

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS

This playlet centers on the Sisters in the ministry of education in Beaver Dam.

1862 – 1950 (The first one hundred years)

On an easel: A large picture of a nun and the dates

Before the play begins, hand out names of women who entered religious life from the three parishes, to women in the audience and tell them to come to the front of the stage when the name on their poster is called. (During the music for "StandingShoulders") Hold up poster so audience can see the names.

Give one hand held mic to Narrator, the other hand held mic to Student 1 who can pass it to Student 2 as the narration proceeds.

Spot lights in the back of the gym should light up speakers as they speak.

Spot light on Narrator on stage right

Narrator Fr. Mike: The nineteenth century found many Irish, Polish and Germans immigrating to America. And with these families came the Sisters who dedicated their lives to teaching the children, opening hospitals and orphanages.

Student 1: These pioneer Sisters traveled on horseback, in wagons and stage coaches, put up with all the inconveniences of travel in those days just like the rest of the population that was on the move. They established schools so the children could be taught their catechism as well as reading, 'riting, and 'ritmetic.

Student 2: Their free time was spent making interesting displays for the classroom, correcting papers, planning their lessons for the next day and week, helping others who were just beginners in the ministry of teaching, being sacristan in the church, training boys to become servers, training girls to sing Latin for Mass, besides cleaning the classrooms, planting a garden and preserving the veggies for the winter, sewing their own clothes, etc. etc.

Fr. Mike: They dedicated their entire lives to the spreading of the Kingdom in this new land. For more than a hundred years Catholic Schools grew and flourished under the leadership of these courageous women.

Stand on stage left. Spot light on Sister.

SSND Sister: *(dressed as a nun)(Hold up blue envelope)* I received this letter today from my Provincial Superior. I know it is an obedience; it will tell me where I will be missioned this coming year. We call them "bluebirds". *(To audience)* Shall I open it? Will you stand behind me and support me - wherever I'm sent? ----- Will you? ----- *(open letter)*

Read: In the spirit of obedience you are missioned to teach at St. Peter's in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. *(pause)*

Where's Beaver Dam? "O Lord, come to my assistance."

I have only three days to pack and, school starts next week! "O God, whom shall I fear? You are the strength of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?"

Three of us opened the school. Father De Berge asked Mother Caroline, our Provincial Superior, for Sisters to teach in this German community. Not all children could speak English, so, would she send one to teach German, another to teach English, and a third to be the cook. "O God, in you I trust."

I could tell you so much more, but I have to get to class. The children are waiting for me. You see, they have a very important History test tomorrow and I must help them review!

(Dim spots. Bring up light on the stage where six children are sitting on chairs in rows.)

Sister walks over to classroom.

Gutte morgen, kinder.(Gutteabende, Kinder.)

SSND Sister: Are you all ready for tomorrow's History test? Have you studied hard? Let's begin our review session with some sample True and False Questions. Remember to raise your hand if you think you know the answer.

True or False. The first sisters arrived safely in Beaver Dam after a long flight from Germany.

Student: Oh sister, that has to be false. There were no airplanes when the sisters came to Beaver Dam. The automobile wasn't even invented yet.

SSND Sister: Very good answer. You must have been listening in class. Next question:

True or False. The first sisters traveled to Beaver Dam with their families who helped carry their dishes, kitchen supplies, furniture, clothing, and school books.

Student: I know that has to be false. The sisters weren't allowed to be with their families very often back then. Also, they possessed next to nothing. Everything they needed was provided them by generous parish families.

SSND Sister: Oh, I am so proud of you. Next question. True or False. When the first Sisters arrived in Beaver Dam, they were happy to find a new gym with a shiny floor waiting for them.

Student: False! False! False! You told us that the first school was very small and simple.

SSND Sister: I knew that question was too easy. Here's another question and this will be an especially hard one. True or False: In the 1800's, the sisters began and ended each day with prayer.

Student: I am detecting a pattern here. The answer has to be false. The sisters began and ended their day with exercise.

SSND: Incorrect. The sisters were women of prayer. Last question. True or False. Catholic education helped preserve the cultural and religious traditions of early immigrants to America.

Student: That has to be true. My older brother told me that the longer the question and the bigger the words, the more the answer has to be true! Oh sister, can you please tell us more about what it was really like way back then?

SSND: I will do more than tell you. I will show you.

Voice from back stage: Scene 1, please:

(Lights focus to the left of the stage)

(Student mimics door knocking action. Nun mimics answering the door)

Student: Good Afternoon, Sister.

SSND: Step inside my child. It is cold outside.

Student: I have finished chopping all the wood. I stacked it just the way you told me to. I know it will keep you warm as it burns.

