Kodiak Losing Last of the Grey Nuns After 65 Years

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Erik Wander/KMXT

The last two remaining Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart will leave Kodiak next month, ending 65 years of service in the community. Though the faces have changed over the years, and the ministry has shifted in focus, the Grey Nuns have played an important role for many members of the community. KMXT's Erik Wander has more.

The Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart have been a fixture in Kodiak since 1944, when the first group of nuns arrived to do hospital work. Sarah Bass is a parishioner and volunteer at Saint Mary's Church. She is organizing a farewell celebration for the remaining two Grey Nuns, who are preparing to leave Kodiak after more than eight years of service here.

-- (Bass 1 40 sec. "The Grey Nuns of the ... have always been in the past.")

Dr. Bob Johnson is currently writing a book about his father, based on diary entries and letters to family members. He said the Grey Nuns figure prominently in the book, because his father, the town doctor in Kodiak at the time, was instrumental in bringing them here. Johnson said the nuns came in response to a need at the hospital, which was built in 1940.

-- (Johnson 1 45 sec. "The state didn't fund it ... they decided they'd do it.")

Sister Barbara Harrington and Sister Carol Bartol, the last two Grey Nuns to remain in Kodiak, arrived in January, 2001. Sister Barbara said they originally came to minister to the immigrant community, helping people deal with immigration status issues, learn English and earn GEDs. She said that has continued even as the focus of their work has changed over time.

-- (Harrington
1 45 sec. "At the time, there was ... used by the immigrant population.")

Sister Barbara said neither she nor Sister Carol knew much about Kodiak prior to their arrival, but that they've both grown to love the community and have found it to be an enriching experience. She explained why they are to be the last of the Grey Nuns to serve in Kodiak.

-- (Harrington
2 33 sec. "Most religious communities ... I think that time has come.")

Johnson said the Grey Nuns will be remembered for the work they've done and missed by longtime members of the community.

-- (Johnson
2 44 sec. "They made the hospital ... really, really selfless women.")

Both now in their 70s, Sisters Barbara and Carol will return to their mother house in Pennsylvania. Sister Barbara said they will not seek another ministry, especially at their age, unless called upon to do so. Saint Mary's Church invites the community to a potluck dinner on Saturday at 6 p.m. in the Saint Mary's gym in celebration and farewell of the Grey Nuns.

I'm Erik Wander.

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