

In a time when religious vocations have fallen off drastically, one might expect to find a young nun unsure of her calling, but such is not the case with Sister Elaine Englert.

Sister Elaine teaches English, music and art in the junior high at Holy Apostles school on Lyell Avenue in Rochester. She's 25 years old, and, as the youngest in a convent housing six nuns, she bears the brunt of much of the teasing. Sister Ambrosine Casey, principal of the school, laughs, "We never have to ask who the phone is for, it's always for her."

But the community at Holy Apostles is not nearly as large as it used to be; where once it housed 18 Sisters of St. Joseph, now only the six of them live, and the top floor has been closed off.

Opposed to this is Sister Elaine's faith. "I don't feel that vocations are a problem. We have a basic hope in the Holy Ghost as religious that takes care of everything. Besides, I think the pendulum is swinging back," she says.

Sister Elaine enjoys teaching, which she thinks is "relevant."

"Teaching in a public school," she adds, "you can't really talk about Christ. There's a basic freedom here you wouldn't have anywhere else. Like, in the public schools, you have Christmas with all the emphasis on presents and Santa Claus, but you can't bring up any of the spiritual things behind it."

Sister Elaine would eventually like to move into teaching high school, which is what she trained for. After graduation from Nazareth Academy, she studied business education at Nazareth College.

She's now in the middle of her third year at Holy Apostles school. Before that she spent a year at Corpus Christi after finishing novice and postulant years at the Motherhouse on East Avenue.

Her day starts with communal prayer and Mass at the church across the street. After morning classes the nuns meet in the convent next to the school for their noon meal.

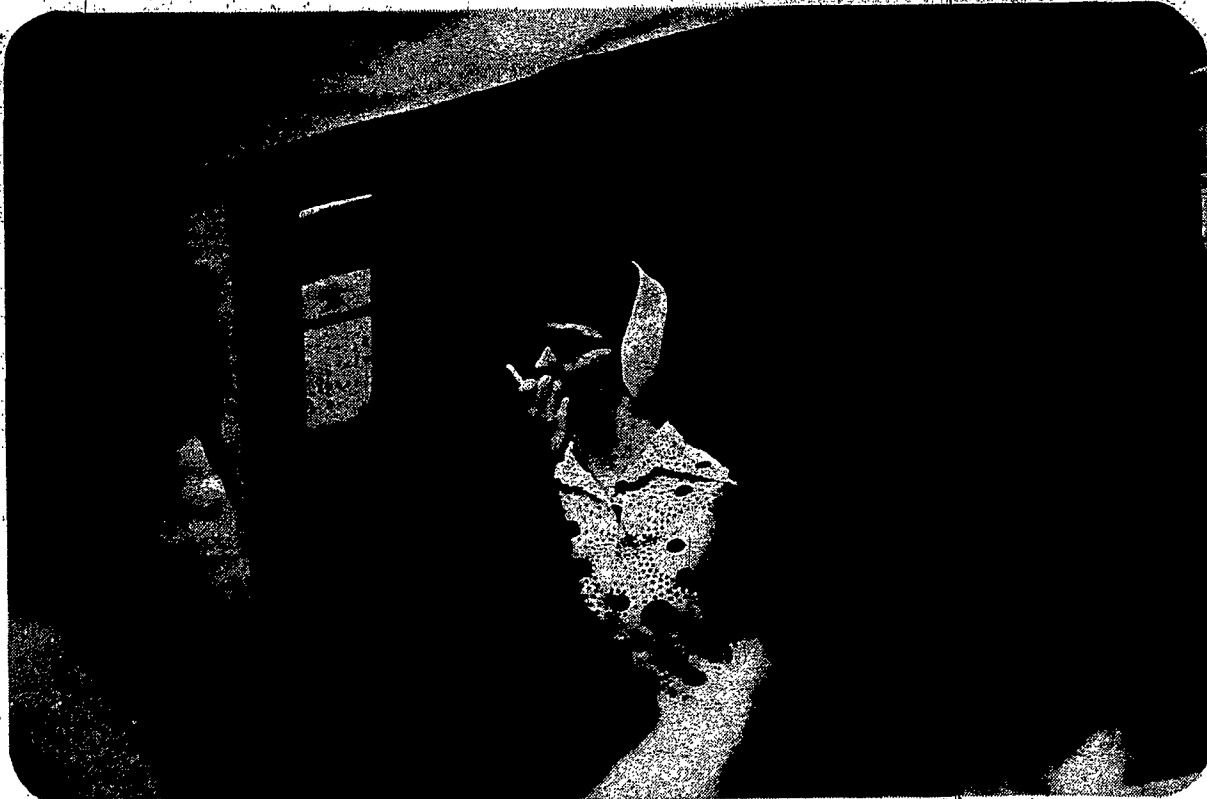
Lunch conversation is light and gossipy, about attendance, a boy's broken arm, and daily occurrences.

