

Dominicans in Elmira Looking Ahead on 25th Anniversary

The following account of the history and life at the Dominican Monastery in Elmira was written for the Courier-Journal by one of the Sisters from Rochester Diocese there.

The Dominican Nuns at their monastery in Elmira are taking a reflective look at their past these days, but in the perspective of the future.

Last Aug. 16 marked the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Monastery of Mary the Queen. Formal commemoration of the event is scheduled Oct. 7, the feast of the Holy Rosary.

Now that their roots have sunk deep in the soil of the Chemung Valley, what are their sentiments at this landmark in their history? There is gratitude, of course, for the blessing of God shown in their years of growth; but there is, as well, faith in and hope for the future for those who see in their way of life an opportunity to serve the diocese and the whole Church.

A few weeks ago they had as their guest one of their Dominican priest brethren, on leave from his mission work in Pakistan. During an evening visit with the community he related many of his experiences in a rugged area where the people live in the most primitive conditions of life, illiterate and destitute.

He explained that a priest working in these conditions soon realizes how little he can do in a field so vast and needy, and that, unless he had deep faith in the loving providence of God, the sight of such widespread disease, famine and starvation would lead him quickly to utter discouragement.

Then he exclaimed: "This is where you come in!"

He firmly believes that the prayers of contemplatives will do more for the world than the activity of many missionaries, and that the contemplative is the necessary counterpart of the missionary.

It is this kind of vision and encouragement which gives the nuns their hope for the future.

The Church still views the contemplative life as a necessary and vital part of her structure. The Second Vatican Council in its decree on "The Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life" states:

"Such communities will always have a distinguished part to play in Christ's Mystical Body, where all members have not the same function. For they offer God a choice sacrifice of praise... By imparting a hidden, apostolic fruitfulness, they make this people grow."

This is exactly what St. Dominic thought when he was about to found his Order of Preachers more than 700 years ago. Even before he officially formed his first group, he had his silent "preacheresses" among some women.

These first Dominican Nuns began their existence in Prouille, France, in 1206. Their monasteries spread rapidly into Italy, Spain, Germany and throughout Europe.

It was not until 1880 that a new dimension was added to the women of the Order. Father Damien Marie Saintourens, O.P., saw his mission in the Order as one dedicated to spreading the devotion of the Rosary—a devotion which had been associated with the Dominican Order since its inception.

He conceived a form of contemplative life in which a branch of the Order's women would be, as it were, a "guard of honor" around Our Lady by the perpetual recitation of the Rosary day and night.

The Dominican Sisters of the Perpetual Rosary were born in Calais, France, and from there spread to Belgium and the United States. Their first foundation was established in Union City, N.J., in 1891. In 1904 a foundation was started in Buffalo, and it was from there, in 1944, that a group of eight nuns came to Elmira.

A proposal to bring cloistered Dominican nuns to the Rochester Diocese was made to Bishop James E. Kearney, who suggested they locate in the southern portion of the diocese. Monsignor Gerald C. Lambert, director of Rochester Catholic



BAKING COOKIES FOR SALE—NUNS ALSO SELL VESTMENTS, HOLY CARDS, ETC.



MONASTERY AT 1310 W. CHURCH STREET—PUBLIC CHAPEL IS AT RIGHT.

Charities, aided in the search for property.

A plot at 1310 W. Church St. was discovered. Its four acres included a large frame structure which formerly had been the Elmira Country Clubhouse. Uninhabited for three years, the shabby had grown wild, and it was almost impossible to get near the cellar windows with overgrown brush. It was purchased June 15, 1944, for \$9,000.

Few persons would understand the feelings of a cloistered nun when she leaves a monastery where she has lived, prayed, worked, loved, laughed and cried for many years.

It is a dramatic moment for those leaving and those left behind: the last recreation together, the last Mass in the big familiar choir, the prayers for travelers, the hasty last-minute preparations. The community Chronicle has this entry: "The Kiss of Peace was begun with tears in all eyes, and few could restrain their grief, for it was the last time we would see these Sisters in Jesus."

During the first year, repairs were completed, the dwelling was transformed and a cloister fence erected.

The growth of the community has been slow but fairly steady. For almost three years there were no candidates and the Sisters became discouraged. Then, within the space of a year, four girls were received as postulants. There are 21 members in the community at present.

By 1949 it was evident that additional space would be needed. With the help of friends a campaign for funds was undertaken. A new permanent wing was completed in 1952, containing a community room, small infirmary, kitchen, refectory, laundry and sleeping accommodations. With the help of a fairly large legacy, the debt on the wing was liquidated in 1957.

