

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

April 25, 2012 at 3:47pm

200 years of Loretto are pure gold

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NCR Today

Two hundred years ago this morning, April 25, 1812, three young women left their small log cabin in central Kentucky, walked up a steep hill to St. Charles Church and "received the veil." The words are from author of "Annals of a Century," Anna C. Minogue. But it is doubtful the young novices wore veils or clothes different than their ordinary dresses. They had no money for new clothes.

Today, Loretto celebrates its 200th birthday. We've written some books, held awards ceremonies and speaking tours, planted 15,000 trees, opened our heritage center and put up three billboards about immigration, inviting all to welcome the stranger.

Several hundred of us are gathered at our Motherhouse, a couple of miles from that original Little Loretto. It is quite wonderful to be together, fathoming the mystery of vocation. Loretto suffered a lot of fires. Walking through the cemetery, we see that many of our sisters died very young. Yet we sent sisters across the plains to Santa Fe, across the ocean to China, and then we traveled more and more, always coming back with new understandings and bigger visions.

This morning at breakfast, someone was telling how the young men of 1815 complained that the young girls were being stolen from them by the priests. The homilist quelled dissent by thanking the men for their generosity to the church. A hundred years later, the local Kentucky ordinary was complaining that the sisters were not obedient to him, sending sisters off to Missouri, New Mexico and Texas. Our Superior General, Mother Praxides, went to the Vatican to make us a canonical congregation. Now, today, the Vatican seems not to be happy with us.

What will become of us? Two hundred years seems long, but it is a mere flash in the pan. A flash in the pan, but pure gold.

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