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Celebrating the 200th birthday of Loretto

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NCR Today

The jubilation is palpable here at the Loretto Motherhouse in Kentucky. Today is the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of Loretto, now the Loretto Community. On this day in 1812 on the Kentucky frontier, three young women who were educating poor children began a formal novitiate and their lives as "Friends of Mary at the Foot of the Cross." They were: Mary Rhodes, Ann Havern and Christina Stuart. They were assisted by a Belgian priest named Charles Nerinckx. Later, they took the name "Sisters of Loretto at the Foot of the Cross."

Today, the Loretto Community is made up of about equal numbers of vowed members and co-members who commit themselves to the spirit and mission of the community. Our volunteer program offers short-term opportunities for ministry. Our members and special friends can be found across the United States and on several continents. We have "sister communities" in Guatemala, Ghana and West Africa, and Sisters of Loretto in Pakistan. We have co-members who live in Europe and Latin America.

Our emphasis today is working for justice and peace in our world. As our guiding document, *I Am the Way*, says: "Just as frontier living shaped the lives of our early sisters, so a global society shapes ours." In that spirit, today we will have a panel on the *Future of Loretto* with talks about global economics as it affects the most vulnerable, evolutionary spirituality and climate change. That's Loretto!

And that Vatican ultimatum? It sits in the background like a storm cloud on the horizon. There has been plenty of venting about it in private conversations, and today, some of us will get together for a larger informal sharing of views. But it won't stop our celebration, and it won't stop Loretto! Moving in reverse and bowing to patriarchy is not our style. Our charism is that of the pioneer and the frontier. Expect that to continue as we look to our next 100 years.

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