A permanent chapel and an additional wing were completed in 1965. Though funds to begin this construction seemed adequate at the time, along with a considerable bank loan, living costs and material prices soared so rapidly and have remained so high that the monastery has been left heavily in debt.

In Elmira the nuns try to support themselves by their work as far as possible, though outside help still is needed even to meet current expenses. Their working hours, too, are limited by the many hours devoted to the primary duty of prayer by maintenance of buildings and properly household duties and the care of the sick.

From its inception the community has accepted orders for liturgical vestments and altar linens. Later, various types of art work, the natural outgrowth

of the talents of individual Sisters, were added. They include paintings, creation of originaly-designed holy cards and notepaper, and so forth. In 1963 the Queen's Cooky Shop was inaugurated. Cookies are on sale, on order, throughout the year.

The daily life of the community is in keeping with the essential spirit and traditions of the Dominican Order. The Eucharistic Sacrifice and the choral singing or recitations of the Divine Office always have priority in the schedule.

Liturgical prayer is complemented and carried on in the Rosary recitation day and night continuously, with Sisters succeeding others each hour. The Rosary contains basically all the mysteries of the liturgy. Mental prayer, reading and study also have their place in the full day of monastic life. Lectures in theology and Scripture are provided by tape recording.

There also are the simple joys of recreation. One is a recent gift of a ping pong table; an equally welcome gift was a German Shepherd watch dog, "Sabina," who has endeared himself to all the nuns and who thoroughly resents any intrusion on their enclosure and makes all outsiders loudly aware of it.

The future of our monastery is built upon its past. Here is a partial quote from the "Dogmatic Constitution of the Church": "Even though in some instances religious do not directly mingle with their contemporaries, yet in a more profound sense these same religious are united with them in the heart of Christ and cooperate with them spiritually. In this way the work of building up the earthly city can always have its foundation in the Lord and can tend toward Him."

Mother Mary Theresia (Florence) Kelleher of Buffalo, founder and first superior of the Elmira Monastery, still is among the 21 Sisters here. The present superior is Mother Mary Terence (Theresia) McNulty, who entered from Sacred Heart Cathedral, Rochester.

Fourteen of the Sisters entered from Rochester diocesan parishes—three from St. Charles Borromeo, Greece, and two from St. Francis Xavier, Rochester. They include: Sister Mary Clare (Eleanor) Russner, who entered from St. Augustine's Church; Sister Maria Consolata Siracusa, St. Francis Xavier; Sister Mary Agnes (Rosemary) Daley, Holy Trinity; Sister Mary Catherine (Mary Frances) Wolfe, Blessed Sacrament, Rochester; Sister Mary of the Angels (Virginia) Quill, St. Mary's Auburn; Sister Mary Michael (Patricia) Claus, Corpus Christi, Rochester.

Also Sister Mary Dominic (Margaret) Balconi, St. Thomas More, Brighton; Sister Miriam (Bonnie Lynn) Schell, St. Charles Borromeo, Greece; Sister Mary Stephen (Jacqueline) Heffer, St. Charles; Sister David Marie (Sandra) Belkitch, St. Charles; Sister Mary of the Precious Blood (Antoinette) Sorbello, St. Francis Xavier; Sister Marie Elizabeth (Alice) Mizarek, St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads; Sister Mary Paul (Carol) Murphy, St. John of Rochester, Perinton; Sister Josephine Houssman, St. Patrick's, Elmira.

Also Sister Mary Dominic (Margaret) Balconi, St. Thomas More, Brighton; Sister Miriam (Bonnie Lynn) Schell, St. Charles Borromeo, Greece; Sister Mary Stephen (Jacqueline) Heffer, St. Charles; Sister David Marie (Sandra) Belkitch, St. Charles; Sister Mary of the Precious Blood (Antoinette) Sorbello, St. Francis Xavier; Sister Marie Elizabeth (Alice) Mizarek, St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads; Sister Mary Paul (Carol) Murphy, St. John of Rochester, Perinton; Sister Josephine Houssman, St. Patrick's, Elmira.

Msgr. John E. Marney, pastor, also announced that Rosary prayers for peace will be recited daily throughout October following the 12:05 p.m. Mass.

Rosary Society members will make available to parishioners "Scriptural Rosary" booklets, described as a modern version of the way the Rosary was once prayed in the Middle Ages.

'Living Rosary' Scheduled at Corpus Christi

Intercession of the Blessed Mother for world peace will be sought through a Living Rosary ceremony in Corpus Christi Church at 4 p.m. on Rosary Sunday, Oct. 5.

