

# Following In Her Footsteps

## Sister Beatrice . . . Teacher

After four decades of teaching, a person can pinpoint decisively important changes in education. For Sister Mary Beatrice Curran, RSM, who has been teaching since 1940, it has been the progression, in the social studies field, of the emphasis on conceptual ideas and classroom discussion instead of factual memorization. It is through this freedom of discussion that Sister Beatrice tries to engender in her students a respect for the ideas and opinions of others even if they should differ from their own.

"My greatest satisfaction in teaching," she said, "is to see the growth in the individual students and follow their achievements after they leave school and then have them come back and tell me how they learned so much through the freedom of discussion in my classes."

Although thinking out concepts, discussing them, and memorizing facts are all necessary to the educational process, Sister Beatrice explained, "Education is the concern with the developing all aspects of a person, not just the intellectual, but the concern with the person's total welfare."

And it is this concern for the total welfare of the person through the works of mercy that was the intention of Catherine Elizabeth McAuley, foundress of the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy in 1827. The Courier-Journal asked Sister Beatrice how her teaching ministry followed the original intention of the foundress. She explained that Catherine McAuley identified with the needs of society in her time and came into her ministry through an historical event, the Industrial Revolution with

its inherent evils. "In teaching history," declared Sister Beatrice, "you can relate to that."

Teaching and learning have been a great part of Sister Beatrice's ministry. She joined the Mercy congregation in 1936 and attributed the impressions made upon her by her role models, the Mercy Sisters who taught her at St. John the Evangelist on Humboldt Street and Our Lady of Mercy High School, for her decision.

After high school, Sister Beatrice received her BA from Duquesne University, her MA in history, political science, and British history from Catholic University in Washington, D.C., and through grants, pursued advanced studies in social studies at SUNY at Stonybrook, anthropology at

the University of Arizona, and economics at Georgetown University.

She started her teaching career at her alma mater, Mercy High on Blossom Road. She taught there until 1955 when she went to Notre Dame High School in Elmira. She returned to Mercy in 1960, and in 1967, returned to Notre Dame where she is presently chairman of the social studies department.

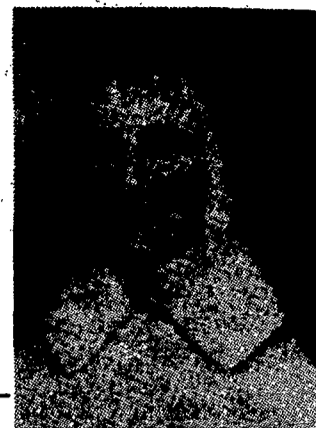
Ivy-covered academic halls, however, haven't been her only domain. She is a tennis enthusiast and it was through her efforts that a tennis program was developed at Notre Dame. Fund drives and private donations saw the completion of three courts at the school, and Sister Beatrice points with pride to the team that has gone undefeated in 27 matches. Regarding an honor she received last season,

Sister Beatrice said, "It was partly because of their efforts that I was named female coach of the year."

Besides giving dedicated service in the classroom and expertise on the tennis courts, Sister Beatrice has served with the New York State Department of Education in revising curriculum. Her work resulted in co-authoring "Teaching American History," a department handbook for teachers. She also spent 15 years with the department constructing examination formats and reviewing student exams.

She has also served as a member of the board of the Rochester Association of the United Nations that worked with the junior UN organizations in the schools, and has served two terms on the Chemung County Commission for human relationships.

SISTER CATHERINE McAULEY



SISTER BEATRICE

## Sister Barbara . . . Jail Minister

"I see any person who ministers in an institution, be it a jail, hospital or psychiatric center, as a person putting flesh on the beatitudes and on the corporal works of mercy."

Sister Barbara Moore, one of the pioneers for the Rochester Sisters of Mercy in seeking new apostolates, said of her present work that "if there ever was a group that was mourning or hungering or thirsting, if there ever was a group in need of so many things, it would be men and women incarcerated. To me, it's a gigantic act of compassion and mercy just to be present."

Sister Barbara is executive director of Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministries (RIJM), both the first woman and the first woman religious to hold the post. The RIJM provides both service and advocacy for those im-

prisoned. It is supported by a consortium of Jewish and Christian groups. The Diocese of Rochester is a member of the consortium.

But first, Sister Barbara is a Sister of Mercy, and of about her congregation's new apostolates she said, "Our very name almost insists that we be with people who are hurting and in need of compassion."

