

They 'Dwell with Lord'

By Martin Toombs
Southern Tier Editor

Elmira — Nestled among the large homes in West Elmira is a four-acre property that most passers-by on West Church Street probably don't notice.

And in that home, 14 sisters live in a way that many who daily pass the Monastery of Mary the Queen would find alien to their lives.

It may seem an unlikely place for a cloistered monastery, but when it was founded in 1944 there weren't any close neighbors.

Four of the eight sisters who moved from Buffalo to found the cloistered monastery, including Mother Theresa, the founding prioress, are still living there and took part in its 35th anniversary celebrations last August.

In the monastery, the sisters live a simple life of prayer and work, and as one sister described it, "dwell in one mind and one heart in the Lord."

Three of the sisters seemed to enjoy the opportunity to discuss their lives recently. Mother Mary Agnes, prioress, Sister Mary Stephen and Sister Mary Michael, sub-prioress.

The Dominican sisters explained that they live under the Rule of St. Augustine. As they described the rules governing their lives, it became apparent they are not preoccupied with what they can't do, but with what their choice of lifestyle allows: an existence dedicated to community, work, and prayer.

They noted three reasons why they can leave the monastery for medical



Mother Mary Agnes, left, Sister Mary Stephen and Sister Mary Michael in the visiting parlor at the Monastery of Mary the Queen in Elmira.

purposes, for business if it can't be accomplished any other way, or to vote. They added that they can ask permission of their bishop to go home to aid a parent in the case of severe illness, or, if a member of the community is hospitalized for a long period, visiting is permitted.

The sisters depend on some work they do for outside concerns and on donations to continue. They have a print shop, and do four local parish bulletins: Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Peter and Paul, St. John the Baptist and St. Mary's, and other printing jobs. Several sisters are good at crafts and artwork, Mother Mary Agnes said, and often people leave offerings for them.

But most of all, they said, the 14 sisters depend on donations to continue their lives of prayer.

When discussing new members to their community, they noted that they look for girls who are a little older than they did previously. Sister Mary Stephen recounted that she was 18 when she joined, right out of high school. But now they like to wait until a girl is 20 or so, they noted.

As to why they joined the

order, Mother Mary Agnes said that she "felt drawn to the contemplative life," a life where she would be able to "pray for the world."

She noted that she had difficulty settling down at first, but after about six months she got accustomed to the life of a cloistered nun.

Sister Mary Stephen noted that she "felt drawn to the religious life," and when a parish priest brought her to visit the monastery, she knew immediately she wanted to join the community. Mother Mary Agnes noted that with some prospective members, "the minute they walk in they feel that's it." Others need more time to decide, Sister Mary Stephen added.

The sisters have several pets, including cats and dogs. They have had a German shepherd for some time, and when a family of one of the sisters could no longer keep their collie, it also came to the monastery. Once, taken back home, the collie sulked, and was happy to get back to the monastery "because of all the attention she gets here."

Sister Mary Michael

called the 11-year-old dog's dedication to the monastery a "delayed vocation."

And then the sisters were surprised to find that the older dog was pregnant, and in the end of November it gave birth to nine puppies.

The sisters described a daily routine that guarantees they are never far from an opportunity for prayer.

Wake-up calls are at 5:25 a.m., and Lauds are at 6, the first part of the Divine Office. Following that is private prayer in preparation for Mass at 7:30 a.m.

The sisters noted that they get few visitors for Mass, probably because most don't realize that visitors are welcome. Mass is at 7:30 a.m. each day except Sunday when it is at 7:45. And, they added, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed from Mass until 5:30 p.m. each day, and the chapel is open. Visitors need simply walk in the front door of the chapel. The sisters sing their prayers and participate at Mass from a screened section to the side of the altar.

The sisters get breakfast when they want; they noted. Following Mass is a work period; at 11:30 a.m., there are 10 more minutes of prayer.

Dinner at noon and supper at 5:30 are taken as a group, and while eating, the sisters listen to a tape or a reading; no talking is permitted.

