

Making Andrew's Center A Family Place

BY SHARON DARNIEDER

They're Sisters of Mercy but they're also known as foster mothers.

Sisters Gaye Moorhead and Rachel Parlavacchio operate the first foster family care home endorsed by the Sisters of Mercy, and, as far as they know, the first home of its kind in the county run by religious.

(St. Joseph's Villa, run by the Sisters of St. Joseph, is in a different classification.)

Called Andrew's Center, the home is half of St. Andrew's Convent, 81 Barberry Ter. Leased from the parish it's known as a special service home and referrals come only from the Monroe County Department of Social Services.

"This means that we take children with special problems, or those that are hard to place," said Sister Gaye.

Such children include the black, the biracial or older child, those that are mildly physically or mentally handicapped, children

from abuse or neglect situations, those with mild behavioral problems and siblings who need to be placed together.

Currently the Sisters are caring for six children, the maximum number the home can provide for. The oldest is 15 and the youngest, 2 1/2.

(The home will take boys from one month to 10 years and girls from one month to 16 years.)

Andrew's Center is not primarily an educational facility (children attend local schools) but is more of a transitional home for those waiting for more permanent placement with a regular foster family or return to their former home.

The home, which provides a Christian environment for these children, began in January and is Sister Gaye's brainchild.

A former teacher and past director of the State Migrant Child Development Center, Perkinsville, her interest in foster homes developed through her friendship with a child at the Center who had been to several homes.

She discovered there was a shortage and decided to do something about it.

After researching the situation the year before she took her first vows, Sister Gaye asked for and received the approval of her order to open a foster home.

"We started our home in response to a growing need," she said simply.

She noted that present circumstances such as the declining birth rate, etc., doesn't affect foster care.

"You'll always have children that are abused or hard to place for other reasons," she continued, "and so there'll always be a need for foster homes."

Since the Sisters have started Andrew's Center they've received a lot of support from St. Andrew's parish as a whole.

"I've had people come up to me and ask us why we're doing it," Sister Gaye added, "and after I tell them they ask where they can get more information on foster homes, how they're started, the care, etc."

They haven't had any major discipline problems and although neither Sister feels the lack of a father figure has hurt them, Sister Gaye admits that it "wouldn't be an ideal situation for a child who had a long term assignment."

"We agree that the ideal situation for any child is in a family environment," she added, "but we started our home in response to a great need for them."

St. Augustine's Group Sets Summer Study

St. Augustine's Human Development Committee is sponsoring a How to Study program, July 8 to 31, Monday through Friday, from 1 to 3 p.m. There is no tuition fee for this program, only a \$3 charge for a textbook, for students in grade 8 or over.

Topics to be covered include note taking, reading, memorization, and public speaking, preparation of papers, reports and biblioographies, and how to use a library. The emphasis for the lower grades will be on reading.

Five experienced teachers have donated their time so that students taking the course can

return to school in the fall better equipped to learn. Enrollment is limited. For further information call Hank Mahor at 464-6325 or 235-5085.

NEWSLETTER SEMINAR

The Area Youth Ministry (AYM) will hold a seminar for newsletter editors and staff Wednesday, July 17, at 7 p.m. in St. Anthony's Church hall. Sister Marie Catherine SSJ, a teacher at Nazareth Academy and winner of numerous journalism awards will speak and moderate the discussion. Registration may be made by contacting AYM at 254-6018.



Photos by Susan McKinney

What's better than playing patty cake with just one? Why, when two can play, of course. Sister Rachel Parlavacchio and two of her current charges at a recent play session.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Sister Gaye

Our neighbors, I am convinced, must think we are crazy. Every morning between 7 and 7:15 a.m., shortly after downing our first cups of coffee, the head of the house and I take the Grand Tour.

We stop at the newest Plane Tree, planted last week, and check it for signs of new leaf. From there our path takes us to the curve of honeysuckle planted the month after we moved in, almost two years ago. They have doubled their size this spring alone, the pink and red flowers now giving way to red berries which the hen pheasants love.

