

Christened Pax, our bell – cast in 1889, rung 74 years in St. Joseph’s Church of Portland, Oregon, and brought to Encino by Novice Mistress Sister Elizabeth Prus, SSS in 1963 calls all to the work of God.

Written by Raphael Carlo Diy with Assistance by Sr. Bertille Prus, SSS

Here at the heart of the Community of the Sisters of Social Service, our bell has its own distinct voice and its own unique history. Our bell, Pax, was cast in St. Louis in 1889, dedicated to St. Joseph, and sent to be one of three in the bell tower in St. Joseph’s Church in Portland, Oregon. There it hung for many decades, and among other things, rang to announce the wedding of Henry Prus and his bride, Mary Weber. All of their children were baptized under that bell, and it rang for several of their weddings.



Certainly it rang one Sunday morning in June 1938 to call the Portland community together for the Eucharist and to celebrate Elizabeth, the eldest Prus daughter and brand new Sister of Social Service, home for her first family visit. When Sr. Elizabeth returned to Los Angeles a week later she was accompanied by her youngest sister who also joined the novitiate and soon entered the Community as Sr. Bertille Prus, SSS.

The following years saw both the Prus sisters and St. Joseph’s Church flourish. But in 1963, as the city of Portland expanded, plans for Interstate freeway extensions called into question the church’s future. As St. Joseph’s priest Fr. Alcuin Heibel, OSB put it to his parishioners in an open letter:

“No doubt by this time you all know that little St. Joseph’s Church will be the victim of so-called progress by way of a new freeway.”

Ever an optimist, Sr. Elizabeth imagined our grounds in Encino enriched by the presence of the largest bell from the St. Joseph tower and wrote to Fr. Heibel.

The reply came quickly: “Dear Sister Elizabeth...I see no reason why you cannot have the St. Joseph’s bell...”

After some cooperation with St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church who took the smaller of the St. Joseph’s bells, the Sisters in Encino were greeted by the arrival of their bell. In the usual graciousness of her thank you notes, Sr. Elizabeth wrote to all parties involved:



Sr. Elizabeth radiantly welcoming the bell from St. Joseph’s church of Portland, where Sisters Elizabeth and Bertille Prus grew up.

“The beautiful bell arrived safely and soundly on the feast of St. Isidore, October 25th. I should have let you know sooner but have been ever so busy. It was so nicely cleaned, crated, and transported – with a care befitting the function and purpose of this bell.”

A few years later on February 27, 1967, the bell now in its permanent place on the Encino grounds, a ceremony was held to bless and name the bell. On that joyful occasion, Sr. Elizabeth prayed:

“Loving God bless this bell, cast to proclaim your honor and glory. May all who hear its voice experience your peace, that peace which goes beyond understanding, that peace which the world cannot give. Bless our bell which I now christen Pax.”

Since then, our bell Pax has welcomed hundreds of thousands of friends, visitors, retreatants, family members, youth, religious men and women, and all those seeking peace and God’s grace for themselves and our world.

Pax, our bell, lives on the grounds, across from the dining hall and just outside the Chapel of Holy Spirit Retreat Center.

