

50 Years Serving God

By **SISTER KATHLEEN MILLIKEN, RSM.**

Mother Mary Magdalene, 12 years Mother General of the Sisters of Mercy of the diocese, and a teacher in diocesan schools for more than 20 years, last week celebrated the golden jubilee of her religious life.

For Mother Magdalene, the beauty of 50 years as a Sister of Mercy has brought fullness to a life still active in the service of others. Gentle, gracious, with a twinkle in her eye betraying a never-failing sense of humor, she spends several hours each day interviewing freshmen at Cardinal Mooney High School, helping them investigate possible careers, encouraging doubtful students and those who "just want someone to listen."

Administrative positions in her congregation have claimed 30 of Mother's years in the religious life, and she is widely



MOTHER MAGDALENE

known in both clerical and lay circles.

Mother Magdalene began her career at St. John the Evangelist School on Humboldt Street, followed by six years of teaching Latin, German, math and religion at Our Lady of Mercy High School.

She received a B.A. in philosophy and Latin at Canisius College, and an M.A. in Latin from St. Bonaventure University.

In 1937 she was appointed directress of novices; three years later she became assistant to the mother general, and from 1943 to 1949 she herself served as mother general of the congregation.

In 1955 she was re-elected mother general for six years, then returned to Elmira as religious superior and member of the theology and guidance departments at Notre Dame High School from 1961 to 1967.

For the past three years Mother Magdalene has been on the guidance staff at Cardinal Mooney High School.

During her years as mother general, she was active in both the U.S. Conference of Major Superiors and the Sister Formation movement.

Important milestones achieved by the congregation during her administration included the opening of Notre Dame High School in 1955, the dedication of the McAuley special services wing of the motherhouse in 1959 and the celebration of the centenary of the Rochester Sisters of Mercy in 1957. The new Notre Dame Convent in Elmira was built and dedicated during her term there as superior.

Reflecting on the many changes she has observed throughout her years in the religious life, Mother Magdalene feels that they are signs of growth and health. Changes in structure and custom do not upset her; she considers them necessary and valuable: "The spirit is still there, but shown now in different ways," she opines.

She is one of the Sisters experimenting with wearing contemporary clothing, and often wears a black dress or suit.

Regarding youth, both in general and in the religious life, Mother finds them "very generous and willing. I have enjoyed working with them; give them a little more time for living and they'll be fine."

Special mention goes to the many priests she has known. Their cooperation often eased her burdens, and she particularly expresses gratitude to Bishop Kearney and Bishop Casey for their encouragement and support.

Among the other enriching relationships Mother has enjoyed are those with the Brothers of Holy Cross, with whom she worked in the planning of Cardinal Mooney High School.

"I owe much to the dedicated lay people too," she reminisces. "The interest and help offered by the women of the Mercy Guild, the Mercy High alumnae and the families and friends of the Sisters could not be measured."

Mother Magdalene celebrated her jubilee last week at Cardinal Mooney Convent. A small gathering of relatives and Sisters joined her for a special Mass of thanksgiving and dinner. It was a quiet celebration,

typical of a Sister who even in her days in the public eye was always retiring, deferring to others.

She truly shows that "the

fullness of life does not come from things outside us." Or, as the psalmist aptly sings, "The beauty of the king's daughter is from within."

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MOTHER THERESE COUDERC

Cenacle Foundress To Be Canonized

Blessed Therese Couderc, foundress of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle, will be elevated to sainthood by Pope Paul VI, Sunday, May 10, in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

The congregation Mother Therese founded is dedicated to providing spiritual renewal programs for both Catholics and non-Catholics, in more than 60 centers throughout the world.

Sister Clare Lill, the writer of this article, is a member of the community which operates the Cenacle Retreat House at 693 East Ave., Rochester.

By **SISTER CLARE LILL**

Sister Therese Couderc was born Feb. 1, 1805 in a mountain village of France, Sablieres. She was baptized Marie Victoire on the following day.

Marie Victoire grew up in a strong peasant environment. She was a daughter of the soil. Her education was meagre. But a priest giving a mission in her parish, Father Stephen Terme, saw in Marie Victoire a resolute girl of sound judgment, hard common sense, and a willingness to serve God. To her father, Claude Couderc, he said, "Give me your daughter. I want to make a nun of her."

Finally, permission was obtained and at the age of 22 Marie Victoire received the religious habit at the hands of the Bishop of Vivarais and took the name Therese.

A short time later Sister Therese was placed in charge of a house which Father Terme

had established at La Louvesc to grant hospitality to women making pilgrimages to the tomb of St. Francis Regis. Through her persuasion, these women pilgrims were gradually induced to spend a few days in meditation.

The days of prayer were soon to become retreats. Father Terme made a retreat under the Jesuits and experienced the Exercises of St. Ignatius. Won over to their searing logic, he persuaded the Sisters at La Louvesc to adapt the Spiritual Exercises for the pilgrims.

Father Terme died soon after; and Mother Therese, with the help of the Jesuit Fathers, wisely governed the new congregation for some years. During this time the congregation received the title — Congregation of Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle.

However God had other plans for Mother Therese and after some years as Superior General she was removed from office, being considered by some incapable of governing.

From that time on she was placed in the lowest rank and assigned only very humble and menial tasks in the congregation she had founded. She accepted all this willingly—seeing in it God's plan for her. Indeed, her title and renown as foundress was not so much by her ruling and teaching as by her resemblance to the "grain of wheat which must die in order to bring about much fruit."

Mother Therese died at 80 in the year 1885.

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