
Sister Francella Mary Griggs

Who was Sister Francella Mary Griggs?

Sister Francella Mary Griggs was a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. She was also a member of a Catholic religious community called the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary and became an important community leader and educator.



Early Life

Sister Francella was born on February 5, 1920. When she was born, her name was Florence Griggs. Her parents' names were Lloyd Manley and Amanda West Griggs. Amanda was a Siletz Tribal member of Coquille and Latgawa descent, Tribes removed to the Coast (Siletz) Reservation from southern Oregon. Both Florence's parents died when she was young. After they died, she was raised by the nuns of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary at their school in Marylhurst, Oregon. A nun is a woman who dedicates her life to a religious community. Today, the school is called the Christie School.

Adult Life

On her 23rd birthday, in 1943, Florence took her vows to become a nun. She changed her name to Sister Francella. She went to college and studied English and Spanish. Then she became a high school teacher in many different high schools around the Pacific Northwest. She taught at Holy Names Academy in Seattle, Washington, Star of the Sea in Astoria, Oregon, and St. Mary's Academy in Portland, Oregon.

Sister Francella also worked as a professor at the Indian Center at Eastern Oregon State College in LaGrande, Oregon. The college was started as a place for people to learn how to be teachers. Today, it is called Eastern Oregon University. As a teacher and professor, Sister Francella helped many young adults get a strong education to succeed in life.

Later Life

Sister Francella also helped to support the Native community in Portland. Along with other Siletz people, Sister Francella helped to run urban Indian programs in the Portland area during the 1960s and 1970s. These programs helped to find housing and health care for Native people from many different Tribes who had moved to Portland. They also helped Native people stay connected to each other.

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Sister Francella also served as a community activist and leader during the Tribal push for Restoration. Restoration was an effort to get the United States government to recognize Siletz as an independent nation. Sister Francella carefully gathered data about Siletz students to prove to Congress that they needed help. She organized mail-outs and even went door-to-door to build support for her Tribe.

In 1976, Sister Francella and other Tribal leaders traveled all the way back to Washington, D.C. to testify before Congress. She told Congress why education was important to give Siletz people the tools to live good lives. She said, "Now that we have experienced our own people writing books, teaching on the college and university level, directing Indian health programs, Indian urban programs, and speaking out ... we can be proud to be recognized as Native Americans."

Sister Francella died on January 7, 2012. When she died, she was 91 years old. She was the oldest member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians at the time. She was buried in her family's plot on the Siletz Indian Reservation and is remembered today by many as an important leader and mentor in the Tribal community.

Sources

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