

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 59

BY SENATOR BISHOP

A RESOLUTION

To commend and congratulate the Sisters of the Holy Family on one hundred seventy-five years of service.

WHEREAS, the Sisters of the Holy Family were founded in 1842 by Henriette Delille, a free woman of color, with cofoundresses of the African-American religious community, Juliette Gaudin and Josephine Charles, who defied the mores of the time to live a chaste life together dedicated to God; and

WHEREAS, Henriette overcame resistance to the idea of a Black religious congregation, the lack of finances to more fully serve those in need, and the lack of support from the Church and civil authority; and

WHEREAS, she had to secretly get religious training with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Convent, Louisiana, where she served as a pantry girl; and

WHEREAS, Marie Jeanne Aliquot, a Caucasian, a good friend to Henriette served the small community as their Novice Directress; and

WHEREAS, the Sisters had as their mission to teach slave women and children the Catechism of the Holy Catholic Church for their reception of the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and Henriette and the cofoundresses became godmothers to many Blacks, Whites, slaves, and free people of color as well as witnesses to marriages; and

WHEREAS, in 1846, Henriette wrote the Rules for the Sisters of the Presentation (the original name of the order) which provided direction for the group; and

WHEREAS, the Sisters took in four elderly women into their home, the beginning of the old folks home which today is known as Lafon Nursing Facility, recorded in the National Register as the oldest continuously existing Catholic nursing facility for the elderly in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the Sisters cared for the sick during the yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans, and when children were left homeless by the pestilence in 1853, the Sisters took care of them and opened an orphanage; and

WHEREAS, in 1847, a group of free people of color incorporated the Association of the Holy Family of which Henriette was president and Juliette Gaudin was secretary; and

WHEREAS, the Sisters lived a very poor life, doing laundry and sewing, teaching during the day and begging for funds in the evenings; on many days and nights they went to bed hungry, because they gave their food to the poor; and

WHEREAS, when Henriette Delille died in 1862, she willed her house to the church so that the ministries could continue; and

WHEREAS, in 1867, St. Mary's Academy, the first secondary school for free girls of color in New Orleans, was established; today, St. Mary's Academy educates students from preK three-year-olds through twelfth grade, is coed from grades preK three-year-olds through fifth grade, grades sixth through twelfth are all girls; in the middle school, the classes for the boys and the girls are separate; the male academy was initiated; the school is accredited by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges; graduates hold prominent positions throughout the United States; and the school's principal, Sister Jennie Jones, was honored by the White House as a "Champion of Change"; and

WHEREAS, in 1906, Mother Austin Jones purchased 123 acres of land in New Orleans East, the cornerstone for the motherhouse, St. Mary's Academy, St. Paul the Apostle, Lafon Nursing Facility, Lafon Daycare Center, and Delille Inn Apartments; and

WHEREAS, the motherhouse and St. Mary's Academy were formerly housed at 717 Orleans Avenue, but in 1955, the motherhouse moved to New Orleans East and St. Mary's Academy was moved there in 1965; and

WHEREAS, in 1973, invited by the Bishop, the community sent Sr. Sylvia Thibodeaux to cofound a community in Benin City, Nigeria, Africa; and

WHEREAS, in 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated the ministries in New Orleans and the Sisters were not able to move back into the motherhouse until 2006; however, with the aid of the generosity of people throughout the United States and Federal Emergency Management Agency, all of the institutions have been rebuilt with the exception of one; and

WHEREAS, current ministries of the Sisters include care for the sick and elderly at Lafon Nursing Facility, St. John Berchmans Manor (apartments for low-income senior citizens), Delille Inn (apartments for low-income senior citizens), St. Mary's Academy High

School, St. Mary's Academy Elementary School, St. John Berchmans Early Childhood Development Center, school teachers and administrators in archdiocesan schools, pastoral care in parishes, and prison ministry; and

WHEREAS, the canonization process for Henriette Delille was opened in 1988 by Archbishop Philip Hannan of New Orleans and on March 27, 2010, she was named Venerable by Pope Benedict XVI; and

WHEREAS, there have been eighteen Superior Generals, and Sister Greta Jupiter is the current Superior General; and

WHEREAS, the community has ministered in Louisiana, Texas, California, Oklahoma, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Illinois, Tennessee, Washington, DC, Belize, Central America, and Nigeria, Africa; and

WHEREAS, the charisma of the Sisters of the Holy Family, true to the divine inspiration of its foundress, is to be a prophetic witness in proclaiming the Gospel message of compassion, liberation, healing, and empowerment to all peoples with a preferential love for the poor and the powerless; and

WHEREAS, for over 175 years, the Sisters have continued the mission of educating the youth, caring for the sick and elderly, providing housing for low-income senior citizens, participating in prison ministry, and pastoral care in parishes, especially for the poor and marginalized of society; and

WHEREAS, the Sisters of the Holy Family is the only religious order founded in New Orleans in existence today.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby commend and congratulate the Sisters of the Holy Family on one hundred seventy-five years of service.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to Sister Greta Jupiter, Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE