

# A Time and Place Alone

Text and Photos by Laurence E. Keefe

The Cenacle on East Avenue in Rochester blends the old with the new, the stately quiet of a traditional retreat house with ecumenism, and the perennial spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola with new religious forms.

The Cenacle, housing 11 sisters of the Order of the Cenacle, is located in the turn of the century Libanus

Todd mansion, with a new wing and chapel built in 1960. It has been offering retreats for women since Feb. 11, 1949, a year after Bishop James E. Kearney invited the Order into the diocese.

The purpose of her order in maintaining the Cenacle, explains retreat directress Sister Sadie Nesser, RC, is to carry out a mission as "the only congregation given solely to active spiritual guidance." One woman who later found her way to the Cenacle, says Sister Sadie, spent three days in a motel just to be alone away from her family and duties. "When a person needs to get away," she concludes, "a motel or a hotel just isn't what they need."

Besides regular retreats available for women, the Cenacle is the scene of many other activities. It hosts meetings of non-Catholic groups, gives cursillos, holds marriage encounters, sponsors two weekly meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous for women, has a service for Pentecostals on Sunday evenings and a seminar in effective living taught by Sister Marie Halligan, superior.

The nuns at the Cenacle attempt to tailor their programs to women with full schedules. A good example is the 30-day "home retreat" directed by Sister Sadie. Women who have families go through a prescribed course of reading and prayer similar to one established by St. Ignatius Loyola, but at the same time carry on with their outside responsibilities. Women in the program come in weekly for one-to-one guidance and direction, and to share their spiritual experiences.

Another instance of tailoring programs to the needs of participants is the second group of Alcoholics Anonymous. Originally only one group met in the Cenacle, and that was during the evening. Several of the younger women with children had difficulty arranging for baby sitters, so a second group was set up for afternoons before the children came home from school.

Until the time of Vatican II, the Cenacle sisters were partially cloistered; since 1962 they have been less sequestered and one member of the community does parish CCD work, but their primary work remains the development of spiritual awareness. In the distinguished quiet of their residence on East Avenue, the Cenacle sisters look forward to a year from June, when they will complete 25 years of work in Rochester.



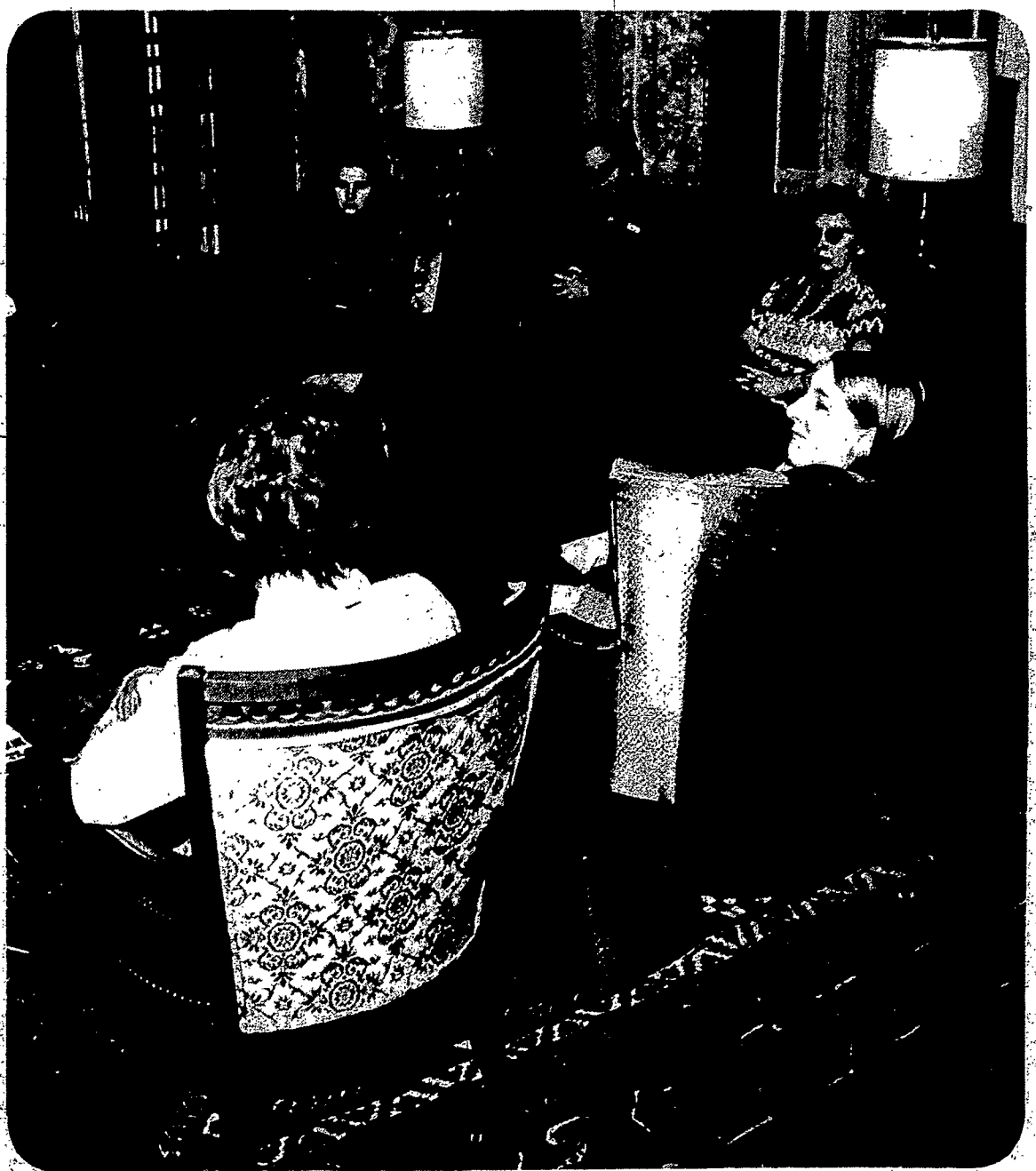
in the main retreat office.



Packed bags of retreatants wait in Cenacle foyer.



The Cenacle is a well-known landmark to Rochesterians.



After an overnight meeting, members of the Gates Presbyterian Women's Assn. listen to U. of R. senior Carol Adams talk on women's liberation. Wednesday, May 10, 1972