News

Catholic Sisters Week logo (Courtesy of Catholic Sisters Week)



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Every year in the United States, Catholic Sisters Week tries to celebrate the amazing story of women religious. But this year's observance — the 12th — will focus on telling those stories rather than on events to commemorate them.

United under the hashtag #LikeaCatholicSister, the website currently contains a few stories as previews, but launches on March 8, the first day of Catholic Sisters Week, when it will have more than 100 stories.

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Mikaela VanMoorleghem, who is one of those coordinating this year's effort for Communicators for Women Religious, said March 4 she had 60 stories ready to publish with another 60 or 70 in process.

"People are telling the most amazing stories," said VanMoorleghem, who is the director of communications and marketing for the Notre Dame Sisters in Omaha, Nebraska. "We're trying to bring all these powerful stories to the forefront."

As is often the case, stereotypes have to be challenged.

"Some people still think they're just these little old nuns in habits that just kneel and pray. But they're also breaking barriers, leading institutions and working for social justice," VanMoorleghem said. "Some people are struggling right now and they're looking for sources of hope. These stories are a reminder that sisters are out there doing good."

One of the stories is that of Notre Dame Sr. Mother Fabiola Ditek, who, along with several of her Czechoslovakian sisters, were sent to Nazi concentration camps during World War II. Ditek somehow survived, but at least three others did not. After the war, the sisters then had to endure decades of Communist oppression.

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>
> — Mikaela VanMoorleghem
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If it weren't for things such as Catholic Sisters Week, these stories may never be known.

"For the most part, it's difficult to persuade the sisters to talk about what happened during the war and during the years of the Communist government," the story says. "The sisters will tell you that there's nothing remarkable or heroic to talk about; they only did what was necessary, and what they were supposed to do."

The Ursuline Sisters of Louisville are telling the story of their foundress St. Angela Merici in a unique way: They're using an interactive, digital map to bring to life Merici's pilgrimage to Rome. This year is the 500th anniversary of that journey, and the sisters say the project aligns perfectly with Pope Francis' Jubilee Year theme of "Pilgrims of Hope."

"We wanted to honor Catholic Sisters Week in a unique way that connects our spiritual heritage with modern technology in a virtual pilgrimage," said Ursuline Sisters of Louisville director of communications Kathy Williams.

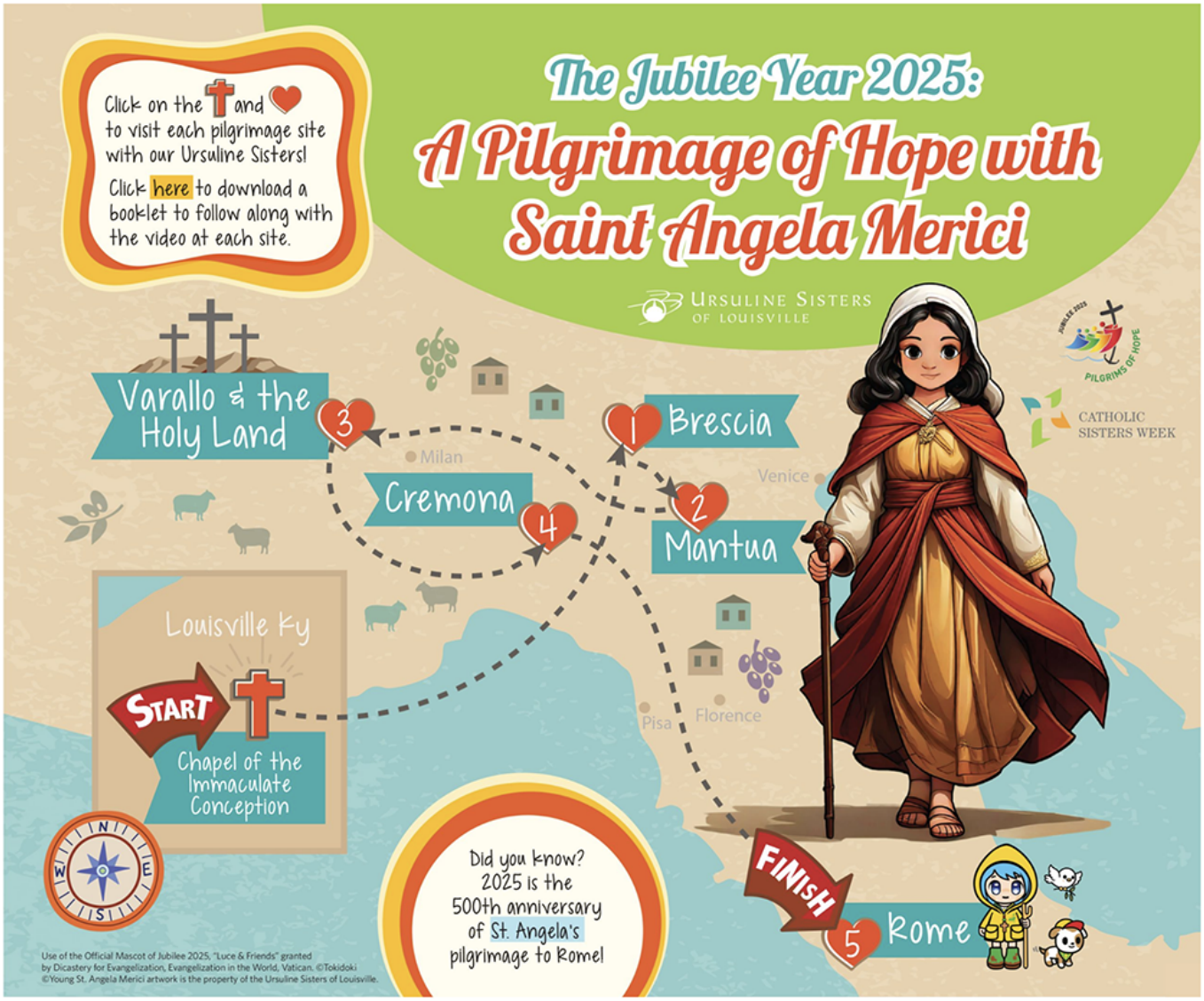
The virtual pilgrimage begins at the Ursuline Motherhouse in Louisville, Kentucky, then takes users to Brescia, where Merici formed the Company of St. Ursula, a secular institute that would eventually become a religious congregation. At each location on the digital pilgrimage, users find videos narrated by Ursuline sisters about Merici's experiences in each city she visited.

When Merici reaches Rome, she is joined by Luce, the official Jubilee mascot.

"I believe it is a gift for us, as followers of Angela, that the 2025 Jubilee pilgrimage to Rome is also the 500th anniversary of St. Angela's pilgrimage to Rome and the 490th anniversary of the founding of the Company of St. Ursula," said Ursuline Sisters of Louisville president Sr. Jean Anne Zappa.

"Despite losing her sight during her pilgrimage to the Holy Land* for the Jubilee year, Angela's deep trust in God enabled her to continue her journey. She learned to let go of expectations and see with her heart and the eyes of faith and hope, perceiving what God was revealing to her."

**This quote has been updated from an earlier version.*



The Ursuline Sisters of Louisville created an interactive, digital map to bring to life the pilgrimage their foundress St. Angela Merici made to Rome 500 years ago. (GSR screenshot/Courtesy of Ursuline Sisters of Louisville)