

Sister Maureen Finn, SSJ



Viewpoint: Sisters Reflect

Parish Social Ministry

"No one in our city is hungry anymore. Everyone in need can get Food Stamps." This is a comment made to me by one of our parishioners.

The truth is there is hunger. Many of the people I meet are in need of food; many fall between the cracks of the federal bureaucracy.

And there is not only hunger. Poverty takes many forms. Working with the poor, elderly, physically handicapped, jobless, those on welfare, those in inadequate housing, homeless travelers, the emotionally disturbed — I come into direct contact with needs of many kinds.

For several years, I have been engaged in Parish Social Ministry. This is a relatively new outreach effort, begun by the National Conference of Catholic Charities to decentralize services by placing within a parish a person who is more accessible to the needs of people.

The function of Parish Social Ministry depends on the unique character of a parish. In a small parish in

the rural south, where the median income of the county is only half that of the median income for the rest of the United States, Parish Social Ministry deals to a large degree with the economically poor.

Many people in our parish are not poor themselves, and so Parish Social Ministry also tries to inform—and educate people regarding poverty in our area, the needs of others, and how people can respond with their time, talents, and resources.

Helping people see that action on behalf of justice and service to those in need are as integral to the life of a parish as are Sunday liturgy and Religious Education is the challenge of Parish Social Ministry. Our parish staff functions as a pastoral team to provide good pastoral care and concern for all members of our church. Good worship and educational experiences lead us to want to reach out. The other ministries of our community have a direct connection with our social ministry efforts as people are enabled to care about others in our city and beyond and to value the efforts we make to minister to the poor and needy.

My ministry and that of other Sisters from the Rochester diocese who work

in and around Selma, Ala., put us into a different social, economic and political reality and also into a different experience of Church.

Perhaps the most obvious difference in the Catholic Church in the rural south is that we comprise less than two percent of the population. There are counties near us with no Catholic Church and no resident priest or Sister. Some of our parishioners drive more than 30 miles to get to our church in Selma.

Selma is most noted for being the center of the 1965 Civil Rights Movement, the scene of a 50-mile march to Montgomery to press for voting rights for black Americans. The Catholic Church here continues to work toward greater respect for the dignity and rights of all peoples and the recognition of the gifts of all. The ministry of reconciliation takes place in very concrete ways, as people of diverse racial, economic and religious backgrounds live and work together in Christian community.

Through Parish Social Ministry, the concerted effort of informed and interested people is bound to have a considerable impact on the lives of the needy. It should help alleviate, at least to some extent, the poverty that is a real part of our world.

Sister Maureen Finn, SSJ, works in Parish Social Ministry as part of the pastoral team at Queen of Peace Church in Selma, Ala.

State Tops in K of C Charity List

New Haven, Conn. — New York State's Knights of Columbus contributed \$1,949,148 to charities last year, a release from the national headquarters of the organization here has stated. Across North America and Mexico, members gave \$29 million and 9.2 million hours in community service last year. The figures emerge from a survey answered by 75 percent of the order's 8505 units.

Jubilee Noted

Father John Richardson, OFM, a native of Elmira, is celebrating the 25th anniversary of his ordination in West Haven, Ct., where he is chief of chaplain services at the Veterans Administration Medical Center. His sister, Sister Therese Richardson, RSM, is principal of St. Andrew's School in Rochester.

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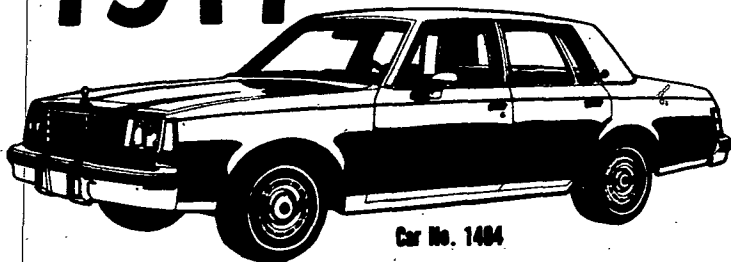
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