

*135 Years Celebrating our Legacy Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*  
*Welcome by Sister Kathleen Kluthe, President SSSF*  
*~ Eucharistic Liturgy, April 26, 2009 ~*

Good afternoon and welcome to our Anniversary Celebration of 135 years of service and ministry as an International Congregation.

We are deeply grateful to each of you for joining us today as we celebrate this rich legacy of “responding to the needs of the times” yesterday, today and tomorrow. As we reflect on this legacy, we are grateful for the many gifts that characterize us as School Sisters of St. Francis. These gifts have been passed on to us over the years and we hopefully will pass them on to future generations.

**We are grateful for the gift of being an international congregation.** Our foundresses, three courageous women, Mother Alexia, Mother Alfons, and Sister Clara, left Germany and sailed to America in 1873 to fulfill their dream of founding a world-wide Franciscan Community as an answer to the needs of the times: to help other immigrants and meet the needs of the church.

- ❖ Between 1820 and 1920 over 3 million immigrants entered the United States.
- ❖ By 1907, School Sisters in the US were teaching in 104 schools.
- ❖ In 1895, Mother Alexia went back to Europe and responded to the needs of the times with a wide variety of ministries in Germany, Luxembourg, France, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland and Italy.
- ❖ By 1907, Mother Alexia’s dream brought Sisters to the Caroline Islands in the Pacific.
- ❖ By 1931, Sisters were in China and Honduras.
- ❖ By 1936, we were in India.
- ❖ In 1957, we began ministering in Costa Rica.

Today, we are an International Congregation with 1048 Sisters and 136 Associates with Provinces in North India, South India, Europe, Latin America, and the United States. Today we are proud to have 38 Sisters in temporary vows, 12 novices, 5 postulants, 11 aspirants.

**We are grateful for the gift of being multi-cultural in our membership and in our ministries.** By being sensitive to and ready to learn from the knowledge, attitudes, values, customs and practices of cultures other than our own, we are enriched in so many ways.

We recognize the need to appreciate diversity and to communicate and understand people of different cultures as we spread out across the world. This awareness helps us as School Sisters of St. Francis to reach out to new needs in pastoral outreach, social justice, education, and health care regardless of color, race, age, language or religion. The theme for our General Assembly in 2010, with participation from our 5 Provinces, is: *Be the Franciscan Face of the Gospel in a Multicultural World.*

**We are grateful for a strong tradition in music and art which was a vision and dream of Mother Alfons.** Many Sisters are recognized as distinguished artists, composers, parish musicians, music educators, and leaders in the field of liturgical music. Mother Alfons’ dream of building a chapel of exquisite beauty as a place of prayer and sacred music was realized in 1917 when this chapel was dedicated. Isn’t it grand that we are experiencing this chapel built for prayer and sacred music right now?

**We are grateful for the gift of being attentive to the signs of the times and “responding to the needs of the times”.** The vision of Mother Alexia, Mother Alfons, and Sister Clara rooted our congregation in the promotion of justice, human dignity and outreach to the poor. They were not limited to geographic boundaries or certain ministry areas. With a global vision, they responded to the great needs of their time and reached out to immigrants, orphans, troubled youth, indigenous people, Native Americans, and often the poorest of the poor. As School Sisters, we have a strong commitment to mission and often are recognized for our innovation in education, healing and health care, pastoral ministry, the arts and social justice. May this time of celebrating our 135<sup>th</sup> Anniversary be one of listening deeply to the spirit so that we can project our Foundresses belief into today’s reality: *The needs of the time are the will of God.*

**We are grateful to our Associates** who choose to join us in a common commitment to the Gospel and to the mission of the Church and to you who are with us here today.

**As women of the Church, we are grateful to each of you who partner with us** in so many different and unique ways. Because you unite with us in mission to **Be the Face of the Gospel**, it is possible for us to continue to **Change the Face of the World.**

May the mantra so dear to Mother Alexia: *"Nothing is impossible with God"* lead each of us to discover the dreams we are called yet to realize in our Congregation. Let us invite one another to walk together into our future of the unknown with the same faith and determination of Mother Alexia, Mother Alfons and Sister Clara.