From 1 to 2 p.m. is a recreation period. From 2 until 3 p.m. is a "profound silence hour" when the sisters stay in one place, read, write or pray.

And from 3 to 4 p.m. is another work period, followed by another 10 minutes of the daily office. A meditation period precedes Vespers at 5 p.m.

During the day, there always is a sister praying before the Blessed Sacrament. And three nights a week the sisters maintain a perpetual rosary, taking turns throughout the night.

Randolph to Be Speaker At Seneca Falls Dinner

Seneca Falls — Willie Randolph, second baseman of the New York Yankees, will be the main speaker at the 15th annual St. Patrick's Sports Banquet Jan. 6 in the school auditorium.

Other celebrities also will attend the dinner. Another highlight will be the presentation of the Father J. P. O'Beirne and Holly E. Wood Memorial Award to the

outstanding male and female graduate of St. Patrick's now attending Mynderse Academy.

The dinner will be dedicated to George G. Souhan, a graduate of St. Patrick's, who is president of Seneca Knitting Mills Co., J. Souhan and Sons Dairy, Geb and Souhan Woolen Co., and Timothy Farms.



WILLIE RANDOLPH



Calendar

TWELFTH NIGHT — At Christ Church, East Avenue at Broadway, a pageant based on traditional observances of Epiphany and the journey of the Magi, with Scripture and sacred music, 7 p.m. Followed by wassail toast, burning of Advent wreath, Yule log. Public (church seats \$50).

FOR PRAYER GROUPS — Charismatic Mass at St. Louis Church, 60 S. Main, Pittsford, celebrated by pastor, Father John Reddington, and Father James Connolly, SJ; 7:15 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 8.

THE STAR OF CHRISTMAS — Through Jan. 6 at Strasenburgh Planetarium, the Christmas Story retold with astronomy.

SILENT FILM FESTIVAL — At Rochester Museum and Science Center, Eisenhart Auditorium, Jan. 4, 5, at 8 and 9:30 p.m.; Sunday, Jan. 6, 2:30 and 5 p.m. Varied program, no repeats, with theater organ music. Information, reservations: 334-6408, after 5 p.m.

SLEIGH RIDES — Winter weekends at RMSC Cumming Nature Center, near Naples.

SENIOR CITIZENS MATINEE — Smart Woman, starring Constance Bennett and Brian Aherne, at the George Eastman House, 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 10.

SCOLIOSIS CLUB — meeting Thursday, Jan. 10 at 7:30 p.m. in Helen Wood Hall, 255 Crittenden Blvd. Slide/tape presentation "Watch that Curve."

IMAGE CONSIDERED — exhibition of recent photographic work by women, Visual Studies Workshop Gallery, through Feb. 1.

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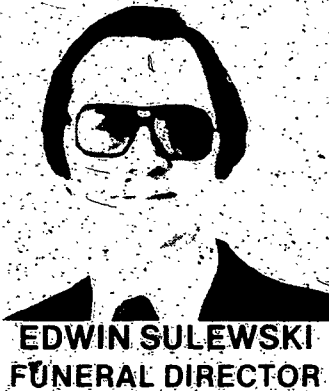
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The end of each year... and the beginning of the next is always an occasion for both reflection and celebration. We look back on a year filled with the ups and downs of our everyday life. Perhaps it has been a year which represented a great deal of growth for us... in our career, our personal relationships or in our own feelings for life and living. Or, it may have been a difficult time — saddened with illness, or the death of a loved one. The coming of the new year gives each of us the opportunity to move on from the last — and look forward to a new beginning. Our thoughts on the past year should be used as guides to help us evaluate what we want to find in the year ahead — and as we look forward to the fresh, new time before us, we can clear our minds of that which is now past. We invite you to join with us in celebrating the New Year — and accepting the challenge it offers each of us. A good year is built from living life to its fullest — every single day, and that is perhaps the best New Years resolution any of us can make.

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