

Chapter Focus Is Renewal of Vows

In a uniquely democratic General Chapter, the diocesan Sisters of Mercy have formulated a number of consensus statements which, they feel, "authentically represent their lived experience and valid aspirations for their vows of poverty, celibacy and service of the poor, sick and ignorant," according to Sister Elaine Kolesnik, spokesperson for the congregation.

The sisters in chapter, which most recently convened Aug. 1-14, also affirmed a statement on the congregation's mission, and devoted a day to reflecting on simplicity of life, as expressed through each vow. The vow of obedience will be discussed in the next chapter session in October.

Sister Elaine stated that religious chapter "is the highest governing body of a congregation, while it is in session, and can deal with such varied matters as governance of the group, decisions regarding ministry, and responses to Church and society."

For the 1979 chapter, the sisters called the entire congregation to participate in deliberations. Usually, only elected delegates attend such gatherings.

"For their 1979 chapter, the Mercy Sisters chose to focus on renewal — their renewal — in terms of deepened understandings of their vows," Sister Elaine said. "It was a bedrock choice, and they knew it would be difficult. Dealing with one's very life and values is not easy, especially corporately."

Working in small groups and in general assemblies, both elected delegates and non-delegates worked on position papers on each vow, Sister Elaine said. They "reflected upon and examined their lived experience and defined, re-defined and chiseled out general statements that were accepted by a consensus of all sisters able to be present."

The consensus statements will be formally voted upon during the final chapter session, slated for December. The statements will then be passed on to the congregation's Constitutions Commission for inclusion in the groups revised Con-



Sister Florence, center, archivist for the diocesan Sisters of Mercy, explains her record keeping system to Sister Mary Judith Heberle, superior general (left) and Sister Jody Kearney.

stitutions, expected to be completed by 1983.

In the vow of Poverty, the sisters have identified, "the effort to find one's richness in Christ," and the pledge "to follow His example in one's life of poverty," Sister Elaine said.

She said that the vow is "intended to give concrete expression to the spirit of poverty to which all God's people are called," and that it "consists in the voluntary renunciation of personal property or the administration of it; awareness that one possesses and shares material things in common; an attitude of respect, gratefulness, and detachment in the use of material goods; availability of one's person, time and creative energies for the good of all."

Under the vow, the sisters see "all things... as God's gifts to be used for building up the kingdom," she said. They also recognize the the vow means "living simply, sharing one's person and possessions; offering gracious hospitality, seeking in community for creative ways to share convents, material goods and spiritual gifts; rising above the compulsion to consume and possess, valuing persons above things, using gifts and talents to promote justice and living dependent on the Father for daily needs; a commitment to solidarity with the poor in their struggle against powerlessness, misery and injustice."

The sisters view celibacy as "a gift of God calling for a response in love to the Father and for a free expression of his love to all people, especially those in need," sister said. A "deep prayerfulness" is "essential to it... since celibacy is fruitful only in the

context of relationship with God and His people."

The sisters have described the vow as "a life process demanding the self-discipline to order the affections, intentions, and priorities of one's life in a rhythm of solitude, prayer, leisure and work that nurtures relationships centered in the Lord."

Besides the vows they take to the "evangelical virtues," the Sisters of Mercy also make a vow of service to the poor, the sick and the ignorant.

The sisters see this vow "as fidelity in proclaiming the Good News; decisiveness for the kingdom; solidarity with the struggles, aspirations and sufferings of all peoples; surrender to the Father's will; identification with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus," Sister Elaine said.

She added that the vow signifies "the Spirit's empowerment to be a healing presence and instrument of reconciliation among persons, nations and races wherever the signs of the kingdom — freedom, justice and peace — are ignored, made trivial or betrayed through the power of evil and sin."

The sisters' intent is to reflect the "spirit and vision of the congregation's foundress, Catherine McAuley: her trust in Divine Providence, mercifulness, compassion, hospitality and spontaneity in response to human need," she said.

In conclusion, the sisters in chapter identified the vow as "a summons to be prophetic signs of contradiction wherever the Gospel demands of love and justice are obscured and to address the causes of injustice, oppression and poverty," Sister Elaine said.

MOS Sets 150th Day

The Parish of Our Mother of Sorrows will conclude its celebration of the 150th anniversary of its foundation with Mass of Thanksgiving followed by an anniversary dinner and dance on Sunday, Sept. 16.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will preside at the Mass, at 2:30 p.m.

The festivities continue at the Mapledale Party House with a cocktail hour at 4:30

p.m. that day, followed by dinner at 5:30 p.m.

For the Mass, the adult vested choir will sing under the direction of Mrs. John Effinger. Soloists for the occasion will be Mrs. Charles Stratton and Miss Rosali Mugavero.

Parishioners and friends of the parish will dance to the music of Mike LaFranca.

Reservations for the gala affair are being taken at the Parish House (716) 663-5432.



Bishop Clark

Bishop Clark To Officiate At Red Mass

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will be the celebrant and homilist at the 34th annual Red Mass scheduled at 12:15 p.m., Friday, Sept. 7, at St. Mary's Church, 15 South St., Rochester.


The Red Mass marks the opening of the courts after Summer recess and is an invocation for God's blessing and guidance. The local Mass continues a tradition dating back to the Fourth Century.

Readers will be Judge Joseph G. Fritsch and Kreaq Donovan. Co-chairman of the Red Mass Committee of the sponsoring St. Thomas More Lawyers Guild are John F. Burke and Gerald R. Barrett.

The honor guard and ushers will be made up of area judges, local attorneys, heads of local law enforcement agencies, the Rochester Fire Department and state troopers.

The public is invited.

Following the Mass an informal reception has been scheduled to allow members of the legal community and law enforcement agencies the opportunity to meet Bishop Clark.



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