

THAT ALL MAY BE ONE

A documentary about the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet

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Press Releases:

CSUN Administrator Makes Nun Documentary

Karen Kearns, associate dean of Cal State University Northridge's Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication, recently completed a documentary film about the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and the renovation of their motherhouse in St. Louis. Inspiration for the film came after Kearns' 2000 trip to her native St. Louis, where she visited her cousin, Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet Joan Lampton.

Sister Lampton told Kearns of the religious community's decision to go ahead with a monumental renovation of its motherhouse built in 1840. Kearns realized the ambitious revitalization project, undertaken in a time of aging religious communities, would make a fascinating film. The 55-minute documentary, titled "That All May Be One," focuses on the restoration of the sisters' house, now used as a retreat and conference center shared with the lay community.

While the documentary also deals with the death of six of the nuns during its five years in production, it has an uplifting message of hope, since "it looks at how the work of these sisters goes on even as their numbers dwindle," said Kearns. The film has recently been screened at CSUN and Mount St. Mary's College and will be entered in several film festival competitions.

—*Tidings Online News - Friday, February 1, 2008, San Fernando Region News*

Making a Documentary-A Tale of Sacrifice, Sweat, Tears

CAMC Associate Dean's Six-Year Effort Produces 'That All May Be One,' Bound for Festivals

Anyone who has made a documentary and lived to tell the tale will describe a journey filled with sacrifice, sweat and tears. Karen Kearns, associate dean of the Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication, has joined the throng of independent souls who have made the trip and emerged with a new understanding of the art of filmmaking.

"That All May Be One," Kearns' beautifully realized documentary about the indomitable spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, was previewed at Cal State Northridge in October, and shortly after was screened at Mount St. Mary's College.

The documentary evolved after Kearns' 2000 visit to her native St. Louis. Sister Joan Lampton, Kearns' cousin and a leadership figure among the St. Joseph sisters, told the CSUN administrator of her order's decision to undertake the monumental renovation of its mother house overlooking the Mississippi, built in 1840 in a poor south St. Louis neighborhood.

Back in California, Kearns read a newspaper account of disappearing orders of Catholic sisters in the U.S. It hit her that she had a story to tell, about an order of sisters persisting at a time when others are in decline.

"In a way," Kearns said, "it was

like chronicling an endangered species. After hundreds of years, this system of sisters teaching sisters, being nurses and ministering to others is disappearing."

But though her 55-minute film deals with the death of a way of life—six of the nuns of St. Joseph died during the 2001–06 production of the documentary—it is also about hope. "It looks at how the work of these sisters goes on even as their numbers dwindle," Kearns said.

Founded in October 1650 in France, the order in 1836 sent six sisters to begin religious work in a log cabin in Carondelet, a poor Creole community of St. Louis, Mo. Under Sister Celestine Pommerel, their numbers grew to about 150 throughout the U.S. and Canada. In St. Louis, they operate one of the country's oldest schools for the deaf, a nursing home for nuns and lay people, and an all-girls high school.

Their decision to renovate rather than raze or abandon the mother house represents the nuns' respect for mission rooted in their ruling dictum "That All May Be One," taken from St. John's Gospel. The documentary observes in loving detail their restoration of the structure, now used as a retreat and conference center shared with the lay community. The camera lingers on intricate oak and walnut floors and



The mother house of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet in St. Louis, Mo.

gorgeous paneling, and on a secret floor trap door which may have been a hiding place on the Underground Railroad.

But Kearns' focus remained on the nuns themselves. One sister described her pre-Vatican II habit as "a wall" she had happily doffed, while for another it was a "visible sign" that protected her. Yet another calmly pronounced that "we are alive, we are well, we are still instigators of grace...still vital members of this neighborhood called the world." One aging, graceful sister is shown

ministering to the shut-in. "This is where the cry of the poor takes place," her voice-over narrates. "This is where we live."

To get "That All May Be One" made, Kearns "wrote it, directed it, narrated it, mixed the sound and wrote the checks," though some funding came from the Cinema and Television Arts Department. "We mixed all the sound right in my kitchen," recalled the filmmaker. "A friend brought his Mac laptop and some huge hard drives. Within eight hours, we had mixed and corrected all of it."

Some important early help came from CSUN colleagues such as music professor Elizabeth Sellers, who composed deeply felt tracks in response to Kearns' request for themes that were "lyrical and hopeful, but in a minor key" to suit the film's blend of light and dark.

CSUN art professor Magdy Rizk, music professor Katherine Ramos Baker and the CSUN Women's Choral, and Plaza del Sol Performance Hall managing director Kathy Anthony also were part of Kearns' team.

The next step for "That All May Be One" is its entry into the competitive round of film festivals. "It took nearly six years," Kearns said, "but holy cow, it's finished!" ■