

ChicagoHistoryMuseum

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GROWING UP CATHOLIC IN CHICAGO: THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Catholic Chicago exhibition at the Chicago History Museum explores the city's largest faith.

CHICAGO (January 21, 2008) – The Chicago History Museum presents *Catholic Chicago*, an exhibition that explores Chicago from the perspective of the Catholic community, examines how being Catholic in Chicago has transformed over time, and how it has shaped the city's urban landscape. The exhibition opens on Saturday, March 8 and will run through January 4, 2009.

Catholic Chicago is the first in a series of exhibitions the Museum will present focusing on the religious communities that have contributed to the city's traditions and its evolution as a major urban center. Catholicism, which claims more than 2 million Chicagoans, remains the largest religious faith in the city. "*Catholic Chicago* is the logical place for our series to begin since the Catholic community has had an ongoing presence in Chicago since the seventeenth century," said Gary T. Johnson, museum president. "The biggest challenge is how to do justice to this expansive subject in just one exhibition."

The exhibition is presented in six themed sections beginning with an introduction that showcases the 28th International Eucharistic Congress held in Chicago in 1926. The event attracted over one million Catholics, elevating Chicago's image in Rome and offering Catholics living in Chicago a public affirmation of their faith and identity. The first section, *Laying Foundations*, examines the historical role of parishes in Chicago, as well as Catholic leadership during the 17th through 20th centuries. The stories of influential individuals such as Jean Baptiste Point DuSable, Cardinal Mundelein, Father Jacques Marquette, and Mother Cabrini will be told. Next, visitors will be introduced to *School Days*, a section focusing on the significant role Catholic education has played in Chicago. This section uses engaging artifacts and audiovisual materials to connect visitors to the city's Catholic elementary and high school experience. A bulletin board showcasing the histories of schools such as Gordon Tech High, St. Scholastica, and Marist High Schools will rotate monthly. Ten different Catholic schools will be featured overall. Other topics explored in this section include segregation and the tragic fire at Our Lady of the Angels.

Visitors will then explore *Committed to Community*, which examines the role of parishes and Catholic communities around the city; focusing on the Catholic traditions and the "cradle to grave" experience of parish life. The next section, *Worship in the City* explores the artistic aspect of Catholicism from the music heard at church to architecture

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and traditional imagery and symbolism seen around the city. Artifacts on view include a 4-foot crucifix by artist Meltem Aktas, a reproduction of an 8-foot by 12-foot vivid stained glass window from 1920 depicting a priest offering Mass, and a photomural reproduction of the ceiling of the heavenly dome inside St. Clement's Church. *Changing the Church* looks at the activities and changes the church has experienced from the 1960s to today. Oral histories of Catholic Chicagoans sharing their stories, along with images and background on some of the more controversial aspects and actions of the church including the impact of Vatican II, the Civil Rights Movement, and other aspects of social activism are explored. The sixth and final section, *Faith in the Future* looks at the future of the Catholic faith in Chicago; it touches on politics, Catholic identity and devotion in contemporary society, and the new generation of Catholics in Chicago.

The Museum formed a Teen Council for this exhibition representing high school students from diverse social, ethnic, economic, and faith backgrounds from all over Chicago. The teens collected oral histories from members of the clergy and religious sisters, teachers, writers, artists, and people who grew up as Chicago Catholics. Individuals include Father Michael Pflieger, Laura Washington, Stuart Dybek, and Francis Cardinal George.

Programs pertaining to the exhibition will include three film documentaries dealing with the topic of religion, a special performance of the musical *Late Nite Catechism*, and the Museum's *In The K/Now* series will feature a program dedicated to the controversial issues surrounding the Catholic Church. Developed in collaboration with the Center for Religious Architecture, neighborhood walking tours will be offered focusing on the "Parish Perspective;" including the neighborhood and three different churches.

Audio tours for *Catholic Chicago* will be available in English, Spanish, and Polish. Other religious exhibitions being considered for the future are *Jewish Chicago* and *Muslim Chicago*. "Museums are interested in long-term forces, and the stories that define them. In telling the story of Chicago, it is my belief that understanding the unique contributions of all religions will help us to become one. This is our heritage, and this is our glory," said Johnson.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the generous support of Mr. Philip H. Corboy and Ms. Mary A. Dempsey, Mr. John W. Croghan and Mrs. Rosemary Croghan, DePaul University, The Jesuit Community of Chicago and The Cuneo Foundation along with Mr. Frank W. Considine and Mrs. Nancy S. Considine. Additional support provided by Saint Xavier University and the William and Marilyn Simpson Foundation.

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The Chicago History Museum, a major museum and research center for Chicago and American history, is located at 1601 N. Clark Street. The Museum can be reached by CTA buses 11, 22, 36, 72, 151, and 156. Parking is conveniently located one block north of the Museum at Clark and LaSalle Streets (enter on Stockton Drive). Admission to the Museum is \$14 adults with audio tour, \$12 seniors/students with audio tour, free for children 12 years and younger. General Admission is free on Mondays. Please call 312.642.4600 or visit us at www.chicagohistory.org.