SSND: I commend your hard work and effort. I have prepared a treat for you. Here is a piece of fresh bread richly covered with lard. I hope you enjoy it.

Student: Oh, thank you sister!

(Lights go up on stage right)

Voice from backstage: Scene 2, please.

SSND: Children, this is the third time I have had to ask you to settle down. You are so restless today.

Student: But sister, but sister...

SSND: Enough! I must have your attention. Stop looking out the window.

Students: But sister....your porch is burning!!

(Lights go up on stage left)

Voice from backstage: Scene 3, please.

Student: Sister, are you crying? Why are you so sad?

SSND: I just learned that my mother is dying and I can't go home.

(Student turns, takes a few steps, and says to the audience)

Student: Right then I wish I could have hugged Sister but how was I to hold her in all that starched habit.

(Lights return us to the main stage classroom)

SSND: Those are three stores from the past. Enough now about times long ago!

(Dim stage lights. Bring up spot on new Sister at stage left.)

SSJ-TOSF Sister: We, the Sisters of St. Joseph of the third order of St. Francis did not appear on the scene in Beaver Dam until 1905. Our congregation had just been founded in Stevens Point to educate Polish immigrant families, Father Wenta invited us to come to the little Red School on the Hill to teach the Polish children in Beaver Dam.

Can you imagine our surprise when we found out the school had only two classrooms and we each were to teach four grades! Yes, two Sisters, two classrooms with four grades in each! But we accepted the challenge. "O God, in you I trust."

I wish I had time to tell you more, but I need to get to the classroom. My students have an important History test tomorrow and I must help them review.

(Dim spot. Bring up lights on stage.)

Walk to the classroom and say in Polish "Gen dobrey. Good morning, children"
Dobrey vacho. Good evening, Children"

SSJ-TOSF: Tomorrow is an important day. You will each be given a History test comprised of 25 multiple choice questions. Let's practice now with some sample questions. Listen carefully while I read the question and then raise your hand if you think you know the answer.

When not teaching, the Sisters of St. Joseph spent their time:

- a). in prayer
- b). fixing the roof of the church
- c). watching Packer games

Student: That answer has to be A. I know that even today nuns pray a lot!

SSJ-TOSF: That is correct. Good thinking. An important prayer to all of us was the Salve Regina. Are you ready for the next question? Listen!

Parish priests were happy to have sisters for their schools in 1905 because:

- a). the sisters helped children learn about the Catholic Faith
- b). the sisters could help distribute communion during Sunday Mass
- c). the sisters were the only people in town who could speak Polish

Student: I want to say B for distributing communion, but I think the real answer could be C but then again, maybe the best answer is A. Oh...this is so hard. I'll guess Letter A. The sisters helped children learn about their faith.

SSJ-TOSF: Choice A is correct, but you should not have to guess.

(Change dates on the easel.

Bring up spot light on Narrator. Dim stage lights.)

Part TWO 1950-1970

Narrator Fr. Mike Change came about in the late 1940's after World War II with the baby boom generation. By 1956 the seams of Catholic Schools were bursting. Classrooms all over the country were filled with up to fifty, sixty, sometimes seventy or eighty children for one Sister. Can you imagine the stack of papers that needed to be corrected each day? Besides that, the Sisters trained servers, took care of altar linens, decorating the altars, laid out the vestments each day for Mass, played the organ and taught children to sing in Latin, taught catechism to the children who did not attend the Catholic School. The Sisters kept giving every ounce of strength to their mission. And, young women kept asking to become Sisters! Work did not deter these women. Additions to schools were built. Convents were constructed on small parcels of parish land.

Spot on Sister. Dim spot on Narrator.

SSSF Sister: In fact, a convent was constructed in the back of St. Patrick's School – next to the alley. We didn't have much lawn space for sure. That's what we called "living simply." And in those days, Sisters stayed on the parish property and didn't wander off much except for business. Yet, five of us SSSFs came to live there and open St. Patrick's School. At least these Irish children could speak English.

(Bring up lights on stage. Dim spot on Sister.)

Walk over to the classroom. "Top of the morning to you, children!"

SSSF: Let's continue with our multiple choice questions.

To help children best learn their English grammar, students often:

- a). ate graham crackers
- b). watched the Grammy Awards
- c). diagramed sentences

Student: Sister, you are so funny. Everyone remembers diagramming sentences. Noun, Verb, Adjective.

SSSF: I am so pleased with how you all have been studying for our History Exam. My next question is going to be a hard one, so please listen carefully:

By their example and through their teaching, the sisters missioned at St. Peter's, St. Michael's, and St. Patrick's school all:

- a). worked to build the kingdom of God
- b). left town to attend Vatican II
- c). learned how to drive from the parish priest

Student: The correct answer is letter A. I knew it right away. The sisters always wanted to help build the kingdom of God through the little children they taught.

