

The Religious: A Life of Love

Continued from page 1

found in her community a "concern for others," a "loving spirit," an "at-home-ness."

Sister Helen Edward Dobb, a Daughter of Charity, recalls that, although her family had a "strong devotional life," one marked by membership in Catholic societies and strong parish affiliation, it was she who made her own decision to enter the religious life. None of her brothers or sisters entered into it, she said.

Sister Mary Lourdes of the Sisters of St. Joseph's said that the foundation of her vocation "was in the environment in which we were reared, a very devotional life." She described her parents as "encouraging the children to live the Christian-Catholic life, the thing they admired most."

She commented that for her religious life contained as "much fulfillment as possible. My religious life has been happily and totally fulfilled."

Sister Mary Lourdes said that the present is "a very exciting time in which to be a religious. I am now in the period of enjoying today what went before."

Sister Marilyn Pray states that religious life has enabled her to grow personally. When she entered, she said, "I was completely ignorant of the religious values, except that I felt these women had values which I wanted too."

Sister Jane Marie, a nurse for the past 10 years, said that she first felt summoned to religious life because "I felt I had a talent to give," and entering the community has made her "very happy."

Sister Loretta's motivation was a "desire to have the ability to develop a relationship with God."

For some men the religious vocation evolves somewhat differently. As an example, Father Thomas Schmidt of the Redemptorists first wanted to be a priest. The realization that his vocation was to religious life came later.

He described his order as having a "great community spirit, a brotherhood, a collegiality, a sharing in concerns."

For Father Carl Belish, a Basilian, the desire to serve as a priest also came first and only "as I grew older and lived in Basilian foundations," the distinct call to religious life came. Community is the distinguishing mark of religious life, he said. "Religious life comes much easier in community spirituality."

For men, too, there is a significant difference in the perception of religious vocation. For some there is a call to the religious life, while for others there is a call for the religious priesthood.

None of the Holy Cross Brothers interviewed, for example, are ordained.

Brother Mark Knightly said that his "vocation built up over several years. At first I was attracted by the community life. I was living in Washington (D.C.) in the 60s, and that also affected me. I was interested in the alternate life style," afforded by the religious community.

Also a Holy Cross Brother, Andrew Boone, said that he was first attracted to the community because "they could deal with people on a human level." He said that his religious view of the community matured as he grew older.

Community life also was the inspiration of Brother Gerard Suddick. He describes himself as "gregarious by nature" and inspired by the "common work" of his community. The former missionary to Africa said that he entered because he felt a "need to grow with others;" and since joining the Holy Cross Brothers, he has "felt that need fulfilled."

For Sister Shirley Kittagawa, a Religious of the Cenacle, the calling to be a religious was a specific thing, however, one which initially "scared" her. "I was simply called to religious life. One



Father Joseph Trovato, CSB, chaplain at St. John Fisher College, and senior Larry Kurmis peruse materials available to those interested in pursuing a vocation to the religious life.



Brother J.F. Costello, C.F.C., chairman of the science department at Bishop Kearney High School, conducts a biology laboratory exercise.

sister had a great impact." on that call. Today, Sister Shirley finds it "exciting to be a religious and to share the deep inner search for the Lord."

Throughout their history, members of religious communities have been engaged in a variety of ministries, and sometimes what appear to be extraordinary occupations. It was, for instance, a religious monk who formulated what would later become the controversial science of genetic research, Gregor Mendel.

Today, in the diocese, there is a religious surgeon, an ambulance driver, teachers, chaplains, pastoral assistants, missionaries, administrators and preachers.

The scope reflects, in the words of Sister Marilyn Pray, the need for "religious life to be reincarnate in the situation that is changing. Religious life reflects a changing society."

The unique contribution that religious make to society is "to be really in tune with the Gospel and the times," Sister Marilyn said.

In each community, however, all of this is centered on prayer, both in private and in common.

Depending on the shape the local religious community takes, this prayer can occupy from one to several hours a day. Monastic and cloistered religious communities, are engaged officially in worship and meditation for longer periods than are communities whose apostolates are more varied and in contact with secular society.

Prayer life centers on the Mass and the Church's saying of the "Hours," canonically determined scripture readings and psalm recitations which span the day.

Monastic communities also stress labor as part of their waking hours. The monks at the Abbey of the Genesee, for example, nearly all work in their bread factory and out in the fields. The monks also give retreats and do extensive counseling.

The Redemptorists, on the other hand, have ministries in parish administration, give retreats, are active as missionaries, act as chaplains.

And the Sisters of St. Joseph, long known principally for their work in education and missionary and hospital ministry, are also widening their scope to include parish assistance, community organization, prison chaplaincy, social work and a number of other fields.

The Jesuit Fathers are engaged not only in education in the diocese. Also to be found in their ministries are community organizing, writing, theater, and even movies.

Each community is unique, has its own spirit. On occasion a community is also marked by a "fourth vow," a pledge over and above the ones to poverty, chastity and obedience. The Sisters of Mercy pledge service to the poor as do the Daughters of Charity. The Jesuits pledge fidelity to the pope.

But, over all, the religious is "to do the work that Christ was doing," Sister Mary Lourdes said. And Sister Marilyn observed that the religious has a "prophetic role" to play, "to touch the truth. Institutions are not doing the work of Jesus," and it is the function of religious to improve those institutions, "to be critical both inside and out."

(Next week: an overview of the history of religious congregations, how they help people determine if they have a religious vocation, and a source list of congregations in the diocese.)

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