

Hays School Principal Named Woman of Year

Sister Mary Giswalda Kramer, principal of St. Paul's Mission High School, Hays, has been named 1973 Woman of the Year by the Havre Business and Professional Women's Club.

Sister Giswalda will be honored by her friends and colleagues at a no-host dinner at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 8, in the Student Union food center on the NMC campus. Reservations may be made by writing to Mrs. Pauline Welch, Box 351, Havre, or by calling Mrs. Arlene Campbell at 265-6552 on March 5, Monday. Cost of the no-host dinner is \$3.00 per person.

A member of the Order of Saint Francis, Sister Giswalda has also taught and served as principal in the Mission Elementary School prior to becoming high school principal.

Honors are bestowed upon her not only as an extraordinary teacher, but as an extraordinary servant to all people of a remotely located mission at the foot of the Little Rockies southwest of Malta and northeast of Lewistown.

The mission was founded in 1887 during the roaring gold mining days of the Alabama and Ruby Gulch mines by Father Hugo Eberschweiler, a Jesuit who set about his task in a true DeSmet tradition. The land was set aside on the Fort Belknap Reservation by the old Gros Ventres chiefs so that the Blackrobes could come and teach Christianity to the Indian children.

Sister Giswalda came to St. Paul's Mission in 1936 just two weeks after the Little Rockies forest fire, and she recalls that the air was still hazy with smoke when she arrived. The school sisters of Saint Francis were assigned to take over the eight-grade boarding school formerly run by the Ursuline Sisters who were reassigned to another post when the school house was destroyed by the forest fire. By 1941 it was changed over to a 12-grade day school and through the efforts of Sister Giswalda it had become the only reservation school at that time



SISTER GISWALDA

people she served. When Sister Giswalda accepted her assignment to St. Paul's mission, she dedicated her life to the people she admired since childhood and vowed to help make up for the wrongs which the Indians suffered generally throughout the American Westward movement and particularly during its last thrust.

Her father was intensely interested in the Indian people and had great admiration for them. His yearly vacation was spent in Shawano, Wisconsin, to be with

his Indian friends and Sister Giswalda was his perennial companion. Perhaps it was her father who filled her with a deep and abiding inspiration to become a missionary among the Indians.

Sister Giswalda believes that growth is usually imperceptible to those who live with it, but after 36 years of hard work, she can point to tremendous growth and change which has taken place not only at the mission schools,

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walda it had become the only reservation school at that time to receive accreditation from the state of Montana. The first high school class graduated in 1941.

Sister Giswalda was born to Louis and Kathryn (Held) Kramer in Slinger, Wisconsin, where she and her four sisters and one brother grew up and graduated from high school. She was an active person in student affairs and showed unusual leadership qualities even in her early years as she participated in sports, music, art and drama. Sister Giswalda went on to earn her Bachelor of Philosophy degree from Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska; Master of Education degree from University of Montana, Missoula, and did post-graduate studies at Marquette University, DePaul University, Montana State University, as well as additional studies at Eastern Montana College, and Northern Montana College.

Prior to her coming to Montana she held the positions of teacher and principal at St. Catherine Elementary School, Milwaukee; and teacher and principal at St. Nicholas Elementary School, Chicago.

In 1959 she was named Journalism Advisor of the Year and was awarded the Golden Key, and her student publications at Mission High received awards on numerous occasions. She is listed in the "Personalities of the West and Midwest." Sister Giswalda has been appointed to serve on an Advisory Council on Education for the Disadvantaged by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. She is a member of the North American Indian Alliance and also of the National Council of English Teachers.

Her hobbies include cooking, sewing, baking, and writing prose and poetry. She recently published a book of poems, "Toward a Better World, (Bits of Inspiration)," in commemoration of her Golden Jubilee which she celebrated in August 1972 to mark 50 years of service in the order.

The Franciscan nun is well-known for her indomitable courage and resourcefulness under what seemed, and many times were, hopeless situations and for her true dedication to the

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but to the people she has taught and helped during the span of two generations. She notes that housing has been improved on the reservations, and she believes this is the foundation of all improvements. This theory is made plausible as one sees the mission school's Little House of Loretto, a project undertaken by Sister Giswalda which is so unique that it is probably the only one of its kind in Montana and is just one example of her innovative efforts which ultimately paid off in making life better for her people.

Through the House of Loretto which is a five-room house where crafts students obtain first-hand experience in home management, meal preparation, housekeeping, and home arts and crafts, she put into practice effective teaching. The house is a self-sustaining venture financed by student projects such as selling baked goods, quilts, rugs, and the mission school specialty, cranberry-orange relish. Students have also

earned money for the little house through their participation in the Ft. Belknap Midwinter Fairs. Furniture and furnishings have gradually been obtained from these sources of funds.

In the words of her colleagues who has worked through the decades with Sister Giswalda, these comments are made, "Their (Indian people's) self-image has improved to the extent where they can hold their own with any non-Indian. They are able to carry on their own civic affairs with little or no help from non-Indians."

In 1967 Sister Giswalda herself asserted, "Our people are fully 50 years ahead of some Montana Reservations," as English was adopted as common language for the three tribes who inhabit the Ft. Belknap Reservation.

Perhaps the greatest joy which comes to Sister Giswalda as fruits of her labors is the loyalty of the alumni of Mission High. They exemplify their love for Mission High not only by their service and gifts, but by

their concern and care for their neighbors as she had painstakingly instilled in them through Christian living and doing rather than by Christian preaching alone. Such activities as the annual fifth grade project of making Christmas boxes for the aged, the infirm, the orphaned, and the needy has contributed greatly toward producing responsible adults who really care about their fellow men.

It always thrills sister to see her former students come back and report to her that they are happy and things are going reasonably well with them. She is quoted, "At first the sisters had to do everything. Now our alumni can take over lots of jobs. Like being Santa Claus for the Christmas party. They are very faithful about coming back. Parents bring their babies back to St. Paul's to be baptized. It makes us very happy when a graduate boy marries a graduate girl; then they can both start even toward making a good marriage and a good home."

Not too long ago Sister Giswalda was encouraged to take a

position commanding a salary commensurate with her abilities in administration and in her speciality, but she declined. It was the wish to the Gros Ventres when she was adopted into their tribe in 1951 that she live a long life and remain with them until death. They named her Pipe Woman, and the name is abundantly clear that she is loved and entrusted with all that is traditionally sacred and treasured by the people who adopted her, for it was Pipe Woman who encouraged the tribe to keep their culture and their identity as a proud people when their fragile but precious culture was doomed for extinction.