(Dim stage lights. Bring up spot on Sister.)

SSND Sister: In the meantime, while St. Patrick's was establishing their school, at St. Peter's the Notre Dame Sisters – twelve of us by now – continued working diligently. We developed a happy sense of community living, continued to say the daily office, shared meals together, recreated together, lived in close quarters together. But we were young and dedicated and passionate about who we were and what we did. Pastors and parents wanted their children to have a Sister as the teacher for their children. There simply were not enough. Religious communities simply could not keep up with the demand. Life was changing in the convent.

(Dim spot light. Bring up stage lights. Have children's choir line up on stage front. Sister walks to them.)

Now children, we've had our hot lunch and recess. It's time for singing now.

Sing: "Today is Sunday.....What shall we do today?"

Thursday.....

Child 1: Go to Mass.

Celebrate fine arts day!

Child 2: Have a family dinner.

Do our homework!

Child 3: Celebrate Catholic Schools Week!

Child 4,5,6: YES! Celebrate, celebrate, celebrate!

(Children walk off stage repeating "celebrate" until off stage.. Stage lights dim.)

(Change dates on easel. Bring up spot light on Narrator.)

PART THREE 1970 - 2015

Narrator Fr. Mike: The Sisters were under stress. Additional Lay Teachers were needed to join the Sisters. But lay teachers did step forward and received less, because they believed in Catholic Education. Parishes came under financial stress to build more classrooms and pay Lay Teachers more than the Sisters had previously received. Then came Vatican II with its theme of "Open wide the doors". "O God, come to our assistance."

(Dim light on Narrator. Spot light on Sister)

Sister: Religious congregations were asked to look back at the roots of their foundations and bring the purpose for their existence into the twentieth century. They needed to sort out what was needed in today's world. They studied lots and adapted to the signs of the times. Off went the habit into a more modified one at first and then gradually, just wearing what the common folk generally wore. Sisters were seen driving cars because mothers and other friends were no longer available to take them to the doctor or buy groceries or go to meetings at their motherhouses.

(Keep spot light on Sister. Spot light on Lay Teacher.)

Lay Teacher: As a lay teacher I found I needed to understand the difference between a public school education and a Catholic School education. Why should we keep Catholic Education? Why not just close all the Catholic schools? No, I needed to learn and understand the significance of being educated in a Catholic environment. Once I caught on to that belief, I was completely sold on Catholic education. I was committed.

*(Sister and Lay Teacher walk over to classroom on stage. Bring up stage lights. Dim spots. Have half the students stand and turn their chairs to face the lay teacher.)
As a transition from Sisters to Lay Teachers, have Sister and Lay Teacher say:*

Sister begins, " You've had some homework and today...

Lay Teacher continues: I want you to read your essays."

First Student: *(from Sister's classroom)*

My essay is entitled "The Church's One Foundation".

In the 1960's each parish in Beaver Dam began to struggle with rising school costs. For many reasons, there were no longer enough sisters to teach in every classroom. Salaries now had to be paid to lay teachers and eventually, out of fairness, to the religious sisters that our parishes were still fortunate to have.

In 1982, change came to St. Peter's and St. Patrick's when the two schools were combined to form one Unified Catholic Parish School. Even with all the changes, the church remained true to her one foundation...spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Dim lights on classroom. Bring up spot light on Narrator.

Narrator: As pastor of this parish in Beaver Dam, I saw the strain of having a parish Catholic School. It was then that we pastors from St. Peter's and St. Patrick's, with the help of the Archdiocese and some lay people decided now was the time, 1982, to combine the schools and call it UCPS – United Catholic Parish School. Bit by bit, the Sisters disappeared and lay teachers took over. Tuitions were introduced but some families just could not pay for it. The Catechism classes for children attending public schools mushroomed as a result. Now it was time to develop a more comprehensive program for them. Vatican II stressed the idea of lifelong education formation for all baptized peoples.

Dim spot light on Narrator. Bring up light on Catechetical Leader.

Catechetical Leader: And that's where I was hired. At first each parish developed her own program, but as time went on, parishes saw the benefit of combining the programs. In time, the parishes did become one parish. St. Katharine Drexel Parish was born in 2003. The school also became known as St. Katharine Drexel Catholic School. The religious education program became known as Lifelong Learning.

Dim spot light on Catechetical Leader. Bring up classroom lights.