Afternoon classes over, Sister Elaine lays out the vestments in the sacristy for the morning Mass, corrects papers, goes out for dinner with some girl friends, and works at assigned chores around the house.

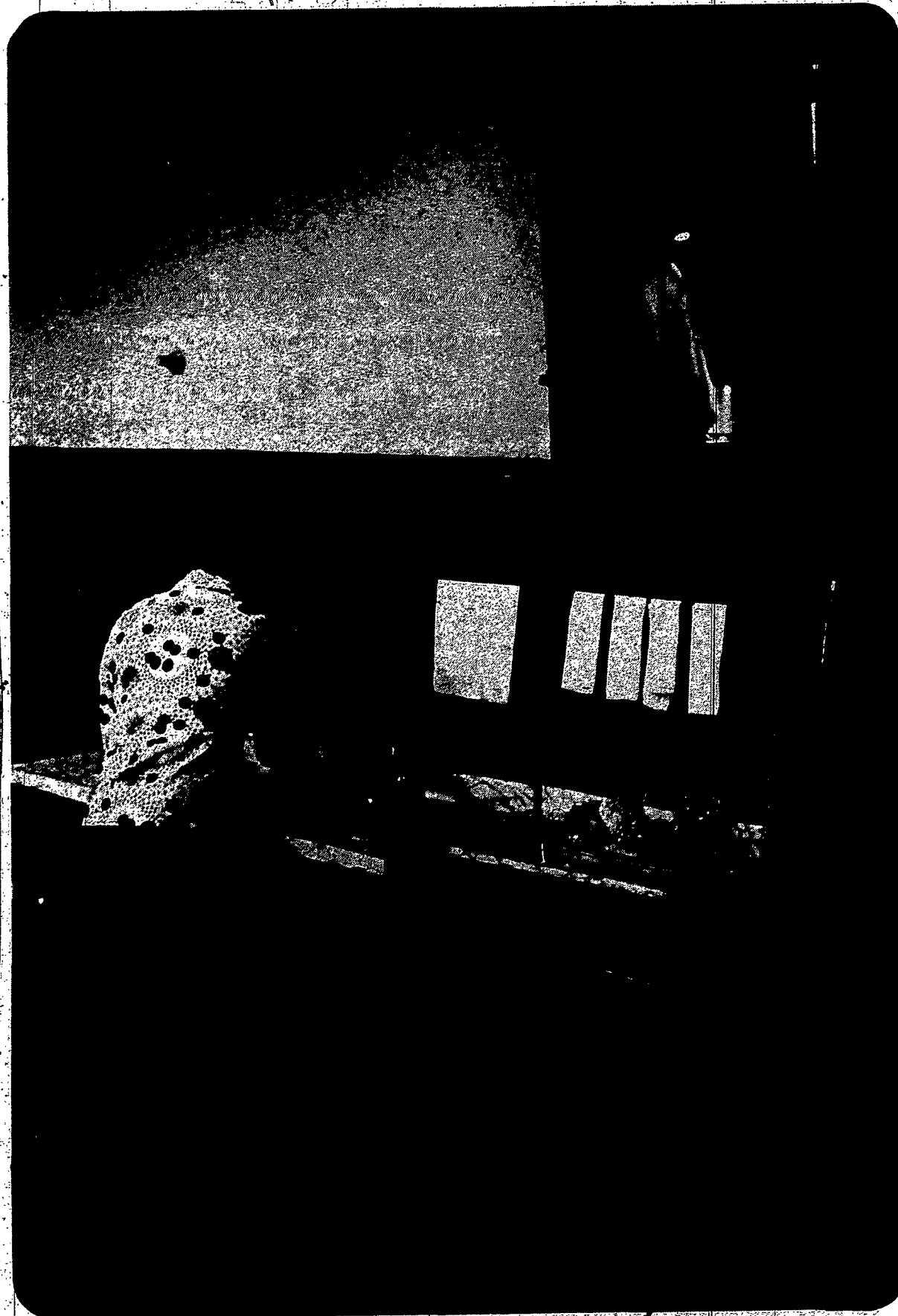
"You could never live this life without a vocation," she says. "You could never do it alone."



Noon meal brings the convent together.



Listening while a student struggles with an answer.



Each night she washes and fills the cruets for next morning's Mass.