

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO.2005-4654, by Representatives Dunn, Ahern and McCune

WHEREAS, Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart was born as Esther Pariseau on April 16, 1823, in St. Elzear, Canada, and entered the newly formed Sisters of Providence in Montreal at twenty years of age; and

WHEREAS, Her father made a prophetic remark upon her entry: "I bring to you my daughter, Esther, who wishes to dedicate herself to the religious life. She can read, write, figure accurately, sew, cook, and spin and do all manner of housework. She can do carpentry, handling a hammer and a saw as well as her father. She can also plan for others, and she succeeds in anything she undertakes. I assure you, Madam, she will make a good superior some day"; and

WHEREAS, The Sisters of Providence responded to the pleas for help that were coming from the new frontier settlements in the western United States, and Mother Joseph was chosen to lead the group of five sisters to the Washington Territory in 1856; and

WHEREAS, By February 1857, the young Sisters inherited their first convent, an old fur storage building abandoned by the Hudson Bay Company and later used as a barn, and Mother Joseph designed a chapel, built the altar herself, and fashioned a tabernacle out of an old candle box; and

WHEREAS, From this home base the Sisters began visiting the sick, soon opened the first permanent hospital in the territory, which is still operating today as Southwest Washington Medical Center, and also cared for Indian children displaced by the Yakima Indian wars; and

WHEREAS, By spring of the first year, preparations had been completed for a school; the first student, a three-year-old orphan, arrived early, and soon a tiny baby boy was also placed at the doorstep; and

WHEREAS, In 1859, Mother Joseph incorporated the Sisters' charitable works and became the President of the Sisters of Charity of the House of Providence in the Territory of Washington, one of Washington's first corporations; and

WHEREAS, From the 1850s to the 1890s, Mother Joseph established no less than eleven hospitals, seven academies, five Indian schools, and two orphanages throughout an area that today encompasses Northern Oregon, Idaho, Montana, British Columbia, and Washington, including hospitals that continue in operation in Vancouver, Walla Walla, Seattle, Spokane, Olympia, Port Townsend, Yakima, and Colfax; and

WHEREAS, Some of her most demanding work was raising funds to complete her buildings, and she found the people of Vancouver generally had modest incomes or were poor and began "begging tours" to the mining camps of Idaho, the Blue Mountains of Eastern Washington, Montana, and Western Canada; and

WHEREAS, From 1856 to 1873, while she worked on other facilities, Mother Joseph planned and built her home for the Sisters' various medical, spiritual, and educational ministries in Vancouver, Washington, the House of Providence, later called Providence Academy, which was three stories high, was considered to be the biggest brick building in the Washington Territory, and today has been declared an historic monument in the "National Register of Historic Places"; and

WHEREAS, After her death from a brain tumor in January 1902, her close friend, Mother Mary Antoinette, honored Mother Joseph in a letter to the community, "She had the characteristics of a genius: incessant works, immense sacrifices, great undertakings; and she never counted the cost to self. She exercised an extraordinary influence on the Church in the West"; and

WHEREAS, In 1953, Mother Joseph was recognized as one of the first architects in the Pacific Northwest, and because she was among the first to appreciate the use of Douglas Fir for both carving and building, she was recognized as the "first white artisan to work with wood in the Pacific Northwest," by the West Coast Lumberman's Association; and

WHEREAS, In 1980, Mother Joseph was honored as one of Washington State's two representatives in National Statuary Hall, Washington, D.C.; and

WHEREAS, A replica of that statue resides in the east wing of the entrance foyer of the Legislative Building in Olympia;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives recognize and honor Mother Joseph on the occasion of the 182nd year of her birth.

I hereby certify this to be a true and correct copy of  
Resolution 4654 adopted by the House of Representatives  
April 16, 2005

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Richard Nafziger, Chief Clerk