



Gala Celebration Shines the Light on 150 Years of Ministry

Last Saturday, December 7, the International Leadership Team and Office of Mission Advancement hosted our congregation's first gala fundraiser at Saint Kate – The Arts Hotel in downtown Milwaukee.

The evening's theme was "Shining the Light and Joy" and it was truly a joyful night in which more than 200 of our sisters' benefactors, supporters, and friends came together to honor the community's 150 years of worldwide mission, and to raise funds for our many ministries in the United States and around the world. Associated Bank Private Wealth was the presenting sponsor for this first-of-its-kind gathering.

"We are so grateful to everyone who worked so hard with Holly Danen in preparing, planning, and presenting the gala, and to everyone who attended," said Amanda Ferguson, Mission Advancement Director. "Our Gala Committee was an invaluable resource in making the gathering a success, and we are so pleased with how the event went."

"It was incredible to see the joy on so many faces at the gala!" Holly said. "It truly was a wonderful event, and we deeply appreciate all our sponsors and generous donors that made the evening possible."

The evening began with a lively cocktail reception, where guests mingled and placed bids on an array of silent auction items. This portion of the night was accompanied by the elegant piano music of Dr. Aaron Mathews, the music director at St. Charles Parish and School in Hartland, Wisconsin. Excited guests then proceeded to the ballroom, where they were greeted by beautiful harp music performed by Sister Patty Gallagher, OP, a member of the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa.



Sister Deb Fumagalli shared a welcome message, and the International Leadership Team offered an opening prayer. This was followed by a surprise announcement from Jim Sajdak, the president and CEO of Stan's Shoes and a member of the Gala Committee. Jim kindly reached out to his connections at the Vatican and was able to present Sister Deb and the team with a beautifully framed Apostolic Blessing from Pope Francis, congratulating the congregation on 150 years of ministry.



The carefully curated menu offered delights for every palate, starting with a fresh Saint Kate Salad. The choice of dinner entrees included a braised beef short rib bourguignon, grilled semi boneless chicken breast, and a maple-glazed sweet

potato option for vegans. Dessert was a delicious and sweet chocolate crunch mousse cake.

The pace of the evening switched into high gear as guests put down their forks and picked up their auction paddles. The live auction was led by the talented, award-winning emcee and auctioneer Yve Rojas, whose expertise as a benefit auctioneer dramatically boosted the energy and spirit of the auction. Tens of thousands of dollars were raised for items that included a stylish bar cart ensemble; a gourmet dinner with the sisters, prepared by Chef Nicholas Burki and his team; a Chicago getaway package; an artsy Milwaukee weekend package featuring ballet tickets; several pieces of artwork by renowned artist Sister Helena Steffensmeier; and a luxury Black Forest vacation in Germany.

The lights were turned down for the premiere of a specially prepared video that featured sisters in leadership from all our provinces and regions, highlighting our global ministries and the care of our retired sisters. [You can watch the video online now.](#) There were many familiar faces on the screen because the video company filmed our sisters during this fall's Oktoberfest fundraiser in the St. Joseph Center garden.

When the video concluded, Yve encouraged guests to support the work of our congregation with financial gifts, and the outpouring of generosity was inspiring.

The evening's entertainment included a performance by Adrian Dominican Sister Nancy Murray, the sister of actor Bill Murray and a gifted actress in her own right. Sister Nancy shared a portrayal of the life of the Franciscan "Saint Kate" (St. Catherine of Bologna) and recounted the inspiring journey of our own foundresses 150 years ago.





The evening concluded with an energetic musical performance by Mariachi Monarcas de Milwaukee. Mariachi Monarcas are a vibrant ensemble dedicated to preserving and celebrating the rich cultural heritage of Mexican Mariachi music. Their lively and heartfelt performance had guests dancing, clapping, and tapping their feet until the close of the evening!

Donations continue to arrive in response to last Saturday's event, and Amanda said the Mission Advancement team will be sharing the fundraising results in the near future. We invite you to [view a collection of photos](#) taken throughout the evening that show some of the highlights and memorable moments from this very special event.

"We are so grateful and touched by the spirit of generosity we experienced last Saturday," Amanda said. "The funds that were raised during this remarkable event will contribute significantly to our worldwide missions and the care of our sisters in retirement."