

**Protestants
To Hear Prelate**

St. Louis—(RNS)—Joseph E. Cardinal Ritter, Archbishop of St. Louis, will be the speaker for the 115th commencement service at Eden Theological Seminary here June 4.

"This is the first time a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church will address the graduating class of a Protestant seminary," according to Dr. Robert T. Fauth, president of Eden.

"We are delighted that Cardinal Ritter should be the person to do this, for we have come to know him as a dedicated and effective proponent of the ecumenical spirit," Dr. Fauth said.

A Story that Began 25 Years Ago

How Did Rochester Nuns Get to Selma?

Selma gave Rochester "Opera under the Stars!"

And world famous pianist-conductor Jose Iturbi helped the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Rochester Diocese establish their mission in that little Alabama city, itself now also world famous.

These are some of the facts we unearthed when we asked at the Motherhouse in Pittsford — "How come our nuns picked Selma twenty-five years ago to be their mission outpost?"

Coincidence, or for those who have faith, divine Providence, would a skein of events which fulfills the old saying about "truth is stranger than fiction."

THE STORY begins in Elmira.

Sister Rose Miriam in 1940 had just been elected Mother General of the diocesan community of nuns. She was wrapping up details at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira where she had served as administrator for several years.

Monsignor John S. Randall, then diocesan director of the Society for the Propagation of

the Faith, was in Elmira that weekend to preach at one of the parish churches there. He went over to the Hospital to congratulate her and she told him, "One of the first things I want to do is establish a mission for our nuns. I think it will strengthen our order immensely."

Monsignor Randall then described a plea he had received only a few days before—from the Edmundite Fathers in Selma, Alabama. Their superior, Father Francis Casey, formerly an insurance agency executive in Boston, had visited Rochester to ask for his struggling three year old project.

"We need nuns," he told Monsignor Randall.

So he relayed the appeal to the new Mother General.

And how perfectly this fitted into all her hopes!

As a college student she was a member of the St. Peter Claver unit of the Catholic Students Mission Crusade and devoted a good portion of her after-school hours to the Negro people of Rochester — then only a fraction of their present number.

She developed a deep admiration for the warm religious faith of the Negroes and also a growing concern that affluent white Catholics, so generous in contributing to foreign missions, were so little aware of the vast mission field at their doorsteps.

Someday, the young college girl dreamed, she would try to do something personally to show the American Negroes that the Catholic Church loved them and wanted them to be its members too.

So then and there in Elmira the Selma project was born.

Within four months, the pioneer group of four nuns was on its way.

And what did they find when they arrived?

The "Selma Alumnae" now total 40 nuns, plus the eleven there now.

We talked with Sister Louis Bertrand and Sister Alma Joseph at the Motherhouse. Here is what they described:

The first group of nuns

established a "beach-head" by visiting the homes of the sick poor.

Many of the aged were alone, unable to cook their meals, unable to do even elementary housekeeping chores.

So the nuns turned a rambling house into the Holy Infant Inn — it opened for its first guests on Christmas Eve.

A "parish hall" — another ramshackle house — was used for catechism classes for children.

As the nuns continued their home visiting, they came to the conclusion that Selma's Negroes needed a first class hospital. At that time Negroes were cared for in what was called Good Samaritan Hospital — an outpost of Selma's Baptist Hospital, actually owned and staffed by the city's doctors.

When word got out that the nuns were going to build a hospital, the doctors offered to sell them Good Samaritan.

Father Casey paid the price, "and I still remember how he came back waving the deed and saying, 'It's ours, let's get going,'" Sister Alma Joseph said.

AND WHAT did the nuns find at their new hospital?

"We went over about ten in the morning," Sister Alma Joseph recalls. "It was quite a place. We were appalled."

The cook was getting the dinners ready.

One of the nuns said, "I'll help you. Where are the trays?"

"Trays, Ma'am? We's got none."

For twenty-six patients, there were four plates. The rest ate out of tin cans and used their fingers.

"The mattresses had more life in them than some of the patients," Sister Louis Bertrand said. "We took them out and burned them all. We cleaned house for a week."

She also recalls the "three strikes against us" when they had any business transactions with white citizens in Selma.

Some of them bluntly told the nuns, "We don't want your business." Others would give

them what they asked for, sullenly, but wouldn't take the money from their hands, they had to put it down on the counter. "We were Yankees, Catholics and 'nigger lovers' and that made us lepers to a lot of people there."

