



Nazareth Alumnae Beaux Arts

Among the committee leaders for the Nazareth College Alumnae Association beaux arts, scheduled at 7 p.m., Saturday, April 11, at Oak Hill Country Club, are, from left, Mrs. Thomas A. Lyons, Mrs. William Ouwellen, Mrs. Gerard Schmitt and Mrs. Sam Urzetta. Proceeds of the annual dance will aid the Sister Helen Daniel Endowment Fund, established in honor of Sister Helen Daniel, Nazareth College president.

Sister Mary Francesca Termed A Wonderful, Dedicated Teacher

By SR. MARY PIUS
KEOUGH, R.S.M.

Sister Mary Francesca, a Religious Sister of Mercy, born Nora Marie Connor, died April 4 in St. Mary's Hospital at the age of 82.

In the city of Rochester, she was best known for having founded and been the first principal of Our Lady of Mercy High School on Blossom Road.

Ten years ago, she requested that at her death her eyes be donated to the Rochester Eye Bank "... to be used to restore the sight of some blind person, or for research, seeking to prevent blindness and find cures for diseases of the eye." So within 60 minutes after her death her request was granted.

Somehow this final act of generosity is a significant symbol of the life and person of this extraordinary woman; for of all her gifts, and they were legion, one of the most widely respected was her vision — the kind of vision that does not depend upon the frailties of human eyesight.

Like Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Mercy Order, Sister Mary Francesca was always ahead of her time—planning, innovating, risking, if necessary. Her decisions were consciously made not only for the people and needs of the "now," but also for times unknown and people yet unborn.

On September 9, 1928, she opened a new high school for girls out "in the wilderness of Brighton." With four stalwart sister companions and 72 brave freshmen, she began to forge an institution, that within a decade held its own against any high school in the State.

In 1943, when Mercy High was evaluated for the first time by the Middle Atlantic States Secondary School Evaluation Committee, the committee's report was so excellent that the then Commissioner of Education, Dr. Edward Mooney, came to Rochester to inspect it for himself.

Subsequently, he confided, "If I had a daughter and lived in this area, I would send her to Mercy High School."

Sixteen years at the elementary level where she taught grades five through eight in four different schools in four different cities — St. Mary's, Corning, St. Patrick's, Owego, St. Cecilia's, Elmira and St. Charles Borromeo, Rochester — helped equip Sister Mary Francesca for teaching and understanding the girls she would meet on the secondary level at Mercy High School.

In addition to teaching, she was the principal in the latter

three. During those years she also completed the requirements for a B.A. and an M.A. from Canisius College in Buffalo.

Prior to her joining the Sisters of Mercy when she was 23, Sister had studied Fine Arts at what is now the Rochester Institute of Technology. This disciplined talent was an invaluable aid in her subsequent programs of beautifying and building at Mercy.

The number of the girls touched by Sister's influence in her nearly 30-year tenure at the high school climbed into the thousands. Not only was she the Principal, but in the early days of the school, she was also the mathematics department.

To her retiring day, she could name every girl in school, outline her scholastic and extra-curricular achievements, boast or lament her character development, and enumerate important family details. Sometimes the students wished she did not have such a good memory.

She asked only of them what she demanded of herself; namely, that they develop to the fullest whatever they had been given — character, talent, even physical prowess and beauty.

Mrs. Raymond Culross, a graduate of the first class and today a secretary in the Mercy office, recalls with warmth her association with the first Principal:

"She was unique. As a teacher, she was wonderful, intelligent, interesting, and dedicated; as an administrator, she was firm and just, yet warm and kind. Her example of goodness and discipline was magnificent."

The continued fruitful record of Our Lady of Mercy High School stems significantly from the matchless spirit of the first Principal and her colleagues.

The faculty lived on the third floor of the school, cooked their meals on a two-burner hot plate, ate on a table in the laundry; and used their precious evenings and weekends to beautify the grounds, to maintain a spotless building, and prepare their daily lessons as well.

Sister Mary Francesca boldly spearheaded a full-fledged curricular and extra-curricular program for the school.

In four short years, when the first 42 girls were ready to be graduated, Mercy was a fully accredited high school with majors in every important field, including programs in art, music, and physical education.

Those four years also saw the birth of the school newspaper and literary magazine, the Mis-

sion Society, the orchestra and glee club, and the Sodality — the first to be affiliated with Rome.

From the beginning, the girls wore a uniform which Sister Mary Francesca insisted be clean, pressed and complete.

She insisted on good grooming, not only in matters of dress, but also in bodily care and erect, ladylike posture. She abhorred discourtesy and uncouth language.

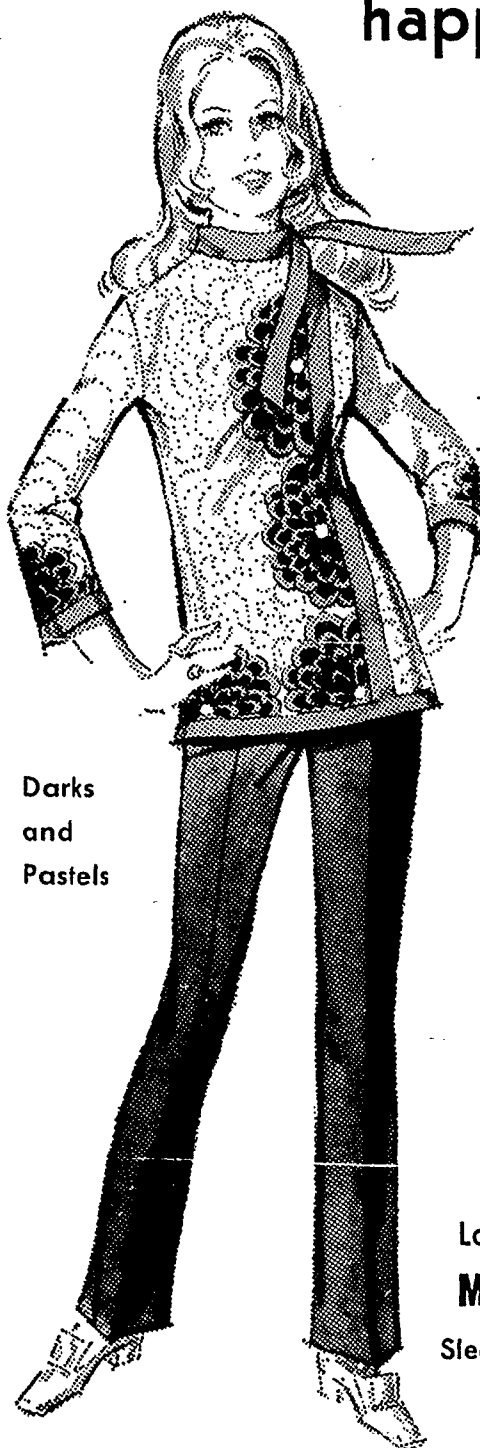
Sister Mary Francesca's efforts did not go unnoticed:

Bishop Kearney often referred to Mercy as the school where "... girls were still ladies."

A neighbor across Blossom Road, Monroe County Fire Commissioner Wackerman, observed

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