

# Chapter: Sisters of St. Joseph Set Elections Prepare New Constitution

By John Dash

Diocesan Sisters of St. Joseph will gather next weekend to start the election process for a new superior general and central administration.

At the same time, the event will mark the midpoint in the congregation's first standing Chapter, an event which will next July establish a new constitution for the group.

A Chapter, in the words of Sister Carol Cimino, spokesperson for the event, is the highest governing body for a congregation, while it is in session. Chapters are generally brief convocations, held once every four years. This Chapter, however, will, by the time it closes, have lasted for two years. Though it is not a unique event among diocesan religious women, this is the first standing Chapter for the 129-year-old St. Joseph congregation.

The Sisters' election, Sister Carol said, will be March 20. The January process is one of nomination.

Sister Jamesine Riley, superior general for the past eight years, is canonically disqualified from seeking a third term. She may, however, be re-elected superior general after a term without the post.

The new superior general will be assisted by six Sisters, also elected by Chapter delegates, to the congregation's central administration. Until this present Chapter, Sister Carol said, the central administration only had five Sisters. The sixth was added because of the increasing work load on the congregation.

In addition, Sister Carol said, the Chapter is expected to deliberate on a proposal which would establish a place for "consultants" on the central administration. Such in-



The heart and the path constitute the official logo for the Sisters of St. Joseph Chapter. The heart represents "heart membership" in the congregation; the road stands for the journey the sisters are on, through the development of the constitutions. The scripture text which applies is Philippians 3:16, "Meanwhile, let us go forward on the road that has brought us to where we are."

dividuals, she said, could well be persons with particular expertise, but from outside the congregation.

Already the present Chapter has approved a formation process for Brazilian women who wish to enter the congregation, and has affirmed the establishment of a congregational "house of prayer," and with it the prayer ministry.

On the prayer ministry, Sister Carol observed that "it's a real source of power and energy in the congregation." She described it as "a witness to counter culture." The house of prayer, located at the motherhouse, is not cloistered,

but the prayer observance is as intense as it would be in a monastic community, she said.

Still to be considered by the Chapter are such topics as a proposal on setting up an "auxiliary membership," in which individuals would share in the community life and ministry of the Sisters, but would make no permanent commitment to such a life or the congregation. In addition the Chapter will deliberate questions on community living; ministry and planning; statements on such social justice issues as capital punishment, nuclear armaments and world hunger; the living out of the vows; spiritual development and finances.

The Sisters also are expected to approve a new two-part constitution for the local congregation. The first part of the constitution, "the Heart Book," Sister Carol said, is a compendium of canonical considerations and affirmations of the congregation's particular charism.

The second part deals with specific prescriptions of congregational life, "the particulars of day-to-day living: the Life Book," she said.

The new constitution will come to the floor of the July session. The congregation has labored over it for more than a decade.

Only twice in its history has the congregation attempted such a task, the first time in 1927, and the second in 1958, when the sisters received a papal charter, which, in effect, elevated their status above that of a diocesan institution.

The sisters have had a standing commission since 1979 working directly on the constitution. Sister Carol said; but the process of evaluating the St. Joseph charism and the experiences of the Sisters living out that charism goes back in this instance to 1969. The congregation has been observing interim rules since that time.

The Chapter has 36 elected delegates and five "ex-officio" delegates from the central administration. Sister Carol enunciated the over-all goals as including a review of the congregation's place in both the Church and in civil society; an affirmation of the direction the congregation has taken; the enactment of legislation; and "to afford the common renewal."

## Film Slated On Abortion

Geneva — The movie "Assignment: Life" will be shown at 8 p.m., Friday, Jan. 21, at St. Francis School, 110 Exchange St.

Nathanson, Dr. and Mrs. Jack Wilke and various ministers. It also includes scenes from the 1980 March for Life.

The updated film interviews people on abortion, including Dr. Bernard

The event will be sponsored by St. Francis and St. Stephen Human Development Committees.



Father Bruce Ritter

## HE WAS, ONCE, SOMEBODY'S CHILD.

Surgeons in battlefield aid stations separated the wounded into three categories: the slightly wounded that could safely wait for medical attention; those so severely injured that medical help was useless; and the others, less seriously wounded who might live if helped immediately. They called it triage.

He was, once, somebody's child. Now he's merchandise, commodity. Anybody who buys him is crazy. A valevolent little boy lost at 16, now a profoundly sad and very scared 19-year-old street wolf who has absolutely no reason to believe he will make it back, but has to think that he go crazy.