Student 2: (from the lay teacher's classroom)

My essay is entitled "Standing on the Shoulders"

The Good News of Jesus Christ continues to be shared with the children of Beaver Dam by dedicated lay people just as it was so nobly started by the Sisters generations ago. Today, we are all fortunate to be standing on the shoulders of those Sisters. We lean on their legacy for strength and inspiration. We bow before them in gratitude.

Dim lights on classroom. Bring up spot light on Narrator.

Narrator: What was so nobly begun by the Sisters of various congregations in Beaver Dam, is now continued with new and renewed energy by dedicated lay people, both in the school and religious education program for one united parish in Beaver Dam. Pastors and parents saw the advantage of having children attend Catholic School if at all possible so endowment funds were set up to help families in need who want a Catholic education.

The work continues. Now the parish is welcoming a new influx of immigrants. It brings us to a renewed challenge to integrate them into our parish and school and lifelong learning. We've unified once, no, two and three times. We can do it again. "May God come to our assistance."

Dim lights on Narrator. Bring up spot light on Sisters.

Sister Toni

Many young women from the three parishes in Beaver Dam followed in the footsteps of the many pioneer women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Sister Mariel:

These women from Beaver Dam joined with thousands of other women religious to reach out across the continent and beyond as they continue the tradition of working to build the Kingdom of God.

Turn both spot lights to the front of the stage as people carrying the posters with names of these women to the front.

Music background "Standing on the Shoulders" – soft at first and then, increase volume toward the end.

The young women from Beaver Dam who followed this call were:

Cecilia Neumann	Eleanore Bibula	Margaret Sawejka (<i>Pronounced Savayka</i>)	
Eleanor Vilker	Cecilia Vilker	Helen Vilker	
Mary Ann Bartell	Rita Schmidt	Bernice Haider	Theresa Kastenmeir
Emma Neumann	Theresa Schmitt	Agnes Schmitt	Blanche Frisch
Helen Beers	Elizabeth Kumba	Angeline Schweiger	Mary Schweiger
Anne Roedl	Mathilda Heimler	Angeline Geneiger	Lorraine Neuman
Mary Neuman	Mary Cigelski	Jeanne Leisses	Margaret Meyer
Mary Budde	Sharon Roedl	Doris Rushlow	Dolores Gergen
Agnella Heidt	Mary Heidt	Caroline Haider	Phillipine Kumba
Dorothy Kaiser	Catherine Haas	Rita Haider	Lisa Kalscheur

We call all SSND Associates, Lay teachers as well as Catechists to please stand!

Sisters Toni & Mariel together say: So the story continues.....the work continues.
Come back next year for Part TWO, the rest of the story. "Whom should we fear?"

Narrator: We want to remember these women who worked so tirelessly to develop Catholic Education in our community, these women who are part of the history of the Catholic School here in Beaver Dam, and so we have determined to place three plaques in our school to remember them. (*Presentation of the three plaques*)

Research by Sister Mariel Kreuziger, SSND

Developed into classroom script by Jeff Rehberg

On the PROGRAM:

Some reflection questions for the back of the program:

- What did you learn about the life of a Sister?
- Have you ever talked to a relative or friend about religious life?
- How would you feel if a family member wanted to enter religious life?
- What important lesson did you learn for living a good life from the Sisters?

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS

(Joyce Johnson Rouse)

I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me.
I am stronger for their courage, I am wiser their words.
I am lifted by their longing for a fair and brighter future.
I am grateful for their vision, for their timing on this earth.
We are standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before us.
They are saints and they are humans, they are angels, they are friends.
We can see beyond the struggles and the troubles and the trials
When we know that by our efforts things will be better in the end.
They lift me higher than I could ever fly, carrying my burdens away.
I imagine a world if they hadn't tried.
We wouldn't be here celebrating today.
I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me.
I am honored by their passion for our liberty.
I will stand a little taller, I will work a little longer
And my shoulders will be there to hold the ones who follow me.
They lift me higher than I could ever fly carrying my burdens away.
I imagine a world if they hadn't tried.
We wouldn't be so very blest today.
I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me
I am honored by their passion for our liberty.
I will stand a little taller, I will work a little longer
And my shoulders will be there to hold the ones who follow me.
My shoulders will be there to hold the ones who follow me.

PRAYER for the YEAR of CONSECRATED LIFE

O God, throughout the ages you have called women and men to pursue lives of perfect charity through the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. During this Year of Consecrated Life, we give you thanks for these courageous witnesses of Faith and models of inspiration. Their pursuit of holy lives teaches us to make a more perfect offering of ourselves to you. Continue to enrich your Church by calling forth sons and daughters who, having found the pearl of great price, treasure the Kingdom of Heaven above all things. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.