Some sunshine filtered through, however.

Sister Louis Bertrand described how the Sisters of Mercy "on the other side of town" used to "come down to us on our feast days and invite us up there for theirs," or send a cake or school supplies over to St. Elizabeth's, the name of the parish for the Negro Catholics in Selma.

"The old bitterness is breaking up," Sister Louis Bertrand believes. "The new generation knows the old system can't go on forever. They've also come to realize that what we've been doing there for a quarter of a century — has been good for Selma. We have a good-sized payroll, the merchants realize our checks don't bounce and that educated, healthy citizens — black or white — mean a prospering community."

She also admits the exasperating reluctance of the whites to let Negroes vote was bound to trigger the present turmoil. "The priests have been trying to tell them this for years," she said.

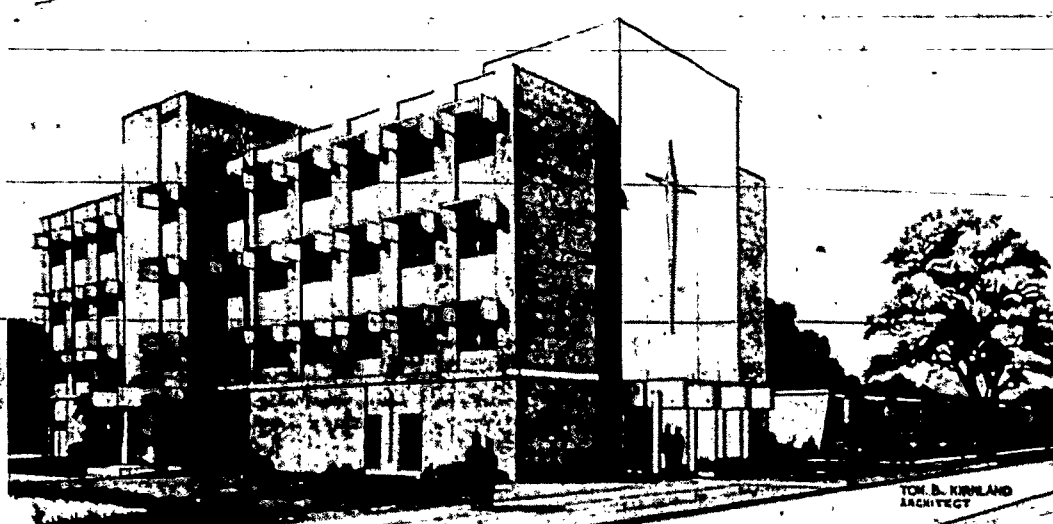


Sister Alma Joseph and Sister Louis Bertrand look over booklet which describes "early days" at Selma mission twenty-five years ago.

Shacks like this in Selma were fixed up to be a home and a hospital for the aged sick poor.



"The mattresses had more life in them than some of the patients!"



Drawing of hospital building recently completed.



This was Good Samaritan Hospital after it was cleaned, painted and re-opened for patients.

She also said she thought Selma's Mayor, Joe T. Smitherman, is one of the "new generation" that wants to move along "realistically." "He is a segregationist, of course. He has to be or he would never get elected but he knows you can't act today as if we were still in the middle of the last century."

Will the civil rights demonstrations of the past month set the situation back to its former atmosphere of suspicion and hate?

"I don't think so," Sister Louis Bertrand said. "Our nuns stayed on their job at the Hospital all through the turmoil. They worked around the clock and many of the Selma white people who never came to the Hospital before volunteered services and supplies. Maybe we'll all come out of it all knowing and understanding each other much better."

Sister Alma Joseph and Sister Louis Bertrand, who is a wheelchair patient recovering from an auto accident in Alabama and from arthritis, have countless other stories of the early days in Selma—"but our hopes and prayers are for the future."

And what about that Jose Iturbi aspect of the story?

Back in the summer of 1940, Monsignor Randall decided he'd raise some funds (not an unusual idea for him) for the nuns' mission to Selma. He organized a musical concert to be held at Manitou Beach, next to the old Odenbach Hotel. It was a beautiful summer evening, exquisite music by Eastman School of Music students — but only a handful of people attended.

Jose Iturbi suggested a city park as a better site and he offered to play and conduct. So a second concert was scheduled.

