

VOCATION AWARENESS LESSON
GRADE THREE
SAINT KATHARINE DREXEL
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY: SISTERS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Objective: Through the life of Saint Katharine Drexel, students will gain an understanding of a vocation to the consecrated life.

Materials: Story of Saint Katharine Drexel (provided), art supplies

Instructional Focus:

- I. Students will listen to age appropriate adaptations of the following vocabulary/definitions which are taken from the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults.
 - a. Vocation- the call each person receives from God; everyone has been called to holiness and eternal life, especially in Baptism. Each person can also be called more specifically to the priesthood or religious life; to the married life; and to the single life.
 - b. Priest- a baptized man ordained through Holy Orders who with the bishop exercise the pastoral mission of the Church. They serve God's people in the work of sanctification by their preaching, teaching and offering the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the forgiving of sins. (A priest may be ordained as a diocesan priest or as a member of a religious community.)
 - c. Holy Orders- The sacrament in which a bishop ordains a man to be conformed to Jesus Christ by grace, to service and leadership in the Church. A man can be ordained as a deacon, priest or bishop.
 - d. Religious or Consecrated Life- A permanent state in life into which certain men or women freely commit themselves to a life of special service to Christ, marked by the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Students will listen to the story of Saint Katharine Drexel. As a class, the students will discuss her life span, travels and endeavors. Students will be paired to discuss:

- her religious vocation
- her commitment to God's work on earth

Students will share their discussions with entire class.

Students will write a prayer to Saint Katharine Drexel which asks for her assistance in living out their Christian vocation each day.

- II. Students will form small groups of three or four and research significant events in Saint Katharine Drexel's life. From this research each group will create a time line and voyage map.
- III. Students will complete time lines and voyage maps and then share with class.

Resources used for lessons and story of Saint Katharine Drexel:

Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament website: www.katharinadrexel.org

Sisters of Notre Dame of Chardon, Ohio, Saints and Feast Days: A Resource and Activity Book, Loyola Press, 2004. Those who have purchased this book may reproduce its contents for use in educational settings.

SAINT KATHARINE DREXEL (1858 – 1955)

What would you do with a few million dollars? In 1889 newspaper headlines read “Gives Up Millions.” The article told about Katharine Drexel, an heiress from Philadelphia.

Katharine’s father was an international banker, and her mother died soon after Katharine was born. When her father remarried, he chose a wonderful mother for his daughters. Her family was very rich and even had a private railroad car. Katharine traveled widely, received an excellent education and made her debut into society. The Drexels were also devout Catholics who had a private chapel in their home. Her father and stepmother set good examples of prayer and charity for Katharine and her two sisters.

When her stepmother became ill with cancer, Katharine took care of her for three years. After her stepmother’s death, Katharine thought more about her own values and goals of life. On a trip to the western part of the United States, she became concerned about the Native Americans and their living conditions. Soon after, Katharine met Pope Leo XIII and asked him to send more missionaries to help her friend, Bishop James O’Connor minister to the Native Americans. The pope asked, “Why not be a missionary yourself, my child?”

The Drexel family already financially supported two mission schools on Sioux reservations in South Dakota. When Katharine and her two sisters visited them, Katharine became convinced of her life’s work. After much thought and prayer, she joined the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh to become a sister. When she was 33, Katharine made her vows as the first Sister of the Blessed Sacrament. Her order was dedicated to sharing the Gospel and the life of the Eucharist among Native Americans and African Americans. The old Drexel summer home in Pennsylvania was the sisters’ first convent.

After three and a half years of training, Mother Drexel and other sisters opened a boarding school in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She spent her life and millions of dollars on her work. In the end she had established 50 missions for Native Americans in 16 states, a system of Catholic schools for African Americans, 40 mission centers, and 23 rural schools. She had also made the Church and the country more aware of the needs of the poor and had spoken out against racial and social injustices.

No doubt, Mother Drexel’s greatest educational achievement was founding Xavier University in New Orleans, the first University for African Americans in the United States. A heart attack at the age of 77 forced Katharine to retire. She spent the next 20 years praying for the sisters who carried on her work. She died at the age of 96. She was beatified in 1988 and canonized on October 1, 2000.