



Photos by Terrance J. Brennan

Pastoral Assistants Meet

Some 20 diocesan pastoral assistants met last Wednesday at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse to listen to Reverend William Gaventa, right, chaplain of the Monroe Developmental Center, speak on the disabled.



Healing Mass Set For May 3

The Redemptorist Fathers at Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua are planning the celebration of a Healing Mass at 2 p.m. on Sunday, May 3, with a fellowship to follow.

Celebrants at this Mass will be Fathers Dennis Kelleher, Thomas Schmidt and Timothy Keating. A buffet dinner will follow. Those planning to attend are asked to bring a dish to pass.

Sister Mary Florence Sullivan, RSM



Viewpoint: Sisters Reflect

The Ministry Of Suffering

Religious congregations, as they look for the renewal mandate by Vatican II seriously and made many changes in their ministries, found that the traditional Ministry of Suffering, to which all people sooner or later are committed, could neither be dropped nor changed.

Strange as it may seem, no special training is needed to fill this ministry; no particular qualifications are listed for its personnel; no age for beginners in fulfilling its duties is specified. The ministrants are divinely chosen to function in this Apostolate of Suffering by God, Himself — the Master of life and death.

Strange doors admit members to the apostolate. A doctor's verdict "inoperable" strikes a sudden blow to a youthful religious; gradually body tissues cease to function properly. Others, active on the service line, become victims of "freak" accidents which incapacitate them. Still others, after long years of giving service, feel the crippling effects advancing years have on the body while the mind remains alert.

Each person thus encountered by the Divine Giver of Life must struggle through her own Gethsemane days of acceptance of a new life style, a new ministry in the apostolate. When each religious minister reaches through days of anxiety and painful struggling, the heights of Calvary and accepts her debilitation and suffering as a special gift from God, she then utters her "not my will but yours, O Lord." A new peace settles upon her; a transformation takes place within her.

Suffering has a sacredness about it. The ministers of suffering realize they are

companioning with their crucified Lord. They know their aching joints, their crippled limbs, their shattered nerves will in God's almighty plan bring relief to some unknown person on this vast earthly planet, or withhold the destroying hand of God against ungrateful and rebellious man. Each minister has somehow found a divine, triumphant meaning in all her painful moments; otherwise, how does one explain the peaceful serenity on the faces of bedridden or wheelchair-bound suffering ministers in infirmaries or "senior Sisters" quarters.

The ministers engaged in the Apostolate of Suffering often have a 24-hour service in their ministry as they endure their sleepless, restless nights. No longer do the morning clocks send them into the classrooms, the clinics, the rural areas, the "market places," but their acceptance of suffering, often more painful than pain itself, helps to sustain those ministers in the active apostolates. Somehow these ministers have learned that suffering accepted with humility and utter self-abandonment to God sooner or later will be immersed in God's gift of love — a love that encircles the universe as prayers and petitions embracing suffering humanity everywhere. Their lives become not a question of suffering but of assisting those struggling with life's many stressing problems on the firing lines of local diocesan, national and global services.

Ministers of suffering are delightfully different people, not caught up with the petty affairs of everyday life. An other-worldliness seems to overshadow them. They seem to greet the dawning of each new day with a vision of heaven in their hearts and in their eyes. The rewarding days of their past useful career days now belong to

God; the tomorrows, long or short, still are in His hands. Today alone is theirs to live in the fullness of their weakness, which is all they have to offer in gratitude to God. Many of these ministers know they dwell in the courtyard of their eternal home, but a breath from the embrace of the Father they long to see. The Ministry of Suffering, though not sought after, carries rich dividends both for the ministers themselves and also for those who serve them and support it.

Sister Mary Florence Sullivan, RSM, is congregational archivist for the Sisters of Mercy.

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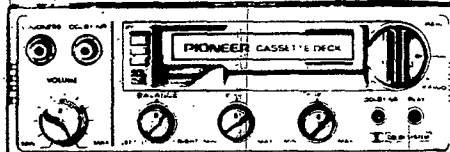
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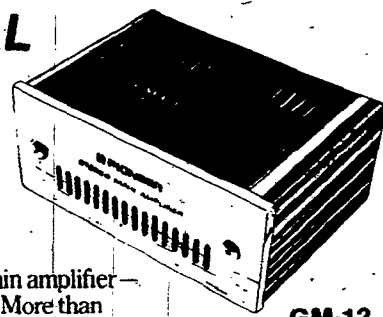
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