

Former Rochesterian Sees 'Wider, More Alive' Church

By MARY ELLEN WISNIEWSKI

Sister Rosemary Statt, RSCJ, often saw live hens and native beer brought up in an offertory procession. The church often was so full that crowds overflowed. Fellow parishioners sometimes wore barkcloth garments with elephant hair necklaces adding a festive touch.

Sister Rosemary, a Religious of the Sacred Heart, recently was in town and related her year-long sabbatical experiences of teaching at a Ugandan bush school, her medical assisting along the Nile River in Upper Egypt and her international retreat-renewal experience in Belgium, Holland and France as "an international education in the human community."

A former parishioner at St. Augustine's and Rochester native, Sister Rosemary joined the international teaching order after attending the now-closed Sacred Heart Academy in Rochester, and Manhattanville College in New York City. She is the sister of Father Thomas R. Statt, rector of Becket Hall.

Though Sister Rosemary has been teaching junior high school social studies at Sacred Heart schools in Albany, New York, and Detroit, she describes the trip as "more than an education as a teacher. I received an education as a religious in a fast-

moving world that is becoming less Western."

Sister Rosemary requested an active job in the countries she observed on her year abroad. She taught religion at the missionary White Father's "bush" school, 80 miles south of Uganda's capital, Kampala.

The Ugandan government imposes strict standards on teachers, examinations and school terms. "The up-and-coming Ugandans know that it is only with education that they'll achieve," Sister Rosemary noted.

The government needs the foreign missionary schools because there are not enough schools in Uganda, but Sister Rosemary said they still have to watch what they say.

"You have to be really careful in faculty rooms because you never know whose father is where."

Sister Rosemary says there is real poverty in the East African country despite numerous exports. They raise tea, sugar, rice, vegetables, coffee and fruit, but everything is exported to Kenya to buy arms. Only the army is well-fed under President Idi Amin's regime, she said.

The Ugandan newspaper comes out irregularly because of a paper shortage. The weekly Air France

flight from Kampala to Paris is canceled often because the country is out-of-fuel.

Sister Rosemary describes the strongly Catholic country as "very much a Ugandan Church. They have their first Cardinal, their own bishops and religious orders, and their own music and syllabus for the Mass." She got used to hearing the Mass said in Lugandan, a tribal language.

Sister Rosemary observed the ancient Coptic rite of the Mass in Egypt. "You can see the ancient roots of Christianity there," she said, describing the Arabic Mass.

The differences between the new and the old struck Sister Rosemary in Egypt.

"It is such an old country with the pyramids and yet it is struggling with modern communication and transportation systems to support the great populace and join the developed nations."

She worked primarily in Upper Egyptian villages along the Nile, visiting outlying areas to offer medical assistance. Most of the populace suffered from eye diseases contracted when rubbing their eyes with dirt. The people "live on the ground, with their animals in their homes. We can only concentrate on curative

