

## other views

## Sisters shaped nation in profound ways

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Thirty-five years ago next month, I began a journey that took me places I never dreamed I would go and asked of me things I never thought I could do. Becoming a Catholic sister was not a popular life choice at the time, but the choice has made all the difference in the life I have lived and the satisfaction I have gained from it.

Thousands of women in this country have taken "the road less traveled" and in the process have shaped this nation in profound ways. This legacy is highlighted in "Women & Spirit," a historical exhibit about women religious that opened Friday at the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium.

Co-sponsored by the museum and Clarke University, it is a celebratory look at the valiant and spirited women who have had an amazing impact on our country, as well as our city, from its earliest days. (A special thanks to Conlon Construction Co., the major local sponsor of the exhibit.)

Throughout history, the number of women religious has ebbed and flowed, rising in the times when the world needed them the most. Take Mary Frances Clarke and her compatriots. In 1843, these faith-filled women (the very first Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary) worked with persistence to meet the needs of the day. They opened a school in Dubuque that sought to provide a quality education to the children of pioneers of all faiths.

This week, now 168 years later,

we celebrate National Catholic Colleges Week having evolved into Clarke University. In doing so, I am reminded that Clarke, like many other institutions of higher education, would not be in existence today if not for the work of sisters.

Education is just one example of the far-reaching impact of women religious locally. In Dubuque's past, sisters also have responded to fill societal needs for health care and social services — having either started or supported many of these services that today are robust offerings in our community.

But the work of the sisters is not only a part of history. Today, it remains equally important and relevant. While you would likely not immediately recognize a sister walking down the street (most of us no longer wear habits), you certainly see our

work all around you. We continue to be missionaries, educators, nurses and activists.

We serve those living on the margins of our society. An example of this can be seen in the effort of six area congregations to launch Opening Doors, which operates Maria House and Teresa Shelter. It also was evident in the way sisters reached out to immigrants following the Postville raid. The list of our contributions goes on and on. In new roles, women religious also are lawyers, artists and even CEOs.

In all that we do, Catholic sisters bring a much-needed faith dimension to the world we live in. We are driven by the love of Jesus Christ to help others, to fight against injustice and make a difference. We encourage those with whom we labor to join us in contributing positively to our global society.

It is often said that history repeats itself and in the case of women religious, I believe that is true. As long as the world has needs, sisters will be there to meet them with the same embracing spirit they always have. Many thanks to those who support and join us in our work for the Kingdom.

*Burrows, a Sister of Charity of Cincinnati, became the 15th president of Clarke University in 2006. She has a broad background in higher education that combines practical and theoretical expertise with a rich understanding of the Catholic tradition. She holds a Ph.D. in higher education from The Ohio State University, a Master of Arts in theology from the Graduate Theological Union and Jesuit School of Theology, and a Bachelor of Science in graphic design from the University of Maryland, College Park.*