

# Spirit House

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 guests at a time. There are no other services and no model exactly like it in the country; Sister Mollie states: an interdependent community, a "receiving community where sister guests share in all the life of the community and are not separate."

Currently there are three centers in the country similar to Spirit House, except for their separation of staff and residents: a center outside of San Francisco and two in Minnesota — Hope Community in Little Falls and Ad Sum in St. Cloud.

Each sister guest at Spirit House must be involved, at least on a part-time basis, in some ministry or volunteer work outside of Spirit House. She must also be in an ongoing therapeutic relationship with a mental health professional of her choice.

In the core community with Sister Mollie, a Sister of Mercy who is a psychiatric nurse and developmental psychologist in private practice, are three Sisters of St. Joseph: Sister Anne Alderman, a former high school teacher at St. Agnes who plans to study part-time and also serve an internship under Sister Mollie at Spirit House; Sister Mary Ellen Campbell, a former music teacher at St. Theodore's Grammar School and soon to be a full-time student of dance at SUNY Brockport; and Sister Michaela Tennity, a staff member in the Sisters of St. Joseph Infirmary and Communications Office.

Two Sisters of Mercy complete the original core community: Sister Virginia Taylor, campus minister at Monroe Community College, and Sister Margaret Comin, a head nurse at Highland Hospital.

A major responsibility of Spirit House's director, Sister Mollie, is to aid the sister and her primary therapist in her transition back to her local community.

Each sister in the receiving community is asked to give a minimum of a two-year

commitment to Spirit House. Sister Mollie explains the nature of this commitment: "It's a quality of presence — rather than time — to this house. It's a willingness to be with people, to listen . . ."

Since each one's ministry takes her away from the house a good part of the day, all have given a high priority to evening mealtime, to an evening they set aside once a week for either liturgy or a "house meeting on a gutsy level," and to evening prayer.

"Our prayer always seems to end with firelight, candlelight and 'Gentle Woman,' a St. Louis Jesuits' song, which has become our favorite prayer song. There's always a strong concept of light."

Bearing this out are candles, of varying shapes and sizes, on the fireplace mantel, one for each of the members of the core community and for their guests. Each guest will receive a candle for her stay there and to take with her when she leaves, "to show that light will go with you wherever you go," Mollie explained.

The Spirit House logo is also hope-filled: a branch tipped with green sprouts, stretching upward.

Spirit House is subsidized in part by the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester, Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, and School Sisters of Notre Dame in Wilton, Connecticut.

Members of its Advisory Board are Dr. Susan Hanson, psychiatrist; Sister Marguerite Dynski, SSJ, M.D., surgeon; Sister Mary Patrick Kennedy, RSM, dietitian; Mrs. Carter Williams, CSW, social worker; James Fitch, banker; John Wright, Xerox; Sister Marie Therese Alaimo, SSND, member of the Research Committee for Spirit House; Mrs. Sally True, lawyer; and Mrs. Anne Marie Boughtin and Mrs. Beatrice Paul Harris, both from the Office of Mental Health.

The roots of Spirit House go back to 1977 when a committee of sisters, coordinated by Sister Mollie, saw the need and began to research the possibilities of such a ministry in this area. Besides Sister Mollie, the research committee also included Sister Christine Angione, SSJ, and Sister Marie Therese Alaimo, SSND.

Referring to the need, Sister Mollie said, "Some religious women who are experiencing emotional difficulties and problems of identity may be able to find healing in the ordinary mainstream of psychiatric treatment centers. For others, it would be a less painful and perhaps faster route to recovery to experience this healing within the context of a community that would be carefully structured to meet their individual needs, while giving them the experience of what a celibate religious community can be in the context of the Church today."

Formerly the Jamison Estate, the three-floor structure now known as Spirit House has been used by the Sisters of St. Joseph as a retirement home (in the 50s), a novitiate, and, most recently, a prayer center.

A wall poster — ignored by the barking of Moses, the house's German Shepherd watchdog — reads: "Be still and know that I am God." Another wall adornment — a calligraphed prayer adapted from a Jewish prayer and quoted from at the beginning of this article — offers a prayerful hope for the ministry of Spirit House:



Sister Mollie points out the house logo.



Sister Virginia tends a flower in the house garden.



## Reunion Dinner

Members of the 1926 graduation class of Corpus Christi School gathered recently to celebrate their 56th anniversary at a reunion dinner at the Green Lantern Inn, Fairport. Seated, from left, Dorothea Day Noon, Genevieve Hanlon Pethick, Dolores Dunnigan Dickson, Dorothy Bohrer Chappell, Father Walter Carron, Theresa Coyne Tschetter, Dorothea Quinn Gage and Rose O'Neill Carroll. Standing, from left, Mary Elman Wackerle, Sherman S. Farley, John Callan, Rhoda Gage Allart, Herbert Gordon, Larry Wilcox, Harriet Schultheis Warth, Lauretta Lennon Gould, Clara Shoniker Suhr, James McAvinney and Pete Culross.

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