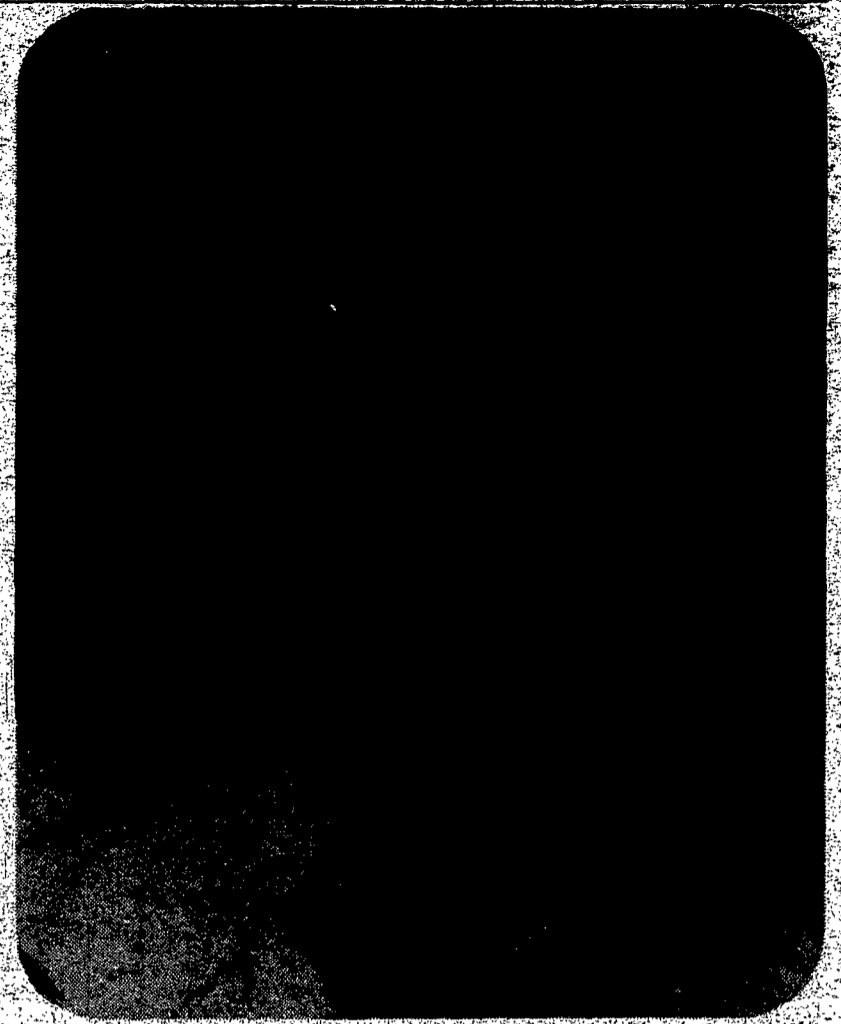


Photo by Susan McKinney

Sister Rosemary Statt points out on a map of Africa the sections of Uganda and Egypt she visited.

medicine, but most adults are blind in at least one eye.

Sister Rosemary's order-sponsored trip began and ended with a retreat — visiting nuns throughout Holland, Belgium and France, with Sisters of the Sacred Heart from all over the world.

"I was able to learn about other cultures so that I can stand in solidarity with other sisters. My concept of the international Church is much more alive, and much broader, and my response to the Church will be much more informed and responsible."

Deaconess Ordination

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Among the limitations or specifications cited in the monograph:

Women ministers, even those who served as deacons, were not always or everywhere ordained. Where ordination to the diaconate was the practice, the ordination of women was identical to that conferred on men.

This practice of ordaining men and women to the diaconate was applied with greater vigor in Eastern Christianity where the practice also perdured to a much later date.

In those instances in which

reference is made to a certain "presiding" of women at the Eucharist, this seems to have been a secondary "overseeing" of one section of the worship assembly, in view of the assignment of places, the orderly participation of prophetic utterances, the offering of gifts, or the reception of the Eucharist in communion.

Discussing the "multiple and complex reasons" for the subsequent diminishment of women's ministerial roles in the Church, the paper refers, among other things, to changes in the administration of the sacraments which made the need for women ministers less pressing, fears about the part of Christian converts from paganism

of an inadvertent reversion to idolatry whose practices included employment of pagan priestesses, and the appearance on the scene of "heretical" sects that admitted women "priests and bishops."

The Catholic Church had no choice so it seems, but to affirm in every way possible its distinction from any of the "Christian" heterodox groups, the study suggested. "A diminished role for women seems to have been one of the means chosen."

Suggesting that there are ministries for women "which even now seem to call for recognition through some type of institution," the study said that the Church is "challenged" today "to a new understanding of women's role in society and in ecclesial ministry."

Opponents of the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church have long appealed to the claim that it has never been done. As for the New Testament teaching on the matter, the Pontifical Biblical Commission in Rome recently concluded in a 12 to 5 vote that Scriptural grounds alone are not enough to "exclude the possibility" of ordaining women priests.

Pope

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ordination of women in the Catholic Church made by the Pope. The correspondence began when Archbishop Coggan wrote to the Pope, noting the "consensus of opinion in the Anglican Communion that there are no fundamental objections in principle to the ordination of women to the priesthood."

In his reply, the Pope said that "we must regretfully recognize that a new course taken by the Anglican Communion in admitting women to the ordained priesthood cannot fail to introduce into this dialogue an element of grave difficulty."

The Pope also said that he hoped the "obstacles do not destroy mutual commitment to a search for reconciliation."