I met Pete five years ago when he was 14—a street kid even then—and hadn't seen him for over a year when he walked into my office yesterday. He was wearing skin-and-muscle tight jeans and a body shirt unbuttoned to the waist. We exchanged greetings—mine delighted, surprised his, muted and detached.

I hoped he was doing well. Peter gave a sad wry smile. OK, he said. Not bad, he said. I think of killing myself a lot, he said. Do you need a place to stay, I said. No, he said. I stay at the Continental Baths, it's cheap. I kinda help out around there. It's a bad scene, I said. It's a living, he said. And then I think he remembered about dying because he started slightly, sat for just an instant of frozen immobility, then shrugged, and again gave me a faint sad smile.

Come back to Covenant House, Pete. I said. No more programs, Bruce. I'm too old. I'm a male hustler, Bruce. I'm not gay, I'm bisexual. He stopped and his face twisted. He couldn't continue. Come on back, Pete, to our school. We'll get you a job. That lifestyle is going to kill you, Pete. It's rotten that you have to do that. He didn't hear me. I grabbed his hand, his arm. We've got this really great place, Pete—really good people. He looked at me in great pain. I'm a go-go boy, Bruce, in this bar on Second Avenue. I dance there. If the johns like me they stick a five dollar bill in my jock strap.

Come back, Pete. We'll find you a place. It's not too late, Pete. This Monday, Bill, downstairs will get you a job. He's an expert at it. It's OK, Pete. I'm really glad you're back, Bruce, he said. I'm a stripper in a male burlesque joint, four performances a night for a hundred bucks. I dropped out of school in the seventh grade. I worked a couple of girls for a while, Bruce. He couldn't stop. He had to tell me the whole sad sick story. It was almost as though he was afraid to leave out any details—like when you go to confession.

I'm really glad you're back, Pete. So are Gretchen and Steve and Dave. You've got to change your lifestyle, Pete.

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House/UNDER 21, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway boys and girls.

You're into a lot of things that make you feel pretty sick about yourself, Bruce. I don't have any clothes. All my stuff was ripped off. I had a stereo. Pete, you're not going to get out of that mess you're in without help.

There's a warrant out for my arrest, Bruce. I pawned a gold bracelet for a friend. It turned out to be stolen. We can work that out, Pete. We've got a place for you and a job and school. We've missed you a lot, Pete. Finally there was no more to tell: the small dirty puddle that was his young life spilled out between us.

"He was afraid to leave out any details—like when you go to confession."

He relaxed and took a deep breath. I think I'll go downstairs and talk to Bill about that job. Is it OK if I come back and talk to you again on Monday? He looked down at his low slung jeans with some amusement. I can't go for an interview in these.

Pete can make six hundred dollars a week—tax free—on the street. It's going to be awfully tough for him to work 40 hours a week for \$3.50 an hour. It's going to be even harder for him to go back to school and learn how to read and write. He's a good kid. He came in to see me for a lot of reasons he didn't really understand very well. He's not a religious kid and he doesn't know anything about going to confession but he needed and wanted absolution bad. Like most of us he was about as sorry as he could be.

"I think maybe the only way he feels he can reassert some control over his life is to end it."

A lot of people drift into, slide and choose into a lifestyle that ultimately kills them. It's almost certainly too late for Pete. The Peters of this world are refuse in our social sewers, to be inexorably flushed down and out, drowned in a sea of garbage, human pollution to be coped with and buried and dumped. Most honest, caring people think so. One such, a good friend, sighed and murmured the word triage. Let them go, Bruce. Think of the others, the ones you know you can help, the ones that still have a chance. He's already almost dead, Bruce.

Peter is already almost dead, and I think maybe the one way he feels he can reassert some control over his life is to end it. Pete is most definitely one of the Lord's lost sheep. He is not the cuddly innocent lamb that just happened to wander away from the fold. In biblical categories I think it's fair to say that Pete is a sinner—the kind over whom heaven rejoices if they turn away from the evil pervading their lives and turn back to God. Pete can't do that without God's help, nor can we.

Pete doesn't really want to end his life but he's not certain he can begin it again either. Only the Lord can provide the massive life support systems he needs to make it—and to carry through with the metaphor—places like Covenant House must exist as the intensive care units for these dying children. We need you to help us, to go on helping us. We're always broke and we are occasionally subject to the kind of questioning doubts that make the solution of triage very attractive. But I refuse to triage my kids, to screen out the ones who won't make it. I cannot exercise that kind of clinical detachment when a kid is involved. My staff and I refuse to turn any kid away.

Thanks much for your help and prayers.

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