



Reception of the religious habit is a happy day for young Sisters

Mercy Sisters Trained For Life Role

Every Year Young Women Cross Threshold Of Mercy Motherhouse To Find A New Life Of Consecration To Christ And Souls

EACH YEAR in early September, usually on the Feast of the Birthday of Our Lady, a group of young women cross the threshold of a new life at 1437 Blossom Road, Rochester. As Nature splashes the campus with the gay colors of approaching Autumn, and former high school classmates head for colleges, jobs and marriage, these girls don the somber garb of black veil and dress and mark a "birthday" into the virgin life of another Mary.

These are "postulants" asking admission to the Sisters of Mercy, modern descendants of a long line of women reaching back to a religious community established in Baginott Street, Dublin, 126 years ago by Mother Catherine McAuley.

Given basic religious formation in the Motherhouse and qualified for teaching with N. Y. State certificates earned in Catherine McAuley Junior College, these girls as newly professed religious will in three years join 300 other Mercy Sisters already staffing 21 parish schools, three high schools and a hospital in the Rochester Diocese.

Who embraces this mode of life? Who asks to become a Sister of Mercy? The answer is that is woven in the basic philosophy of religious life in general. Although Sisters themselves may give various responses to that question, ultimately they amount to this: she asks to become a Sister who loves Christ enough to accept the grace of a vocation He has given her and decides to consecrate her life to Him.

HOW DOES A SISTER effect this consecration of her life to Christ? How is she officially set aside as "someone sacred"? She is consecrated through her vows, the very walls of her religious life.

All religious orders have three vows: poverty, chastity, and obedience. For, on the road to God, every religious, like every person, has to overcome three obstacles: the world, the flesh, the devil. These promises

are not to be thought of in merely a negative way, however.

For example, the vow of chastity means surrendering a sacred right and privilege, dear to any woman — that of becoming a mother. But when Christ says, "You have not chosen Me but I have chosen you" and a girl generously accepts this invitation, God more than compensates. Instead of mothering a family, God gives the religious the tremendous privilege of mothering thousands of children who come to her in the classrooms, hospitals and various fields of work.

Such are the vows common to all religious, but some religious orders have additional vows in keeping with the particular objective of the order. The Sisters of Mercy, because of their special work in the fields of nursing and teaching, take a fourth vow — to care for the poor, sick, and the ignorant.

That everyone might know of this consecration, the Church clads her consecrated ones in distinctive and symbolic garments. Religious dress is but the outward sign of the inner consecration of the religious to God.

WHEN THE BISHOP blesses the habit of the Sisters of Mercy in the Reception ceremony, he states the purpose of the dress in these words: "... that she may be known among all other women to be dedicated to Thee, O God."

Every day of her life Sister recalls this symbolism as she says, while dressing, the customary prayers pertinent to each part of her habit, in much the same fashion as the priest does each time he vests for Mass.

"Clothe me, O Lord, with the nuptial robe of charity that I may be made worthy to follow the Lamb," she says as she dons her habit. "Create in me, O Lord, a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me," as she puts on her gump.

The cinchure or leather belt signifies obedience, a binding of her will.

Her rosary shows her special devotion to the Blessed Mother who is her patroness too for all the Sisters bear the name Mary.

A bride wears a veil on her wedding day, symbolizing her relinquishing the virginal state for the married one. The nun wears her veil because it symbolizes her virginity, like Mary's, and her espousal to Him Who had no mother in heaven and no father on earth — the Virgin Christ.

A Sister of Mercy wears a ring signifying this consecration and making her union as realistic as any bride's. Inside her ring is inscribed a motto of her choice.

THE NEWCOMER to the Mercy Motherhouse enters "the postulancy," a period of six to nine months of getting acquainted with the life of a Sister of Mercy and of learning the meaning of religious life. She follows a well-balanced schedule of prayer, study, work and recreation while her superiors judge her adaptability to the new life.

The postulant goes under daily instruction of the Mistress of Novices in the spiritual exercises of a religious, the Constitutions of the community, the history and spirit of its Foundress, and the virtues of Christ-like life.

She begins her college education in Catherine McAuley Junior College in the Motherhouse and receives specialized training in particular fields such as teaching, nursing, music, nursing and domestic work.

Regular weekly classes in Scripture, Church history, philosophy and theology are conducted by a priest faculty.

When this period of probation ends, the postulant receives the habit and white veil of a Sister at the "Reception" ceremony. She then becomes a member of the Novitiate and begins her two years' religious training as a novice.

The first year, known as the canonical year, is devoted to the

study of the principles of religious life, the obligations of the vows and the duties and responsibilities religious life entails. It is during this year, too, that broader exercises of prayer, especially meditation, are asked of each novice. After the canonical year the novices continue their secular studies at the Junior College.

