

Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary

Western American Area



*“To tell our story is to praise and
thank God for all the gifts given
to us throughout our history.”*

-Pope Francis

Centenary



Celebration



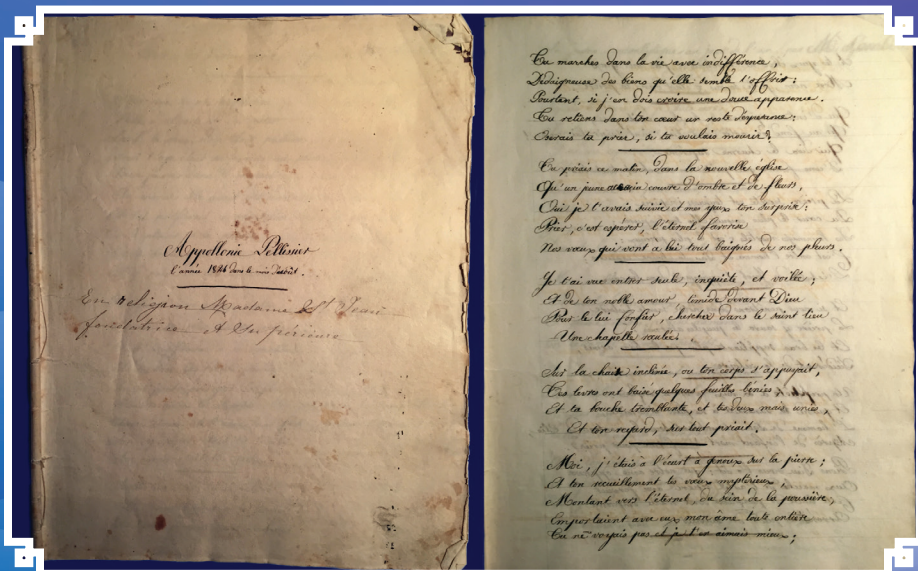
Mother Joseph Butler and Mother Gerard Phelan who came to Los Angeles to open the first Marymount School at 28th Street in 1923.

Our Legacy

The legacy of the Religious of Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM) in California and Mexico (Western American Area) is one of...

Faith, Creativity, and Courage

in response to the founding genius of French diocesan priest Jean Gailhac and Mère St. Jean Cure-Pélissier to know and love God and to make God known and loved. Our story is one of both strengths and weaknesses in responding to the signs of the times, the challenges presented to us as an international, apostolic congregation, and the unfolding understanding of Church.



RSHM co-founder Mère St. Jean Cure-Pélissier's diary

What are the ideals, vision, and values that inspired Gailhac, our first sisters, and all our sisters who transcended boundaries to en flesh our charism in California and Mexico?

Collaboration

Collaboration has been an ideal since our founding - Jean Gailhac worked closely with his friends Eugène and Appollonie Cure on the many projects he initiated in nineteenth century France, including the Refuge for Prostituted Women, an orphanage, and an agricultural school in Bayssan.



At the invitation of an American woman, Sarah Peter, the RSHM crossed an ocean in 1877 and established their first foundation in the United States, Sag Harbor, New York.



Archbishop John Cantwell then invited the RSHM to traverse the continent and establish a school similar to the one built in Tarrytown, New York.



RSHM 1934

From our first days in Los Angeles, the RSHM has collaborated closely with lay advisers who shared our mission. Boards of Trustees and Boards of Regents that included lay persons were established for RSHM-owned and operated schools of the Marymount School Corporation. Marymount College entered a collaborative relationship with Loyola University in 1968 and relocated to its Westchester campus. In 1973, RSHM, Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, and the Society of Jesus partnered to create a new institution, Loyola Marymount University.



Faith and Zeal

Faith and zeal are ideals from our founding. The student population at Marymount School quickly grew after it opened in 1923 on 28th Street in Los Angeles, near the University of Southern California. In 1928, the RSHM purchased a property at the end of a cattle path on Sunset Boulevard, expanding to include junior and secondary schools, a junior college, and a four-year college in a little over two decades. From the late 1930s until the late 1950s, the RSHM opened Marymount School in Montecito—which relocated to Santa Barbara in 1945—Palos Verdes, and Cuernavaca, Mexico. With the same pioneering spirit, in 1941, the RSHM opened Corvallis High School, the first Catholic High School in the San Fernando Valley, in response to the rapidly growing needs of the Catholic population in that Southern California area. The following year, the RSHM opened Sacred Heart of Mary High School in Montebello, having purchased a mobile structure that once housed Oneata Academy.





These high schools became the catalyst for the RSHM's presence in parochial schools, the unique expression of the Church to its immigrant populations in the United States. St. Alphonsus School in East Los Angeles became the first parochial school staffed by RSHM, followed by St. Francis de Sales (Sherman Oaks), St. Patrick (North Hollywood), and Christ the King School (Hollywood). In 1951 ground was broken on the barren hills of Palos Verdes for a new high school and junior school. A few years later, in February 1957, Marymount Cuernavaca welcomed its first students. RSHM also staffed parochial schools in San Jose and Cupertino and opened Mother Butler Memorial High School in the 1950s in response to Santa Clara Valley's expanding population. The genius of Mother Joseph Butler and her vision for women's education are commemorated through this high school. As Mother Butler once said, "The world has never needed womanly wisdom and sympathy so much as it does today."