Yet, "I've become convinced that we don't go into the jail or prison as persons who have it all together, who are healed — but with our own weaknesses."

She said that in her present work it is necessary to approach people in a non-judgmental way, and that is only possible when she recognizes she needs to be healed as well as those she visits.

"My latest reflection on jail ministry is about the business of liberation — you know, when Isaiah says the Messiah will bring freedom to those in prison, and Jesus made the same statement.

"I see those of us in jail ministry as instruments of liberation by our listening, presence, advocacy, our readiness to walk with the person, separating who he or she is from what they have done," she said.

"I just think it's a ministry of mercy."

She acknowledges, however, that the same can be said of a variety of ministries. But she recalls the phrase from the Letter to the Hebrews, "Remember those who are in prison as if you were their fellow prisoner."

On the particular mercy by

charism she brings to her work, and others to theirs, she said to "remember the person (behind the problem) and try to identify with the person and the struggles they're going through."

She cited a statement recently made by Sister Jean Marie Kearse, superior general of the Rochester Sisters, that mercy is really getting into the skin and walking with them.

"I also think that as contemporary women of the Church we have to speak out against injustice and dehumanizing structures — and Catherine McAuley did just that," she said, pointing to the congregation's founder as one who would establish shelters and schools for young women victimized by the mores of their day.

"Those of us in jail ministry

must speak loudly and clearly about dehumanizing structures.

"We have to work for change and reform, and for me right now it's the criminal justice system — for someone else it's health care; for others, Church structures. We are really compelled to speak and work for change."

Sister Barbara worked eight and a half years as a pastoral assistant before taking the post with the RIJM. Earlier, she taught high school social studies — including a six-year stint at Benjamin Franklin High School before she entered the convent.

"I believe," she said, "that if Catherine McAuley were alive today, she would be a prime mover in interfaith circles — the interfaith dimension."



SISTER BARBARA

## Sister Patricia . . . Counselor

Hunger, ignorance and disease aren't simple matters. They weren't in the mid-1800s when Catherine Elizabeth McAuley and her congregation of Mercy Sisters worked to combat them, and they aren't simple matters today. But according to Sister Patricia MacDonald, RSM, they may be too simple to fit today's complicated society where a modern, affluent, and highly technological world has produced people who are emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically poor. And through her ministry, one she calls "a ministry of presence," Sister Patricia, pastoral counselor and marriage and family therapist, devotes herself to helping people solve their problems.

"It is like exploring space," she said about her counseling. "We're the greatest unexplored territory in the world," and added that in helping others, "the best resource I have is myself and that's why I have to keep learning and reflecting."

Learning was what Sister Patricia helped others to do in her first 20 years as a Mercy nun in the school classroom. Inspired and impressed by the environment she encountered while attending Our Lady of Mercy High School, she entered the congregation in 1944. She received her BA in history and English from Nazareth College, and her MA in European history at St. Bonaventure.

Until 1967, she taught at Notre Dame High School in Elmira, and then became the first woman assigned to the staff of the Cornell University Catholic Commission. She served as an assistant Catholic chaplain, and it was a turning point in her life. Her interest in helping people solve their problems grew, and realizing she needed preparation for such work, enrolled at Boston University. She studied the psychology of religion and attended counseling programs. She took her clinical training at Worcester State Hospital and the Worcester Pastoral Training and Service Center. She is now in private practice here in Rochester and is certified by the American Association of

Pastoral Counselors (APC) and the Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (ASMFT).

Sister Patricia doesn't see herself as a Catholic nun who works only with Catholics. She explained that the pastoral counseling profession is an ecumenical ministry which draws on the disciplines of religion and psychology to lead people to wholeness and health.

She admitted that the task of bringing people to wholeness and health can be frustrating and difficult but also satisfying. It is frustrating, she said, when someone whom you are trying to help is hurting and doesn't

have the motivation to change. The difficulty is in trying to remain objective about people and problems, and the satisfaction comes from the ability to be present to someone going through a struggle, in her words, "walking them through and coming out the other side."

It is not only this concern for the human struggle that makes Sister Patricia equate her ministry with that of Catherine McAuley's original purpose, but also, like the foundress, she is concerned with women. "It is important that they be in the field of psychotherapy," she said, and added, "It is real value in having them work along with men in the field."



SISTER PATRICIA