News
Religious Life



Sisters, Servants of Mary Immaculate of the Immaculate Conception Province in the U.S. are seen at a Nov. 24 Divine Liturgy at the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Philadelphia. Following the liturgy, Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia presented the 2023 Metropolitan Service Award to the sisters, and to the Jesus, Lover of Humanity Province of the Sisters of the Order of St. Basil the Great and the Missionary Sisters of the Mother of God. (OSV News/Archeparchy of Philadelphia/Halyna Vasylytsia)

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Three orders of women religious were honored for their long ministry of education, pastoral outreach and witness to the Gospel.

Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia conferred the 2023 Metropolitan Service Award on the Jesus, Lover of Humanity Province of the Order of St. Basil the Great; the Missionary Sisters of the Mother of God; and the Sisters, Servants of Mary Immaculate of the Immaculate Conception Province in the U.S.

Gudziak also bestowed the title of "archpriest" on Fr. Roman Dubitsky and Fr. John Seniw of the Archeparchy of Philadelphia.

Joining the archbishop at the Nov. 24 presentation and Divine Liturgy — which was celebrated in the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Philadelphia — were Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the U.S.; Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations; Bishop Paul Chomnycky of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Stamford, Connecticut; and Bishop Hlib Lonchyna, apostolic administrator of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of St. Volodymyr the Great in Paris.

Gudziak said the women religious and the newly named archpriests had "opened (their) hearts" to the "call for joy."

"You have served, you have been present, you have prayed and by your commitment to chastity, to obedience to the church … you have given us an eschatological sign," said the archbishop in his homily.

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As consecrated religious, the sisters and priests modeled the spiritual focus demanded by both the present moment and eternity — namely, an attention to the task at hand, with heaven always in sight, said Gudziak.

"One thing that is important to remember is that we are all called to be with God," he said. "This journey here is the beginning of the kingdom. … Nothing in this world is somehow, in some way insignificant. But we have a goal. It is when we see that goal there that we make this life worth living."

Gudziak highlighted how the sisters "live Eucharistically" and sacrificially, saying that "it is only the broken bread that can feed," as Christ does when offering himself in the Eucharist.

The archbishop commended the three orders of women religious for their "beautiful vocation" that over the previous century had impacted "tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands" in schools, in orphanages and in preparation for the sacraments.

The Basilian Sisters — part of the oldest monastic order in the world, and tracing their origins to the fourth century in Asia Minor — arrived in Philadelphia from Ukraine in 1911 to serve the needs of Ukrainian immigrants. The sisters cared for orphans and established a Ukrainian Catholic parochial school system, later opening the former St. Basil Academy and what is now Manor College, both located in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania. Founded by St. Basil the Great and his sister, St. Macrina, the order is present in Ukraine, the U.S., Argentina, Croatia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

The Sisters, Servants of Mary Immaculate, founded in 1892 in Ukraine by Blessed Josaphata Hordashevska, arrived in the U.S. in 1935 and formally established the Immaculate Conception Province in 1959. As the first active women's congregation in the Ukrainian Catholic Church, their ministry has served children, clergy and the elderly. Currently, the congregation has almost 700 sisters worldwide, with provinces in Brazil, Canada, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and the U.S., and missions in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, France, Germany and Kazakhstan. The U.S. province's annual Marian pilgrimage in Sloatsburg, New York, has drawn faithful for some five decades.

The Missionary Sisters of the Mother of God were founded in 1944 by Metropolitan Ambrose Senyshyn, then-auxiliary bishop of the Archeparchy of Philadelphia. The motherhouse, ultimately sold in 2014, was located in Stamford, Connecticut, serving as a school and as a primary mission of the sisters for several years. Currently, the remaining sisters dedicate themselves to prayer and to the care of the archeparchy's Treasury of Faith Museum, located within the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and housing relics and historical artifacts of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the U.S.



Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, center back, poses with other clergy and women religious in a group shot after he presented the 2023 Metropolitan Service Award to the Sisters, Servants of Mary Immaculate of the Immaculate Conception Province in the U.S.; the Jesus, Lover of Humanity Province of the Sisters of the Order of St. Basil the Great; and the Missionary Sisters of the Mother of God following a Nov. 24 Divine Liturgy at the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Philadelphia. (OSV News/Archeparchy of Philadelphia/Halyna Vasylytsia)

Prior to the screening of three short documentaries about the sisters following the liturgy, Basilian Sr. Monica Lesnick told OSV News that receiving the Metropolitan Service Award prompted memories of past generations.

"Their sacrifices, their hard work — that's what really paved the way for all of us," she said.

Fellow Basilian Sr. Ann Laszok told OSV News that the legacy of her order's province can be found in "a lot of children of all ages" who have been educated by the sisters "from preschool to college."

She also noted that a number of current clergy — including Gudziak and Lonchyna — were taught by Basilian Sisters.

Yet while the sisters may never know how many lives they have touched, Lesnick said, "whatever you do is for (God's) glory, and you really don't look for anything after that."

Mother Maria Kelly of the Missionary Sisters of the Mother of God agreed.

Addressing those gathered for the reception, a visibly moved Kelly said she and her fellow sisters — while grateful for the award — do not look for accolades, but "for the kingdom."