

Mercy Chapter Ends, and 'Now Truly Begins'

By Sister Elaine Kolesnik

"Our Chapter now truly begins, not in meetings, but in our efforts to continue to search for a harmony among the message of the gospel, the word of our constitution and our lived experience," said Sister Jean Marie Kearse, superior general of the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester, when she addressed the assembled congregation, formally closing the congregation's 1983 Chapter of Affairs.

"What will we allow God to do in us?" she reflected. "Will our decisions remain on paper? Or have our hearts been charged to carry us forth from familiar lands to a new land that He will show us? ...May the world find us changed because of these days."

Chapter '83's closing session was attended by the 35 elected sister delegates and all members of the congregation who were able to be present. All present participated in the discussions. This process enabled the delegates to have a sense of the group before their formal vote.

Ministry was a prominent topic, treated at length on the floor and in the report of the Superior General and Council to the Chapter. The report defined ministry as "more than a profession. It is the activity of Jesus which passes through us individually and as a congregation. Ministry implies a personal experience of God, and this experience is what we communicate to others when we are present to them in service."

Under the ministry heading, the Council stated their belief "that it is important to recognize the needs of God's people beyond the Rochester Diocese if a Sister's call, gifts and education appear to answer that need and if the need is not being met by anyone else."

In this area, they also expressed the congregation's need "to help all women and men realize their full Baptismal call within the Church and society."

After a broad congregational consultation, the chapter unanimously accepted seven criteria for ministry, by which each member of the congregation is asked to discern and assess her ministry in consultation with a member of the Congregational Council. The five primary criteria are as follows:

1. Fidelity to the Mercy charisms to extend God's

love and mercy to the poor, the sick, and the ignorant

2. Compassionate service to those least adequately served by the congregation, Church and society, with a preferential love for the materially poor

3. Fidelity to Gospel values which we are called to establish and uphold: love, freedom, justice, peace, respect for individual human dignity and hope

4. Commitment to the reform of social structures and systems which are directly or indirectly the causes of injustice, oppression and poverty

5. Support and develop-

ment of lay collaboration and leadership to the end of expanding lay leadership in ministry and, when and if necessary or desirable, replacing ourselves in particular ministerial roles, in response to the signs of the times

6. The needs of the congregation in relation to continuing congregational sponsorships, commitments, and present work to be done, as expressed by congregational authority, and responsible concern for the common life and ministry of the congregation and the financial resources to support it

7. The talents, effectiveness, gifts, limitations and personal well-being as a minister of the sister herself, and her past, present or future preparation for ministry

Still on the topic of ministry, the Chapter affirmed a Mission Statement applied to the ministry of education and the Sisters in education. This statement reads:

Mission Statement — Ministry of Education

the foundation for life.

As educators, we strive to be witnesses of hope, mercy, and love for each individual. We are open to, and welcome, all persons, without prejudice or distinction.

The promotion of justice, in the institutions where we serve and in our extended community, is a basic value.

The challenge, hopes and ideals of this educational ministry call for: deep faith commitment on the part of all members of the school community who minister together; administration, faculty, staff, students, parents, and the wider community.

Co-workers in the educational ministry become part of and an extension of the works and vision of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy.

Based on the Gospel, and rooted in our Mercy tradition, our vision for education is to send forth mature Christians into a world and Church, where they will stand up for and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The five women who are presently Associate Members of the Sisters of Mercy joined the panel that received the Chapter's approval of the Philosophy Statement and the revised policies and procedures of the congregation's Associate Membership Program. The Philosophy Statement for Associates, who are not vowed members and renew their covenant annually, reads:

"You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures." (John 15:16)

The Sisters of Mercy in responding to the call of Jesus invite others to share in their life and work in the spirit of the congregation as Associate Members. Associates carry on Catherine McAuley's (foundress) vision of reaching out in merciful service to people in need and share in community, prayer and spiritual development with the Sisters. Together, Sisters and Associates endeavor to live the Gospel message in service to the poor, the sick, and the ignorant.

During the week, the Chapter also accepted the following proposals, among others:

1. That the congregation commit itself to an educational process dealing with the topic of cultural pluralism. Members of the



Sister Mary Florence Sullivan, congregational archivist.

congregation's Vocation/Formation Advisory Board, who submitted the proposal, saw this process as "a means to improve understanding of culturally distinct groups, a challenge to face one's own inadequacies in mission to minority groups, and a possibility for new growth personally and in the congregation for service to and with others."

2. That the concept of sponsorship be accepted and actualized in as many ministries as possible. Basically, Sister Jean Marie said, "sponsorship deals with devising ways and means to maintain the philosophy and spirit of the congregation in institutions where there are diminishing numbers of Sisters."

3. That a formal general assembly of the congregation be held at least annually to enable the total membership to celebrate its traditions and participate more fully in the decision-making of the congregation.

4. That a standing fund development committee be established. In presenting this proposal, Sister Nancy Whitley stated that the congregation must have "a sensible concern for the future while being mindful of the more fundamentally important concern of compassion for the poor and needy. In fact, it is precisely because we are concerned about continued compassion for the poor and needy that we propose a means whereby we can express our balanced concern for the future revenue of the congregation. We see the 'lilies of the field' and we want to be like them, but we also want to give the

'widow's mite,' and to do what we need to give some thought and care to how much 'mite' the widow will have in the future and where it will come from, on its way to ministry to the poor and needy...to our knowledge the congregation has never been out of debt since 1929....but we are advocating the avoidance of future annual deficits, the possibility of which is very real if we do not take steps now. We owe this effort to avoid deficits to the ministering members who will come after us, and to the poor and needy who will not be helped by any inadvertent deficits we incur through lack of common stewardship."

At Chapter's end, with the next Chapter set for 1985, Sister Jean Marie recalled the 1983 Chapter's focus: centering in Jesus and the Gospel message and "reaching out into the world to which God calls us."

"History will tell us the degree of wisdom and truth we reached in the decisions made in these days," she said, "but our hearts, the way we speak to one another and the manner in which we go about our ministry and daily labors will indicate to what degree our Chapter focus 'to deepen and extend Mercy' has been realized."

Deadline

Parish correspondents are reminded that items for At Your Parish must be typed and in the Courier-Journal offices before noon on Thursday preceding Wednesday publication. The address is 114 S. Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607.



Sisters Jane Kenrick, Chilean missionary, and Judith Kenrick, principal of Our Lady of Lourdes, Elmira.

ment of lay collaboration and leadership to the end of expanding lay leadership in ministry and, when and if necessary or desirable, replacing ourselves in particular ministerial roles, in response to the signs of the times

Two secondary criteria of relational importance are:

6. The needs of the congregation in relation to continuing congregational sponsorships, commitments, and present work to be done, as expressed by congregational authority, and re-

The ministry of education is a continuation of the mission of Jesus: to seek truth, bring justice, and proclaim God's mercy and love.

Catherine McAuley, in founding the Sisters of Mercy, enfolded the call of Jesus in service to the poor, the sick, and the ignorant.

As Sisters of Mercy, we, along with our co-workers, strive for academic excellence in our educational ministry, believe that fundamental to this educational ministry is Christian formation, the integration of Gospel values as



Congregation and delegates register a response.



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