saint Mary is a hub in a circle of academic institutions. In Lawrence, the school maintains a house for resident students who want to take courses at the university. But the house at 1464 Engle Street has other functions.

"It's a good place for an 'overnight relaxer,'" Sister Marie Brinkman, house director, explained. "Any Saint Mary girl can go there for a weekend just to get away, to cherish her college years with university study and to have access to university life."

Saint Mary's proximity to Ft. Leavenworth has resulted in a certain cosmopolitanism. Wives of officers at the Command and General Staff College enroll in courses and last year one of the women taught Russian history. Many officer's daughters have been students at the college.

There are 44 students from 16 countries attending Saint Mary College with Thailand represented by 10.

Joann Taylor, 21, a senior from Denver, said she came to Saint Mary for all the wrong reasons.

"I thought boys were better than girls when I was in high school. Here I've learned the value of womanhood and I see myself as a person who has a choice."

She admits she could use a little more initial contact with men but feels she'll get that when she enters law school next fall.

Another student suggested that girls sometimes use the women's college as an excuse if they don't have a glamorous social life."

"They think if they went to a large university they'd have tons of dates—but would they?"

Another joked about the dating game.

"You just have to be a little more ingenuous."

One thing is for certain. Men do come to the campus. At last spring's formal dance more than 300 couples danced, ate, and drank Kansas's 3.2 beer at one of the most successful of all campus activities.

Joyce Jones, 21, a senior from Mount Vernon, Ill., a few weeks ago draped a huge sign in the dining hall reminding students it was just "100 days until the spring dance."

Despite the low costs, $1,150 for tuition, $550 for board, $300 for room and $100 for general fees, Saint Mary is operating below capacity. There is room for 80 to 100 more resident students.

And what of the total results achieved since the brave band of Sisters arrived on the river bank in 1867?

Well an Order has evolved numbering 733 Sisters and their work has spread Westward from Leavenworth into 10 states including California.

Today the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth operate eight hospitals with a total of more than 2,000 beds; two homes for children; one home for the aged; 33 grade schools; eight high schools; one college; and missions in Peru and Bolivia.

In 1946, a red brick, Georgian-styled structure was built on the college grounds. It is the Motherhouse where the Sisters work, study and eventually retire, still under the guidance spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul who founded the original order, the Daughters of Charity, in 1633.