

Wreaths Placed to Honor

Editor's Note: The following was submitted by Joseph B. Sankovich, Director for Associated Catholic Cemeteries of Seattle and taken from THE PROGRESS with permission.

More than 1,000 women Religious are buried in the Archdiocese of Seattle; some were still in their teens when they died, others were well into their 90s. All of them dedicated their lives to serving God and serving others.

The Associated Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese honored those women Aug. 15—the Feast of the Assumption—by placing wreaths at the cemeteries where they are buried or memorialized.

The wreaths (at Calvary and Holyhood in Seattle; Calvary in Tacoma; St. Francis Xavier Parish Cemetery, Toledo; Benedictine Community Cemetery, Olympia; Bayview, Bellingham; and St. James Acres in Vancouver) had a card on them commemorating "all religious women who have served the church of Western Washington." The cards say that the sisters buried in the archdiocese "proclaimed by their lives the primacy of the love of God."

Associated Catholic Cemeteries had asked parishes to remember the sisters in the prayers of the faithful at Masses on the feast day.

Joe Sankovich, Director of the Catholic Cemeteries, said Aug. 15 was chosen as the day to honor the sisters because Mary's assumption into heaven "was the Lord's provision to her for her responding so totally and trustfully to what the Lord called her to be."

Many communities of women Religious model their lives on Mary's "response to the Lord's call," he added.

While acknowledging the role la-

Photo Caption: Wreaths placed near the graves of sisters buried in the archdiocese on the Feast of the Assumption.



ity have in ministry in the church, Joe Sankovich said it is a responsibility of Catholic cemeteries to remind the church community of its history. Much of that history, particularly the early days of Catholicism in the Northwest, was influenced by "pioneering" sisters.

The first sister to be buried in the archdiocese was Providence Sister Mary John Baptist Crate. She was buried at St. James, Vancouver, in 1864 at the age of 19. Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart, the Providence superior who built many schools and hospitals in the Northwest in the late 1800s, is also buried at St. James.

Some of them were barely out of childhood but they carved the life of the archdiocese out of the wilderness.

Joe added that "we need to be reminded from time to time of the tremendous debt of gratitude that we owe to those . . . who have done so much to nurture the gift of faith each of us has."

In addition to being Catholic burial grounds and reminders of church history, Catholic cemeteries have a sacramental nature, Joe said. "The deeper reality is that here is a sign of a believing community." Being buried together speaks of shared values,

he said: "the value of what human life is about; the individual dignity of the baptized; the belief system about death and resurrection, life and life after death."

It is particularly appropriate, he feels, to take time on the Feast of the Assumption to give thanks for and celebrate the service of women who, "in the best way they knew how, gifted the community with their lives."

The sisters buried in the archdiocese were members of the Sisters of Providence, Edmonds Dominicans, Tacoma Dominicans, Sisters of St. Francis of Penance, Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, Discalced Carmelites, Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Religious of the Sacred Heart, Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Good Shepherd Sisters, Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, Benedictine Sisters and Sisters of the Visitation.

Deceased priests of the archdiocese were similarly recognized on Holy Thursday. (See July 1986 issue of the CATHOLIC CEMETERY.) Joe hopes that the commemoration will be an annual event and will expand. Wreaths will be placed near the graves of sisters buried in the archdiocese on the Feast of the Assumption.