Vatican Women Ask Greater Role

Rome (RNS) — A Vatican-appointed commission has called for greater roles for women in the Roman Catholic Church.

Among other things, it suggests that more women religious be assigned to posts at the Vatican.

A commission on women in society and in the Church, established in May 1973 following a recommendation made by the Bishops' Synod of 1971, has recommended a "permanent link" between the offices of the Roman Curia and competent international Roman Catholic women's organizations, such as the International Union of Mother Superiors.

This link, it said, should not become another Vatican commission but exist as a working mechanism which will lead to regular meetings between women's groups and the current commission, which is made up of 25 members.

This "permanent mechanism" would be charged with the task of eliminating unjust discrimination against women and the promotion of women's participation in the life of the Church and in society.

The study commission revealed that there are at present about 900,000 nuns throughout the world, almost three times the number of male religious. Despite this, it said there are only about 150 women working at the Vatican, none of them in important roles and none of whom can vote on a decision of the Roman Curia.

The commission suggests that women should be assigned to important Vatican posts and particularly to offices in which their views would be heard during the current studies on revision of Canon law, which apply to both men and women of religious orders.

In its report, the commission also recommends that the world's bishops take steps in their home countries to intervene with civil governments in an attempt to improve women's lot, particularly in the fields of family laws, the right to work, and the campaign against prostitution.

The commission added that bishops should also work to improve the depiction of women in the media, from both the human and Christian standpoints.



And I began to believe the hard core advertising about makeup. I bought mascara, lash curlers, and thought seriously about rubbing the red off the wallpaper, roses in the guest bedroom for blusher, a one of the characters in Ruth Moore's Downeast novels.

On the eve of The Birthday I went to bed after one poignant moment in front of the mirror making sure my orthopedic shoes were lined up neatly where I would jump (uh creep) into them come the morning.

The Day came. I got breakfast coffee, the newspaper and kisses from the whole crowd while still in bed. I smiled weakly. They seemed not to notice my head which I knew had turned silver over night. Later in the day I turned down offers to jog, play football, and jump rope and started rummaging in the cellar for my knitting needles.

About a week later by accident I caught my reflection in our kitchen floor. Depression makes people do things they've never done before. In total personality disorientation I went down on my knees with a scrub bucket. Not believing what I saw I went to the mirror for confirmation.

In disbelief I stared. I could discern no signs of new deterioration. There were still the same six gray hairs, mole (uh, beauty mark) and John L. Lewis eyebrows. I was neither sunken nor puffed up. In a state of euphoria I kicked off my Enna Jetticks, pulled on my levis and stuck the Bay City Rollers back into the tape deck.

It has been some months now since The Birthday. And yes, I'll have to admit that some things have changed from 10 years ago. I am healthier, and happier. And best of all I am free. Age does have its compensations. Free to say what I think. Free to laugh at the calf length skirt and ankle-tied pants. Free to admit I prefer going to bed at 11 and getting up at 6. Free to be complacently out of step with the "in" thinking.

I am even free to like me at any age. Take that, "Mademoiselle," "Redbook" and "Vogue." Hey, I can hardly wait until the next one.

Oscar Wilde in his play "The Importance of Being Earnest" points out that "no woman should ever be quite accurate about her age. It looks so calculating."

Thus I must be content to report that on my last birthday I hit one of those milestone anniversaries which the media and the grapevine had warned about.

About six months before the occasion I began to experience anxiety whenever I would open a magazine where every model is under 28, or go to a movie where currently the only roles for the 30-plus woman are either as haridan, prostitute or eccentric.

I began acting strangely. When I would go out to pick up the paper off the stoop at dawn I'd make sure my face was shielded with a large garden party hat. Sun is aging. Ann Landers, "Glamour" Magazine and my younger sisters in Pomona and Port Allegany all said so.

Every time I started shuffling our antique sheet music into order "When I Grow Too Old to Dream" would come out on top.

CONVENT REPAIR

Penn Yan — A special appeal for funds which will repair and beautify the convent at St. Michael's will begin Aug. 21. The Sisters of St. Joseph came to Penn Yan in 1884 and lived at first in the cellar of the school. Father Thomas McVeigh, pastor, said "They (the Sisters) have worked for our good for 100 years, now let us all sacrifice for them by contributing a worthwhile gift for the repair of their convent."