

Music has a powerful influence on people's lives

By Mary Stamp - editor



Holy Names Sister Kay Heberling has brought music into the lives of many people.

Kay Heberling, SNJM, started taking music lessons from the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM) because of their reputation for quality education in music.

Now she carries on the tradition started in 1888 when five Holy Names sisters came from Portland, Ore., to open an elementary school and soon began teaching piano.

Sr. Kay said the Holy Names sisters have long recognized the power of music and the arts in people's lives, so music has had a prominent role in their missions of education and justice.

The reach of the sisters' music education has continued through many generations to today in thousands of musicians, music teachers, performers, artists and patrons locally to globally.

Today's Holy Names Music Center, established in 1982, continues the music department that was part of Fort Wright College of the Holy Names. The college was strong in education, science, art and languages. Holy Names College had operated on N. Superior from 1938 to 1960, following Holy Names Normal School from 1907 to 1938.

Sr. Kay is the last Holy Names sister teaching piano in Spokane. She teaches at Holy Names Music Center and at Trinity School.

She knows the impact of teaching piano goes beyond music, because most people she has taught did not become professional musicians, but went into many other professions. The music and the relationships she has established with her students have helped them understand life, take time to be quiet, and put their minds, hearts, souls and emotions into a different frame.

The relationships with her teachers were also important to Sr. Kay as she grew up in Spokane and attended Holy Names Academy. When she was a child, she often stayed with her grandmother, who had a piano. At 5 p.m., when her grandmother began to cook, she would play piano.

When she began studying piano, the sisters who taught her listened to struggles she couldn't talk about elsewhere. She carries on their example of building relationships of trust and caring with students, who share about other aspects of their lives.

"Now I treasure my time with students—from ages five to adulthood—working on music and building relationships," she said.

One student's father told her she is like a grandmother to his children: "They treasure you."

"I treasure them," she said. "When they want my opinion about problems that they share during lessons, they know they can talk about what is bothering them in the privacy and confidentiality of a lesson."

In 1961 after her freshman year at the four-year, liberal-arts Holy Names College, she helped the college relocate to 76 acres they purchased after Fort George Wright closed for military purposes. The college was renamed Fort Wright College of the Holy Names.

Sr. Kay spent three years at the Fort Wright campus studying music, graduating in 1964. She helped pay tuition by teaching private lessons for \$1 each and teaching music for \$10 an hour at Nine Mile Grade School.

"I teach music to children to strengthen them as they go on into careers in math, science, medicine, teaching and more," she said. "I encourage students to become what they want to be."

"Because of the strength of the music program, Holy Names Music Center continues as a community music school for students to come for private lessons in all instruments, but particularly strings, voice and piano," said Sr. Kay, who also studied violin and voice.

Twenty years ago, the center began the New Horizons Orchestra for senior citizens, to socialize and keep their brains active. It's now independent, and its 50 members practice at Salem Lutheran Church. Sr. Kay plays violin.

In 1964, she went to Marylhurst College south of Portland, Ore., where she spent two-and-a-half years in novitiate training.

In the fall of 1967, she returned to teach a semester at Holy Names Academy, and then taught at Holy Names grade schools, two years in Richland and five years in Tacoma, where she helped establish a guitar folk Mass.

Because she worked on the Pierce County Education Board to merge three Catholic high schools, Holy Names Academy asked her to come to help during a time of struggle.

She came in 1974 and taught, but the model of merging schools did not work in Spokane, so Holy Names Academy closed in the spring of 1975.

When the academy closed, they moved pianos, music and archives to the college music department.

During those years, she established junior high choirs at St. Pascals, St. Patrick's, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Aloysius and worked with the St. Aloysius' liturgy committee.

She spent summers completing a master's in piano performance at the University of Southern California and then taught at Marylhurst College for two years. From 1981 to 1995, she taught at Holy Names Academy in Seattle and headed the fine arts department. That school continues today with 700 students.

There, she participated with other priests and nuns in a Marriage Encounter program, "an eye-opening and healing experience" that helped not only with relationships in the convent but also in her family, as she soon began a stint in parenting.

Her mother died suddenly on Memorial Day 1995, so Sr. Kay moved to Spokane to be closer to help her brother, a single father of three children, raise his family. She took in his middle son from seventh grade through college.

While a part-time parent, she taught students in her home, the house her mother left her, and at Holy Names Music Center.

Now Sr. Kay teaches about 20 students at the Holy Names Music Center, accompanies programs at the school, and has accompanied the Mukogawa Women's Ensemble for 13 years.

She began helping with liturgy at St. Thomas More Parish and was music director there from 1996 to 2005, when she left to do liturgy with St. Joseph's Parish on Dean, where several sisters have served as parish pastors.

Sr. Kay has taught for eight years at Trinity Grade School and does Sunday liturgies at St. Anthony's or St. Joseph's, which also have Vietnamese and Spanish parishioners. An English liturgy at St. Joseph's is at 9:30 a.m. and the Spanish one at 12:30 p.m. At St. Anthony's, there are two English liturgies and a 1 p.m., Vietnamese Mass.

She also plays for Sunday liturgies at Brookdale where retired Holy Names sisters now reside.

"Sundays, Catholics come to liturgy to be fed, so the music must be meaningful and rich to give another dimension to understanding the Scripture along with the priest's homily," she said.

Sr. Kay chooses and plays music, directs choirs and plays for children's liturgies.

"People participate in a liturgy by singing. Words of hymns are often words of theology that stay with people, because they are repeated over and over," she said. "Choosing good music is important, because it's what the church teaches and it builds a relationship with Christ."

Sr. Kay enjoys classical music and the Big Band music she heard growing up. She also teaches folk, Disney, patriotic and popular songs and songs from musicals.

With many of her students, she uses the Suzuki method, designed for children before they can read, teaching them by hearing notes and rhythms.

For her golden jubilee, from May to August, she celebrated at Marylhurst, Seattle and Spokane with seven other women who took their vows when she did, one of the first groups after Vatican II, when the liturgy was translated from Latin to English.

The Holy Names Music Center, at 3910 W. Custer, has 30 faculty. They teach piano, cello, clarinet, double bass, fiddle, flute, guitar, percussion, saxophone, trumpet, violin, viola and voice to students of many ages, abilities, income levels and ethnic origins.

The center serves more than 200 private students and small ensembles, as well as the Music Together program for toddlers and parents.

In addition, 120 Adult Ensemble members in Project Joy Orchestra and the Lilac City Community Band rehearse there. The center has outreach to 30 families through Music for Vets and the Catholic Charities CAPA (Childhood and Parenting Alone) program.

Sr. Kay said Holy Names Music Center at Fort Wright is a nonprofit community music school, “providing quality instruction and performance opportunities for all.”

For information, call 475-1956 for Sr. Kay or 326-9516 for the music center, or email kheberling@comcast.net.

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