From the honeysuckles it is only a step to our President Gravy French blue hybrid lilac which for all its fancy title did nothing this year in the way of bloom. The nurseryman says it was the shock of being transplanted from the nursery bed to our rocky piece of land.

Down to the garden. The potatoes, corn (what the cock pheasant left), beans, lettuce, cucumbers and zucchini are doing fine. But the tomatoes outstrip them all.

From the garden it is a few steps to our thicket composed of four white pine (there were seven), three tiny red maples taken from the woods and one wild strawberry plant with one red berry. Then, another row of honeysuckle, these too taken from an adjacent field.

Along the rocks which border one side of our yard we have scalped the sod away and planted some nasturtiums. This is a rewarding stop. Every morning a new nasturtium leaf has pushed its way through the soil.

The Sweet Williams are doing poorly but the marigold mound is dazzling with its proliferation of budding plants. From the woods the insidious grapevine is curling toward the tiny Norway spruce and buffalo berry shrub plus the lilac shoot from my grand-mother's garden.

Back up to the house nearly completing the backyard circle to inspect last year's plane trees

both doing beautifully thank you. Behind the garage the pole peas and the head lettuce are competing for honors. They are as beautiful as any flowers.

Out front the pachysandra, the new burning bush and pyracantha all seem fine as does the Norway Maple. A neighbor who helped me remove a boulder last week in order to plant the latter comes out and wants to know what is wrong with the tree.

Nothing, I tell her, and explain the Grand Tour to her. She laughs, a kindred soul, who professes to like nothing to do with housework, everything to do with gardening.

With the exception of a new leaf here and there, nothing has changed from the evening before. Our pleasure in this routine must certainly seem out of proportion to anyone who knew us in our bachelor days or to whom something green is merely something green.

I find myself hard put to explain the joy of this ritual except that to say perhaps in our advanced years we have learned that there is nothing quite so beautiful to watch as something growing whether it be nasturtiums or kids.



Sister Gaye Moorhead and friend discover that one of life's little pleasures — a wagon ride — can be found right in their own yard. The children also have a swing set.

She also noted a positive factor in their setup.

"Not all children can adopt to a family environment (other than their own), so sometimes it's good for a child in the long run," she said.

Sister Rachel, also a former teacher, has been interested in child care for a long time and describes her new job as "extremely challenging and interesting."

She, too, is acutely aware of the shortages of qualified foster homes and notes that "it'd be great if there were enough families around to take in children, but since there aren't we feel there's a real need for homes such as ours."

Both are delighted with its success and the fact that several children who have not done well at other homes have flourished during their stay at Andrew's Center.

"And, so far we've gotten good reports from the case workers," added Sister Gaye.

In the large convent, which has around 21 bedrooms, Andrew's Center occupies part of the first floor where the kitchen, dining area and other rooms are located.

The entire third floor houses bedrooms and a sitting TV room. Because the building is very sound it required only minor alterations here and there to adapt parts of it to meet the

qualifications for a foster family care home.

Five Sisters live on the same floor with Sisters Gaye and Rachel. All have other jobs during the day but help out with chores and the children during their free time.

In addition, three other Sisters live on the floor below and the children refer to them as their "neighbors."

Some lay volunteers, including young people, also give their time and effort to work on a one-to-one basis with the children.

Did Sisters Gaye and Rachel have a hard time adjusting to a routine that includes children night and day?

"You find you have to budget your time," said Sister Gaye with a laugh, "but the kids are usually in bed by 8:30, so we have some free time then."

And, as any mother can tell you, that's usually spent recuperating from a day spent with healthy, active children, doing mending and other chores, and wondering what tomorrow will bring.

CHECK GIVEN

Newark — The St. Michael's Bridge Club recently presented Father Joseph McDonnell, pastor, with a \$1,000 check. The money will be used to pay the last installment on the aisle carpeting which was installed in the church last fall.

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