

Thank you, nice to be here, on behalf of our Charge d’Affaires Stuart Dwyer, thank you for your invitation to be here.

There’s no doubt that the Sisters of Mercy have had an impact all over the world, and I’d like to tell you a little about what they’ve done in my country, the United States.

The Sisters of Mercy were invited to the United States in 1843 by the Bishop of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania -- Michael O’Connor -- who was, of course, an Irishman.

Those first sisters were led by Sister Frances Warde. Just ten years earlier, in 1833, she had been the first Sister of Mercy to be professed by Catherine McAuley right here at Baggot Street.

They sailed to U.S. on a ship called the Queen of the West and landed in New York in December; then traveled onward to Pittsburgh via stagecoach.

The fact that they went to Pittsburgh has special resonance for me because that’s where I was born, as were my parents and most of grandparents and some of great grandparents. So I know that they would have known the Sisters for Mercy and the work that they did.

In Pittsburgh the sisters found a city that was expanding, growing rapidly and they jumped in to meet the most critical needs in this burgeoning place – needs in the areas of health care and education.

They established Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh not long after their arrival.

Over the years, Mercy Hospital developed into one of the finest medical institutions in the United States.

Yesterday Pittsburgh was the Steel City, but today it is very much a medical metropolis due to the hospitals and health care research facilities there, so in a sense they helped make the Pittsburgh what it is today.

In March 1966, when Pittsburgh celebrated its one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its charter as a city, Frances Warde was named one of the ten outstanding women in its history.

Now, I’d like to tell you that I was born in Pittsburgh Mercy Hospital, but one of my great aunts was a Sister of Charity of Seton Hill and she was the head of another Pittsburgh Hospital and insisted that my mother go there for my delivery. I’m happy to report that it seems like things worked out alright anyway.

In the 1920’s, another need presented itself – the lack of baccalaureate level education for the Catholic women of Pittsburgh.

The Sisters of Mercy founded Mount Mercy College (now Carlow University) in September, 1929.

Let me tell you about two of the remarkable sisters who taught there and their impact.....

Sister M. Francis Xavier O’Reilly

- First chair of the Biology Department at Mount Mercy College.
- She liked to say that she sent more “lady medical technologists” into the profession than any other person.

- She was raised on a farm in western Pennsylvania and earned a PhD in chemistry with a minor in biology from the University of Michigan in 1937.
- Some of her Mount Mercy College students went on to play important roles in researching the polio and influenza vaccines that were developed at the University of Pittsburgh; while others worked on atomic energy projects.

Sister M. Fides Shepperson was born into a protestant family in Danville, Pennsylvania in 1867.

- Became Catholic at 19 and entered the Sisters of Mercy two years later.
- Graduated from Holy Ghost College (later Duquesne University in Pittsburgh) in 1911, the first woman to be granted a B.A. from that institution.
- Later she enrolled in the University of Pittsburgh where she became, in 1923, the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in history from there.
- In 1929, she joined the faculty of Mount Mercy College as a history professor. She was recognized for “her wide knowledge of classical literature, history, philosophy and astronomy...”
- Widely known as a writer, she was deeply concerned with human rights and international peace.
- She founded the Society of St. Francis, an organization whose mission was to promote “world peace based on humane education in schools.”

One hundred years after Sister Warde and the first Sisters of Mercy went to Pittsburgh, there were 861 Mercy convents in the United States, more than in the rest of the world combined.

Today, the Sisters of Mercy continue their work in the U.S.--- still committed to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and helpless and following in the footsteps of Catherine McAuley, Francis Warde, and so many others.

Thank you so much for what you have done.