Letting Go, Dying, and Death

Letting go, dying, and death are also experiences the RSHM have encountered since our beginnings, including the 1855 Persecutions, financial insecurity created by the phylloxera devastation of Bayssan's vineyards, the unstable political and social environment in nineteenth-century France, the anti-clericalism of twentieth-century Portugal, and the nationalization of property in Portugal and Mozambique. Jean Gailhac frequently wrote to us, his dear daughters, that all good comes from the Cross.

For the RSHM, the baby boom of the 40s and 50s following World War II sparked a rapid expansion in California. Yet the years following the renewal of Vatican II, the emphasis on the universal call to holiness, and the challenge to look at our origins, had unexpected consequences. John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated, and with them went the hope of a more equitable society during the turbulent 1960s. A sexual revolution erupted, and the Vietnam War ignited political controversy. This era resulted in a new consciousness for congregations of women in the United States as some women religious became engaged in human rights movements, including struggles for justice and equity for people of color.

Thus, women religious began an exodus from their congregations, and fewer women requested membership. With fewer members available for day schools and boarding schools, the RSHM were cognizant of the need to transform our institutional presence and patrimony, recognizing that dwindling numbers necessitated new strategies for our educational ministries through lay leadership mentoring and divestment. It was a time of dying and of living the Paschal Mystery.

Then the shoots of new life began gradually appearing as our sisters were able to explore and engage in new ministries. Local RSHM communities were established in new neighborhoods enabling the formation of new sponsorships and partners. We have taken comfort in the words of our Pope Francis:

Christ's resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of history, for Jesus did not rise in vain.

Because we do not always see these seeds growing, we need an interior certainty, a conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks.

This certainty is called a "sense of mystery"

(Pope Francis, "The Joy of the Gospel," 278-79).



RSHM sisters (from left to right) Maureen Murray, Peg Dolan, Pauline Funk, Joan Treacy, and Catherine "Kitty" Harper bring bread to Cesar Chavez and Sen. Robert Kennedy in 1968 as Chavez ended his 25-day Fast for Nonviolence in Delano, California.

In the late 1970s, our sisters established a community in Huitzilac, outside of Mexico City, and began new pastoral ministries with Father William Wasson. The RSHM then purchased a house and established a local community in Mexico City. Life took on new expressions.



Mexico: Bible Study and Food Distribution



Risk Takers

This attribute characterizes who we have been from the start—what a risk Jean Gailhac took when he embraced his ministry at the Hotel Dieu, inspired by compassion for vulnerable members of his community, prostituted women. In the 1970s, the RSHM shared in this spirit of risk by continuing—despite diminishing numbers and limited resources—to discover new ways to make God known and loved. Impelled by the vision of the 1971 Synod on Justice in the World, our 1975 General Chapter and 1977 Enlarged General Council challenged us to put our talents and resources at the service of a call to justice, to redistribute our resources, and to be a Church presence where the Church had been absent.

In response to this call, three sisters were missioned to Ahoskie, North Carolina, to be a presence in the rural South and “live and work with the materially poor, in an area where religious are the fewest.” The model of ministry developed for this project became a methodology for future ministerial commitments—to walk humbly with local communities, to grow in cultural sensitivity, to listen to the needs of the people, and to shape a ministerial presence that emerges from within the local reality.

In the decades that have followed, this has been the rhythm of our lives: the sort of death that comes with letting go of beloved places of service and the seeds of life that burst forth from new projects. After thirteen years of rural ministry in Ahoskie, we RSHM handed over our work to the Sisters of St. Louis. Then, in response to the call of Institute leadership, an interprovincial community was established in Amacuzac, Mexico. After a twenty-year span of devoted service, we had to leave this beloved community.

Following civil unrest in Los Angeles in 1992, the RSHM launched South Central Los Angeles Ministry Project (SCLAMP) in collaboration with other women's religious congregations. Using the same methodology as the Ahooskie ministerial project, SCLAMP began as a parenting initiative and now provides English instruction and human development programs to immigrant Latina women and onsite early childhood educational experiences for their children. We RSHM are proud that the project's leadership has been assumed by Latina women whose skills and gifts create an environment where all may have life.



Our Story Continues

Our story continues with new chapters. Although we are no longer a young community in California and Mexico, our apostolic zeal shines brighter than ever. We minister in a variety of ways to those who need our gifts, talents, and extensive experience, and we are continually seeking innovative answers to new questions. Our depth of faith has enabled us to let go, hand over, and give birth to a new mission impulse. Our emphasis on collaboration identifies us as a community of women that has effectively adapted to continuing change. We recall our resiliency and tenacity as we continue to reveal the tenderness of God by responding to marginalized people and the cries of the earth, so fostering the fullness of life for all. As Pope Francis reminds us, “Everything proves instructive, and, when viewed as a whole, our history and legacy continue to serve as a summons to conversion. As we share our story, we praise and thank God for all these good gifts.”





Entrance to 441 Garfield Ave, Montebello, California





Celebrating

100
years

in the

Western American Area

1923-2023