News
Religious Life



Chicago Benedictine sisters pose with their certificate for taking the Refuse to Use pledge, a challenge for Catholic Sisters Week to not use single-use plastic bottles. (Courtesy of Catholic Sisters Week)



by Dan Stockman

View Author Profile
dstockman@ncronline.org

Join the Conversation

March 7, 2023

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

More than 80 Catholic Sisters Week events will be held across the United States and, thanks to the internet, around the world March 8-14 to celebrate Catholic women religious — both their incredible legacy and the transformative work they do today.

This year's 10th annual celebration is all about collaboration.

The biggest example is the 23 congregations of sisters in Illinois and their common message for the week, which begins on International Women's Day. They came up with a challenge: "Refuse to Use," a pledge to not consume beverages from single-use plastic bottles.

They will use the effort not only to reduce the impact of plastic in the waste stream, but to show the intersectionality of racism, migration and climate change. The manufacture of plastic in the United States creates annual greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 116 coal-fired power plants and is projected to create more than all the coal-fired power plants in the country by 2030, Reuters reported. Ninety percent of those emissions are in low-income and minority neighborhoods.

Stacy Spitler, spokesperson for the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and co-chair of the Communicators for Women Religious committee that organizes Catholic Sisters Week, said other congregations have joined the challenge, including the School Sisters of Notre Dame's Atlantic-Midwest Province. There are about 30 Refuse to Use challenges listed on the Catholic Sisters Week events page.

Advertisement

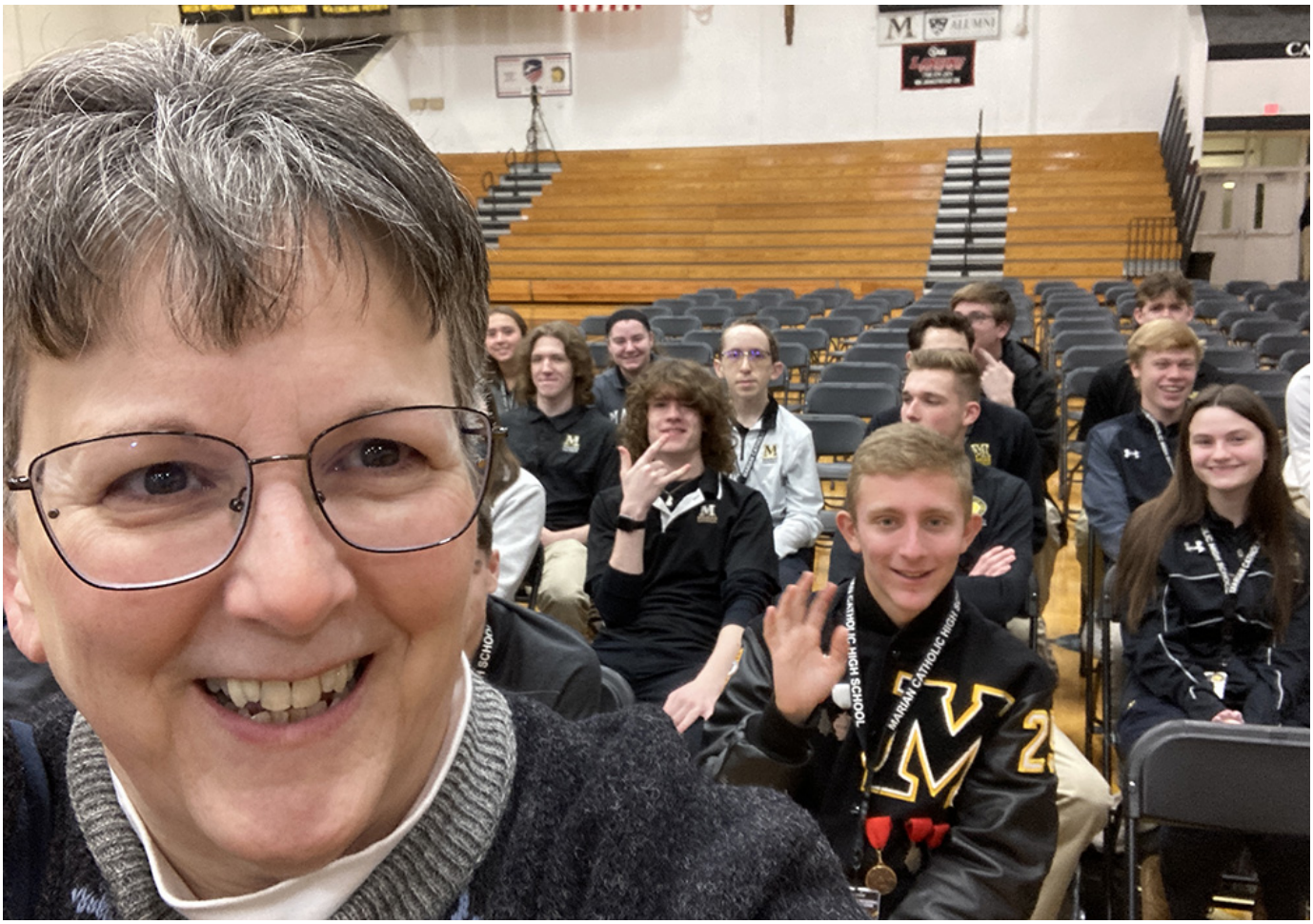
Sr. Beth Murphy of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois, said students at the congregation's three schools also have embraced the challenge, especially Marian Catholic High School in Chicago Heights, where the students' environmental concerns group purchased inexpensive reusable aluminum bottles to sell to students at cost so they don't have to use single-use plastic.

"Trying to help people make those connections [between racism, migration and climate change] is one of the tasks sisters have taken on over the years," Murphy said.

The Ursuline Sisters of Louisville, Kentucky, will host a presentation on that intersectionality on March 12, just one of many events the congregation has planned for Catholic Sisters Week.

Many events are open to people around the world virtually. For example, once a week after lunch, the Springfield Dominicans watch videos about social justice issues. During Catholic Sisters Week, the videos will be about the impact of plastic, and anyone will be able to join the watch party online.

"People say a little education won't make a big difference," Murphy said, "but once you know something, you can't un-know it."



Springfield Dominican Sr. Beth Murphy poses for a selfie with students at the congregation's Marion Catholic High School in Chicago Heights, Illinois, during a recent school celebration of Catholic sisters. (Courtesy of Beth Murphy)

While collaboration is the order of the day, the official theme of the week for 2023 is "Celebrating Traditions, Changing the World," which Spitler said encompasses the need to acknowledge the impact sisters have had over the centuries but also point out the difference they make right now.

"Catholic sisters are a demonstration that hope and change are possible in our world," she said. "[Sisters] are finding their voices, and they're raising those voices."

Murphy said people sometimes forget the impact sisters have had globally.

"I love [Catholic Sisters Week]," she said. "It's a boost for our sisters, and it gives people an opportunity to remember sisters who have made differences in their lives."

The four congregations in the Diocese of Toledo, Ohio, united to plan events surrounding the U.S. bishops' Eucharistic Revival. The events are March 8, 9, 10 and 13, with a different congregation hosting each one.

The Religious Sisters of Charity will host six online events celebrating their charism, each featuring a different presentation and streamed from locations including Malawi, Ireland, Zambia, the United States and Nigeria.

Other events that congregations have planned include food drives, a presentation on environmental policy in Missouri, and an effort to fund the local branch of a national program called Laundry Love that helps low-income people pay for laundry services.