

On Being Alone at Christmas

The trip to cash her Social Security check gets more foreboding all the time. Especially at this time of the year when the crowded downtown streets and the ubiquitous holiday decorations produce a depressing melancholy within her.

She takes the bus back to the house and as she gets off, the driver cautions, "Watch your step." She smiles ruefully; they are the first words spoken to her all day. Even the teller managed her business wordlessly.

The walk from the bus stop home is only a half block. The apartment will be empty and quiet but at least it will provide some surcease from the hectic holiday world. She

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remembers that when she first moved here she used to play a game walking home. She would pretend that one of the kids would be there to surprise her. Of course that would be impossible - California is almost literally half a world away.

But there was no point to the game so she had discarded it.

Up the front stoop. The key unlocks the cracked door. She realizes that the lock provides no safety at all unless the would-be burglar was extremely lazy. There is a great deal of noise in the neighboring apartment - kids fighting, shouting, crying. She

proceeds quietly, as is her habit, down the hall and lets herself in unnoticed.

A few minutes in the easy chair even before she doffs her coat. Her tired feet appreciate it. In a short time, it is dark outside. Must be about 5, 5:30. Soon it will be the shortest day of the year. Also Christmas.

She finally gets up and opens a can of tomato soup and makes a half sandwich of cheese. While sitting in the dim light of the small kitchen, more nibbling at than eating her sandwich, she allows a few remembrances of Christmases past - the family now moved away, the shopping, the

anticipation, the husband now gone to his rest. Thank God, he can't see how little his pension and Social Security provides. And heaven forbid if he knew about the welfare check.

God, it is difficult getting through this time of the year. Daily Mass helps for a blessed portion of the morning but the afternoons get long, the evenings interminable.

She cleans up, neatly stacking the two or three dishes she used this day into the small closet over the stove. She returns to the living room and switches on the television. "Boob tube is right," she says aloud, surprised by the sound of her own voice. The fleeting wound again stings - the

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Photos by Terrance J. Brennan

Second Touch

The Cursillo Movement of the Diocese of Rochester celebrated its 10th anniversary last Sunday with a "Second Touch" gathering at Our Lady of Mercy High School. More than 600 members attended the day-long event that featured discussions, a mass celebrated by Bishop Hogan, and a dinner and reception following the mass. Above, leaders of the Cursillo Movement in the diocese pose with Bishop Hogan. From left, Jim Cassano, Janet Mogab, Joe Fagan, (the Bishop), Ruth Page, Roger D'Aprix and Father Gerald Connor. Bishop Hogan delivers the homily (right) as Father Thomas Erdle translates for the Cursillo deaf. More photos on Page 2.



Hospital Going Ahead with Petition Drive

By JOHN DASH

Despite Gov. Hugh Carey's pledge last week to grant a religious waiver to St. Mary's Hospital obstetrical unit, Sister DeChantal LaRow will still keep her appointment on Dec. 12 in Albany, to deliver petitions and "other substantiating data" she has amassed in her fight to save the facility.

The governor's pledge came at the first in a series of "civic meetings" he has been holding around the state. In response to a question from Father Henry Atwell, Gov. Carey said the obstetrical unit "will not get the ax." He said that the situation is "clearly" a case where the unit is needed.

Sister DeChantal, administrator of the hospital, said she was not "surprised" by the governor's stand, but she quickly pointed out that neither she nor the hospital had engineered the question which drew his response.

She said she had "absolutely nothing to do with asking the question of the governor." "In fact," she said, "I encouraged people not to ask the question."

Father Atwell, former editor of the Courier-Journal and former executive secretary of Genesee Ecumenical Ministries, is presently pastor of St. Agnes Church, Avon.

Sister DeChantal also noted that she had called the state commissioner of health, Robert P. Whalen, the morning following the governor's remark, to assure Whalen that Father Atwell's question was not prompted by her.

She acknowledged, however, that she was "delighted" by both the question and its answer.

She said she and the commissioner had "laughed" over the circumstances. It was Commissioner Whalen's suggestion that the hospital apply for a religious waiver to the fiscal sanctions his office had decided to impose on the facility.

Bill Fagel, an associate in the office of the commissioner's assistant, Marvin Naylor, reacted to the news last week with, "Oh, Gov. Carey did that did he?"

Fagel acknowledged however that he would not use the word "surprise" to describe his reaction, since the governor had already taken a similar stand for St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira.

Fagel said that the governor's action reflects that "he is acknowledging the hospital's eligibility for a religious waiver." His action, he said, "would be in a way very similar to that in Elmira."

Any substantiating data still will be reviewed by Richard A. Berman, Fagel said.

St. Mary's is currently collecting petitions from the Rochester community, asking the state to grant the religious waiver, based on "religious need" and "in accordance with the religious and ethical convictions of a substantial population of this community."

The hospital is the only Catholic hospital between Syracuse and Buffalo.

The petition drive has been sanctioned by Auxiliary Bishop John F. McCafferty, Bishop Joseph L. Hogan's representative to the health care facilities in the diocese.