The second novitiate year brings a deeper formation of the mind and heart of each novice. Instruction in the virtues of religious life forms the reservoir of strength needed for later duties.

WHEN THE TWO year training period of the novitiate has expired, the novices are admitted to temporary vows for three years, promising fidelity in "poverty, chastity and obedience and the service of the poor, sick and ignorant." The white veil of the novice is exchanged for the black veil of a professed Sister. For the next three year period, Sister is officially known as a "Junior Professed."

At the expiration of this period, the novice pronounces her four vows again, for life, and becomes a full-fledged Sister of Mercy. As a sign of her heavenly espousal, she wears henceforward a silver ring placed upon her finger by the Bishop during the profession ceremony.

Inspired by the deep spirit of charity, stressed so often by Foundress Mother McAuley, the new Mercy Sister goes forth to the thousands of little souls that await her ministering hands and heart.

This then is the panorama of years stretching before these young women. As the years pass, their happiness and beauty will deepen, not die. As one writer described a Sister ("God's career woman" he calls her), "She never grows old, for she has the daring of an explorer, the perseverance of the Fuller-Bush Man, the energy of an atomic explosion, the authority of an encyclopedia, the kindness of Santa Claus, the heredity of the Saints."



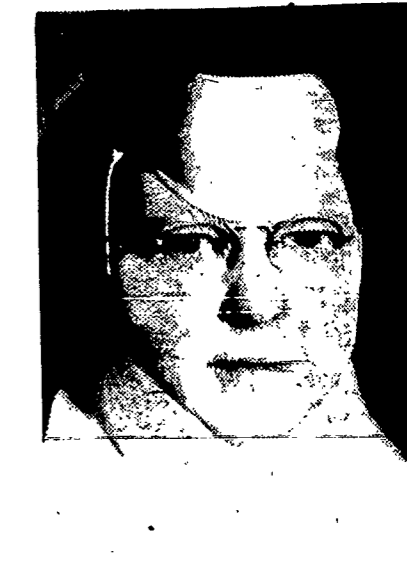
MOTHER MARY BRIDE
Mother Assistant



MOTHER CAMILLA
Councilor



MOTHER ANTONIA
Councilor



MOTHER MARY MARTIN
Bursar General

Century Of Devoted Service To Diocese

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work in the Academy had to be abandoned.

FIVE YEARS after the Sisters were located at the South Street Motherhouse, a small home was sent to Batavia to start a new convent. In 1867 another band of six Sisters started out to establish the work of Mercy at Holy Family Parish in Auburn. As was customary in those days a "free" parochial school and a "select" school were opened.

Grim Auburn State Prison, only two blocks from the Holy Family convent, had no chaplain in those early days but the Sisters were welcomed as visitors. They began frequent visits to the sick prisoners and to the Women's Prison section. This charity continued for over 60 years.

The first Southern Tier community of Mercy was established in 1867 in Corning. Here the Sisters began teaching at St. Mary's School which for years had been directly under the local public school Board of Education using lay teachers on the public payroll. This continued, with the Sisters teaching for the Town and being paid from school taxes.

In 1888 when the "Religious Garb Law" went into effect, the parish declined further public funds, the Sisters were permitted to stay and religion could be taught as part of the regular curriculum of a purely parochial school.

In 1889 the Sisters opened a Convent in Owego, New York. Nowhere was the demand for Sisters as great as in this small town where railroad shops had been recently opened.

By the end of their second year, nineteen sisters were insufficient to meet the parochial needs. One of the amusing memories of this era was the sight of the Sisters riding hand cars on the railroad tracks to nearby towns where they taught religion!

HORNELLVILLE received four Sisters of Mercy in 1871, when they began teaching in St. Ann's parochial school and opened the Academy of Mercy in the Convent. For many years a ninth year of study was conducted in connection with St. Ann's school.

In 1890, Hornell received more Sisters of Mercy when they assumed the administration of St. James Mercy Hospital, a foundation of Reverend James Early.

In 1951 the hospital added a million dollar wing which brings it up to 150 bed capacity. The hospital has a fully accredited nursing school and an accredited x-ray technician school.

In Rochester in 1872 the Sisters opened an Industrial School in their South Street Convent. Orphans and half-orphans lived at the convent and were taught sewing, lacemaking, wax work and embroidery. Wearing apparel made at the school was purchased by two Rochester department stores, Burke, Fitzsimons, Hone and Company, and Gordon's.

At one time there were 53 girls living at the convent, some of them supported by the City of Rochester at \$1.60 per week. Under the guidance of Sister Mary Francis this school has provided the inmates with

a good education since portions of each day and evening were applied to academic pursuits. This school functioned until 1898.

ANOTHER SERVICE for the Rochester Diocese was begun in 1883 with the opening of a Cliche or nursery school for the small children of poor mothers who must work to support their families.