Sister Francetta has been given permission to wear secular dress in her government post, rather than the habit of the Sisters of Loretto which she has worn since joining the congregation in 1918.

Her duties with the OEO have not yet been entirely defined. It was reported she would work as a consultant and coordinator with Job Corps Centers for women throughout the U. S. These will play an important role in the government's war on poverty.



St. Elizabeth's School began here in 1940.



Opening day at new St. Elizabeth's School in Selma.

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What's Missing?

from this
Modern Kitchen
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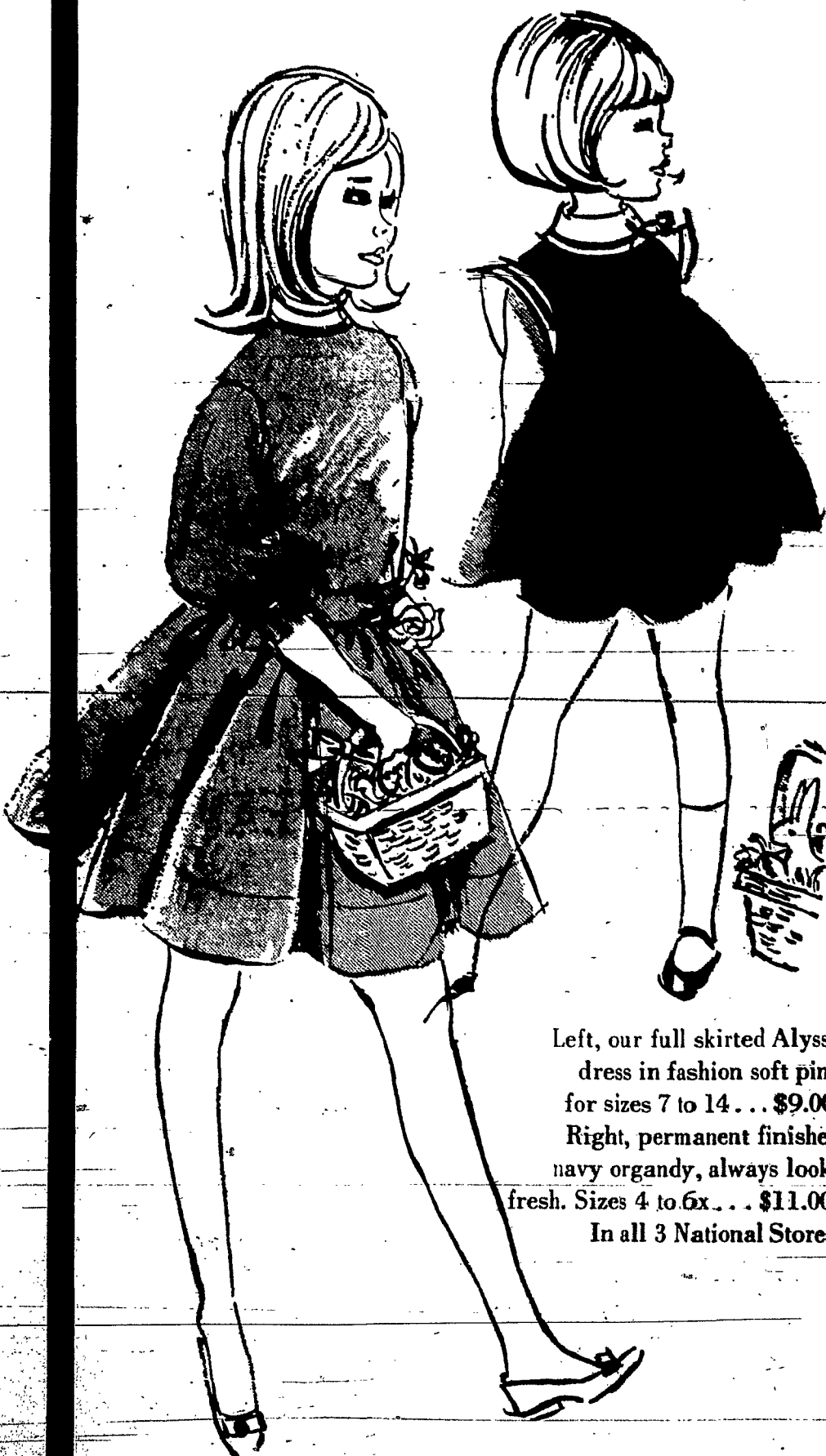
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