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Grand Knight Installed in Greece

Dr. George Fineout was installed as grand knight of Greece Council 3892, Knights of Columbus, at a dinner Sept. 27 at the New Dutch Mill.

Father John Steger, pastor of St. Jude's Church, was re-elected council chaplain. Other officers installed included Frank V. Fatta, John J. Surash, William Reynolds, Joseph C. Gelfell, Martin J. Kolb, Pierre Reiland, Edward Miller, Joseph J. Villa, Dominic De Franco, Gerald Pierson, John M. Morphy, James J. Philippone and Richard Sullivan.

K. of C. Honors Three Members

Coming—Three veteran members of Corning Council, Knights of Columbus, have been presented honorary life memberships.

Honored were Joseph E. Hayes, Earle T. Keenan and John R. Osborne. Grand Knight William Russell made the presentations. Also honored was Robert Young, who headed the council from 1967 until last May.

Confrontation

Up-Coming Events

By JOAN ZUMMO

Get out your calendar with the write-on squares and make a note of the following upcoming events and their dates.

The Gabriel Richard Institute course will be offered for all interested persons at two city locations.

The basic course will be offered in nine weekly sessions at the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 1000 Winton Rd. N., starting on Monday, Oct. 13, at 7:30 p.m. and at St. Bernard's Seminary, 2200 Lake Ave., starting on Tuesday, Oct. 14 at 7:30.

Demonstration sessions will be held at Good Shepherd at 8:00 p.m. Sept. 29 and at St. Bernard's at 8:00 on Sept. 30. For further information contact the CCD office.

If there is still anyone interested in the CCD teachers training course contact the CCD office. This is an excellent course, not only for teachers, but also for those interested in an up-to-date review of theology. Courses are offered in the evening at Annunciation, Brockport, St. Rita's, in Geneva, and on Thursday mornings at the CCD Office.

A principal's workshop will be held on Oct. 18 at St. John of Rochester at 1:00 p.m. The introductory talk by Sr. Bernard, R.S.M., will be "Theology of Administrator's Role in School."

Seminars conducted by local authorities will include Principal and Teacher, Principal and Student, Principal and Total Curriculum, and Principal and the Parish. Registration will be \$1.00. Forms will be available from the CCD Office.

The Saddler people will hold a workshop at Holy Spirit Church on Oct. 21 and 22. The first evening will cover the text and material of grades one and six and the second evening will be devoted to grades seven and eight. Further information will be mailed to CCD personnel before the workshop. This offering should be of benefit to many since this

DINNER-DANCE

Elmira—A charter presentation dinner-dance is scheduled by the newly-formed Horseheads Council 11618, Knights of Columbus, at the Holiday Inn at 7 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 11. Reservations may be made through Frank Saly, 348 Marshall St., Horseheads.

Correction

Last week's Courier-Journal printed the text of Thomas McGarry's address to the parishioners of St. John the Evangelist's Church, Greece. The talk was not delivered at St. Leo's, Hilton, as reported.

series is widely used throughout the Diocese.

If you aren't yet signed up for an adult theology program check last week's Courier-Journal for details or call or write Adult Religious Education Program, P.O. Box 231, Geneva, phone: 716-789-1991. There is a real variety of courses offered this year.

Topics include Sacraments, Scripture, sex education, Penitence, Marriage, Religious Beliefs, Liturgy, Mary, Justice, Bible Themes and a variety of others. Some of the courses are ecumenical in approach and are offered as a service to any interested persons.

Another very interesting adult theology program is a



Church Schedules

Four Candidates

Four candidates for supervisor of the Town of Greece or their representatives will address members of the St. Lawrence Church Men's Club at 8 p.m. Monday, Oct. 6, at the parish hall.

Each of the party representatives—Republican, Democratic, Conservative and Independent—will give his viewpoint for 10 minutes and all will then answer questions.

A dinner at 6:30 p.m. will precede the meeting. Dinner reservations must be made with James Harmon, 225-1674.

course offered in the-Greece Central School Adult Education program. Called "Ethical Problems of Our Day—The New Morality," the course will be taught at 7:30 on Thursdays starting on Sept. 25. Graduates of the CCD basic teachers course will be awarded advanced credit for this course.

While you are circling dates make a note of April 25, 1970 for next year's Lay Catechist's Institute.

One more beginning-of-the-year note: each of your teachers should have a copy of the Christian Formation Committee's Interim report on Religious Education, or at least be familiar with its contents. CCD principals were mailed copies during the summer.

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