Nine thousand dollars were borrowed to build this kindergarten where little children received food, instruction and often clothing for a charge of five cents a day. The work was abandoned in 1906.

St. Patrick's School, Elmira, was opened by the Batavia Mercy Sisters in 1894.

Three years later the Diocese of Buffalo was divided and the four Southern Tier counties of Steuben, Schuyler, Chemung and Tioga became part of the Rochester Diocese which had been created in 1888 with Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid as its first bishop.

This division meant that the four Convents of Mercy in Corning, Owego, Hornellsville and Elmira were now cut off from their Motherhouse at Batavia which was part of the Buffalo Diocese. Bishop McQuaid desiring union among the Sisters of Mercy in his diocese asked the Southern Tier communities to unite and choose St. Mary's, Rochester, as their Motherhouse.

As the century turned, the Sisters took up work at Holy Cross school in 1906 as their second parish mission in the city.

DUE TO THE extensive immigration of Italian population into Rochester, a new Italian parish was organized, and in 1908, four Sisters began commuting from St. Mary's to Mount Carmel School on Ontario Street. Within a month increased registration required six more Sisters.

Reputedly the poorest of all the fields where the Sisters labored, it was at Mount Carmel that the Sisters of Mercy became the loyal friends of the then Father Walter Foery, present Bishop of Syracuse. "With him they shared their poverty and their bread."

The educational influence of the Sisters of Mercy over the years was widely extended in the diocese. One after another they were called upon to staff the schools of St. Vincent's, Corning; St. John's, Clyde; St. Cecilia's, Elmira; St. John the Evangelist, St. Andrew's, St. Salome's, St. Thomas, St. Cecilia's, St. Charles and St. James in Rochester; St. Louis, Pittsford; St. Michael, Newark; St. Joseph's, Penfield; and St. Rita's, West Webster.

On January 2, 1916, fire destroyed the South Street Motherhouse in Rochester, and the Sisters were forced to convert their summer residence at St. John's Park, Charlotte, into a Motherhouse and novitiate.

The fire was a serious disaster for it wiped out the home hallowed by 59 years of residence of hard working, holy women. A few were injured in the quick-spreading flames. Mother Benedict, Mistress of Novices, was burned badly but recovered; Reverend Mother Mary Irene broke her ankle in a leap from the second story window and five other Sisters were overcome by the smoke and suffered minor injuries.

IN THE NIGHT of tragedy the quick decision to convert the Charlotte summer house into a temporary Novitiate and Motherhouse seemed logical and wise, but it was always inadequate for the facilities were cramped and the residence had never been built for year-round use.

The Sisters stayed at Charlotte for another 15 years making it their diocesan headquarters while praying and looking for land to build.



Bishop Kearney Offers Mass in Mercy Motherhouse Chapel

In 1917 the Tolan family gave them 18 acres on Blossom Road and another 32 acres were purchased adjoining it in 1923.

City-wide need for an additional high school for girls to supplement Nazareth Academy and the hope that a girls' school would provide new candidates for the community, moved the Sisters to build Our Lady of Mercy High School on the new property before planning their Motherhouse.

On May 7, 1931, almost three years after the high school was opened, September 8, 1928, the Sisters moved into the beautiful Motherhouse next door.

The Community used the third floor of the high school for its Chapel until June of 1951 when a magnificent chapel wing was dedicated on the Motherhouse.

A modern step in meeting the needs of the children under their care was the establishment of a year-round Reading Laboratory in October, 1951.

This clinic conducts classes for remedial reading throughout the year at Mercy High School and for five weeks during the summer months extends its service to four other centers in Rochester, Auburn, and Corning. With its extensive program it appeals to both boys and girls at all grade levels who have reading problems.

THE SISTERS also have established Mother McAuley Junior College at the Blossom Road Motherhouse, a State-accredited training school for the young Sisters about to enter the teaching profession. Formally opened in January, 1951, the Junior College gives Postulants and Novices a degree qualifying them to teach in all elementary schools in New York State.

The latest foundation of the Mercy Sisters is the \$1,660,000 Notre Dame High School for boys and girls erected on the south side of Elmira following an enthusiastic public subscription of funds.

Opened in September, 1955, with a full 4 year curriculum and 250 students, the school has taken an honored place in the roster of Mercy schools.

Future plans for the Sisters' service to the diocese include staffing Our Lady of Lourdes School, Elmira, in the fall of '57, and opening Annunciation School, Rochester, and Good Shepherd School, Henrietta, in '58.

As the Centenary Year opened, the Mercy community announced plans for a \$2,000,000 expansion program for the Motherhouse.

A Novitiate Wing extending to the west of the main building, will shortly provide urgently needed living space for postulants and novices and enlarged facilities for the Catherine McAuley Junior College.

Included in the building plans are enlargement of the Mercy Reading Laboratory and a Testing and Guidance center for analysis and vocational direction.