

Fact Sheet

Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart

Who are the Grey Nuns?

The Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart are a community of Roman Catholic consecrated women who strive to create a compassionate world through prayer, ministry and advocacy.

There are 111 Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart. Fifty-nine Grey Nuns reside on the Yardley, Pennsylvania Motherhouse campus.

The Grey Nuns were founded by Marguerite d'Youville in Montreal, Canada in 1737. Marguerite and her followers consecrated themselves to God and served the poor and the most neglected members of society.

Marguerite d'Youville died in 1771. At her beatification in 1959, Pope John XXIII gave her the title "Mother of Universal Charity." In 1990, Marguerite was canonized by Pope John Paul II, becoming the first native Canadian to be elevated to sainthood.

What is the mission of the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart?

In the spirit of Saint Marguerite d'Youville, our foundress, the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart strive to be signs of God's unconditional love as we collaborate to create a more just and compassionate world.

Why are they called "Grey" Nuns?

Marguerite D'Youville was the widow of a disreputable man who was involved in illegal liquor trading and she was often unfairly judged by her husband's unsavory reputation. When she and her sister followers shocked class-conscious Montreal society by dedicating their lives to serving the poor, the women were jeered as "Les Soeurs Grises" meaning "the tipsy sisters," (the French word "gris" has two meanings, "grey" or the euphemistic "tipsy"). Later, when Marguerite and her followers earned the respect of Montreal's citizenry through their charitable works, they embraced the name Grey Nuns and adopted the color French grey for their habits to remind them of the unjust accusation leveled against them.

What do Grey Nuns do?

- Pray, as a community, for the needs of the Church and the world
- Promote values of compassion, justice and reverence for all life
- Help the poor and educate others to help the poor
- Educate the young
- Care for the sick
- Cherish the elderly
- Comfort the homeless
- Counsel the addicted
- Support immigration reform
- Visit the imprisoned

- Provide hope for the needy and the neglected
- Advocate for care of the earth

Grey Nuns are...

- Educators
- Social workers
- Chaplains
- Health care workers
- Administrators
- Counselors
- Parish Ministers
- Social justice advocates

Where do Grey Nuns work?

Grey Nuns work in diverse ministries in Pennsylvania, New York, North Carolina and Maryland. Over the years, Grey Nuns have served in ministry in New Jersey, Georgia, Alaska, Peru and Haiti.

The Grey Nun Ministry of Prayer

Retired Sisters dedicate themselves to a Ministry of Prayer, devoting hours to prayer and reflection. Requests for prayers pour into the Yardley, Pennsylvania Motherhouse every day, from all over the United States. The prayer requests are posted outside the Motherhouse chapel and are read by the sisters before daily prayer.

Grey Nun Corporate Stands

Grey Nuns commit themselves to strengthening their personal and congregational efforts to promote peace, justice and care of the earth. That commitment was the impetus for the following corporate stands:

- To work against nuclear proliferation
- To oppose the death penalty
- To work for debt relief for underdeveloped nations of the world
- To integrate the tenets of the Earth Charter into their personal and congregational lives

Additional questions?

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