



Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament

1663 Bristol Pike • Bensalem, PA 19020

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Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament announce decision to sell Motherhouse, Virginia properties

(Bensalem, Penn.—May 3, 2016) “On behalf of all the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, I am announcing today our Congregation’s decision to divest itself of two of our largest properties,” said Sister Donna Breslin, SBS, president of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. “We know the time is right to make this decision.”

The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament are selling the historic, gracious 44-acre property in Bensalem, Penn., which Mother Katharine Drexel purchased to build the Motherhouse for the religious order she founded in 1891. The Congregation also is selling more than 2,200 acres in Powhatan, Va., near Richmond, the former site of two schools for black students: St. Francis de Sales for girls and St. Emma Military Academy for boys. Colonel Edward Morrell, Mother Katharine’s brother-in-law, acquired this land in the early 1890s. Later, the land was transferred to the Congregation.

The National Shrine of Saint Katharine Drexel on the Motherhouse campus remains open and continues to welcome visitors through 2017. Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M., Cap. has confirmed the remains of Saint Katharine Drexel will be moved, when the time is right, to the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul, and placed near the altar already honoring her. She is the second American-born person ever to be canonized.

In addition, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament are entrusting many of their archives to the care of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, especially because Mother Katharine Drexel and her family played such a central role in supporting the Catholic Church in Philadelphia.

The Congregation has retained Plante Moran REIA as its exclusive real estate asset investment advisor to manage the disposition of both properties using a request-for-proposal (RFP) process.

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Forward-looking vision focused on mission

“As we prepare to celebrate in July the 125th anniversary of our Catholic religious order, we rededicate our resources to our mission serving some of the most vulnerable people in the United States, Haiti and Jamaica. We also will use proceeds from the sales to challenge, in new ways, all forms of racism as well as the other deeply rooted injustices in the world. A portion of the proceeds will support the care of our retired Sisters,” Sister Donna Breslin stated.

This decision makes it possible for the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to carry forward the vision and spirit of Mother Katharine Drexel, who left her prominent Philadelphia family to establish a religious order in 1891.

Move to begin in 2017

The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament have engaged the services of a firm experienced in planning and assisting women religious congregations to address their senior living needs. The firm will help find new residences for the Sisters currently living at the Motherhouse. The Congregation’s administrative offices will move to another location.

To learn more about the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and the National Shrine of Saint Katharine Drexel, please visit <http://www.katharinedrexel.org/>

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FYI: To interview Sister Donna Breslin, SBS and to tour the Motherhouse campus, please call Sheila King, 312.622.3999.

About SBS Motherhouse property

The Motherhouse property for the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, located at 1663 Bristol Pike in Bensalem, Penn., is conveniently located immediately northeast of Philadelphia and easily accessible from I-95 at the Woodhaven exit. Enter the campus at Drexel Drive.

A total of 10 buildings, more than half constructed between 1891 and 1933, contain close to 229,000 square-feet of living and working space. Many currently no longer serve their intended purpose or have not been adequately used for as many as 8 years.

At one time, there were more than 600 members of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament; today, there are 104 Sisters and more than one-half are retired.

About FrancisEmma, Inc. in Powhatan, Va., former site of two schools

In the early 1890s, Colonel Edward Morrell acquired land which became the cornerstone of more than 2,200 acres along the James River near Richmond, Va., where his sister-in-law Saint Katharine Drexel established St. Francis de Sales, a school for young black women. Another school, St. Emma, also was established as an industrial and agricultural institute and as a military academy for young black men to learn trades and receive an education. Before they closed in the early 1970s, these schools educated close to 15,000 students.

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During the last 12 years, through dedicated efforts other ministries took place on the property. At this time, it is no longer financially sustainable to continue these ministries.

About Saint Katharine Drexel

On October 1, 2000, Katharine Drexel, who founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in 1891, was the second American-born person ever to be canonized. The National Shrine of St. Katharine Drexel, where she was laid to rest in 1955, is located below the 19th-century chapel Mother Katharine had built. The Shrine is visited daily by people with a devotion to her, and will continue to welcome visitors during 2017.

Photos provided

High resolution JPGs of the Motherhouse campus, of Sister Donna Breslin, SBS accompany this release.