

# We Thank God



## The People of God We Have Come to Serve As the Sisters of St. Joseph Celebrate a Past and Future of Hope

By Sister Grace Giglio, SSI

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester are celebrating their 125th anniversary of ministry to the people of God in New York State.

The primary commemorative event for the congregation's 650 members was a Eucharistic Liturgy, concelebrated by Bishop Matthew H. Clark, at St. Mary's Church in Canandaigua on Dec. 9.

The Canandaigua festivities also featured the history leading up to the first settlement in a house on Saltonstall Street, on Dec. 8, 1854, in Canandaigua. To passers-by, perhaps, the house is of little significance. To the Sisters of St. Joseph, however, it is a landmark — the first convent of their congregation in the state.

The history of the early inhabitants of this 19th century house goes back to the year 1650, when Father John Peter Medaille, SJ, with the approval and encouragement of Bishop Henry de Maupas founded the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Le Puy, a city near Lyons, France. That foundation was the beginning of a movement that experienced phenomenal growth in various places in France, only to be stopped by the French Revolution. At that time, all religious houses were closed and the religious dispersed. Some returned to their families; others, among whom were eight Sisters of St. Joseph, were guillotined.

After the revolution, at the request of the Archbishop of Lyons, Mother St. John Fontbonne left the retirement of her family to restore the congregation in 1807. By 1812, a central motherhouse was established at Lyons with Mother St. John as superior general.

From this motherhouse, sisters were sent as

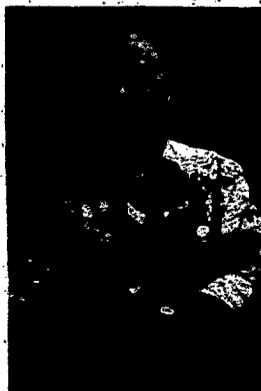
missioners to America at the request of Bishop Joseph Rosati of St. Louis, Mo. They began their work at Carondolet, Mo., and it was from there that four sisters were sent to Canandaigua, at the request of Bishop John Timon of the Diocese of Buffalo, under whose jurisdiction was the territory later to be known as the Diocese of Rochester.

Father Edmond O'Connor, the pastor, had requested the sisters to help him minister to the needs of the people in his parish, needs spiritual, educational and sociological. The sisters moved into the house next to the church on Saltonstall Street. They called their new home the Convent of the Immaculate Conception.

The first investiture of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the state took place in St. Mary's Church in 1857. One of the women who received the habit at that time was Margaret Leary of Corning, who later, as Mother Stanislaus, became the first mother superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester.

When the Diocese of Rochester was formed in 1868, Bishop Bernard McQuaid, the first bishop, asked the sisters to break away from the mother community in Buffalo and to establish an independent Rochester diocesan community. Mother Stanislaus was named superior and 11 other sisters remained in the new community with her.

Bishop McQuaid told the sisters that the greatest need at that time was for the Catholic education of youth. The bishop said that neither money nor labor should be spared in preparing the sisters for their work — the education of youth. He himself gave weekly conferences to the sisters, brought noted lecturers from Europe and from various places in America, and he



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