

From 'Uphphandia' to Old St. Mary's Church, Her Urban Ministry Covers Extensive Range

By John Dash

Granted, it's a very rare event. But every so often Sister Joan Sobala leaves her duties at Old St. Mary's Church to join friends at "Uphphandia," a fun name for an Adirondack territory where cross-country skiing and camaraderie is the order of the day.

"Uphphandians" (there are no Fs in the language) are a mixed lot, but all share a love of Church, their ministerial tasks, and the sight of snow in the Adirondacks.

More often than not, however, Sister Joan may be found at Old St. Mary's Church. The church is celebrating with the City of Rochester its 150th anniversary this year. Her service as pastoral assistant there is wide-ranging, including one of the rarer ministries in the city. She serves part-time as Catholic chaplain at the Eastman School of Music.

She freely acknowledges that the mainstay of religious presence at the school is Canon Cyril Roberts, the Episcopal priest who is a familiar figure on Gibbs Street. He has for a number of years been revered by both students and faculty at the world-famous institution.

He commands, in her words, "a devoted and enthusiastic student support," among the 400 undergradu-



Sister Joan Sobala, SSJ, chats with Eastman School students, from left, Laurie Semmers, Scott Purty and Gretchen Staring.

ates and 200 graduate students.

Complementing that ministry, Sister Joan has developed a program of 10-12 hours a week bringing the Roman Catholic perspective to the school.

She described recently the course of a typical day there. It is a Thursday; and the time blocked off runs from 4 p.m. to midnight. The locale is the school dormitory on the corner of Prince Street and University Avenue.

Her first hour, she said, is devoted to "wandering around, passing out newsletters and catching up on the events of the week." Often she will "stop in and discuss

the news with the kitchen staff."

From 5 to 7 p.m., the dining period, ("I'm the only one here with the luxury of a two-hour meal") is spent table-hopping, joining groups of students here and there, chatting with the students, introducing herself, raising questions perhaps and fielding them as well.

For the next three hours she remains in her office receiving students, by appointment or not. "They come with a wide scope of questions," she said, "from interpersonal relationships in school, to sex and marriage, through parents. Sometimes it's faith — theology."

Not infrequently, students will approach her with fundamentalist challenges to Scripture interpretations, she said. Among them are students "utterly sincere to the Gospel, but they chose interpretations that back them into a corner."

Every other week, at 10:15 p.m. Father Daniel McMullin, a Benedictine monk who is also a student at the Eastman School, presides at a celebration of the Eucharist. In the alternate weeks, Sister Joan arranges for special programs, among them a discussion of the relationship between music and theology; a showing of the movie, "Gods of Metal," and a discussion of nuclear armaments; a how-to lesson, right before examination time, on relaxation techniques.

Following such events, she serves refreshments and socializes with the students until midnight.

In addition, she encourages the students to partake of outings sponsored by St. Mary's and she also encourages them to join in the worship at the church. A number of them do, and the musical programs at the church are generating an enthusiastic response from parishioners.

The actual number of Roman Catholics at the school, she said, is relatively small. "I minister to anybody who knocks on my door. I'll counsel students of all religious traditions — and I'll help students establish themselves in their own faith traditions. Of course, I relate to Roman Catholics in a very particular way," she said.

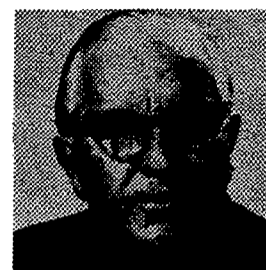
She is not a musician, she acknowledged. And that distinction helps her devise ways to "keep the students' mental pots stirred."

communications, that point a colleague described her role as "the cement here, the nitty-gritty." On ment."

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DANCE -

Bayanihan - Internationally celebrated dance company from the Philippines, 8 p.m., Friday, Feb. 24, main auditorium, Nazareth Arts Center. Tickets, \$10, \$8 for students.

MUSIC - "The Old Maid and the Thief," opera by Gian-Carlo Menotti, 8 p.m., Friday and Saturday, Feb. 24-25, 3 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 26, Gerald G. Wilmot Hall of Music, Nazareth Arts Center. For more information call Music Department, 586-2525, ext 620.

NFP - Session sponsored by Natural Family Planning Education, 7:30 p.m., Friday, Feb. 24, St. Mary's Church, Ontario. Pre-registration is required. Call Marian LaPorta at 464-8705.

FILM SERIES - "Face to Face" features Symbols as Keys to Cultural Identity, by Dr. Richard Rose, RMSC curator of anthropology, 2 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 25, Rochester Museum and Science Center auditorium. Free with general museum admission.

A WURLITZER - And a Song featuring Don Scott at the RMSC's Wurlitzer theater organ, 2 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 26, Eisenhart Auditorium. Admission \$1.50 adults, \$1 RMSC members and children.

KILBOURN HALL -

Eastman-Ranlet Concert, Cleveland Quartet with Victor Rosenbaum, piano, 3 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 26. Free but tickets are required: Kilbourn Concert, Benita Valente, soprano, Cynthia Raim, piano, playing the music of Rachmaninov, Barber and Rodrigo, 8 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 28. Tickets available at the Eastman School ticket office 275-3500: Faculty recital, music of Bach, Franck, Prokofiev, 8 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 29. Free.

SCHOLARS 1984 - Series featuring "Mind in the Universe: The Life That Follows Man." by Dr. Robert Jastrow, 8 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 29, Eisenhart Auditorium.

SENIOR MATINEE - "Till the End of Time," starring Dorothy McGuire, Robert Mitchell, 1:30 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 23, George Eastman House.

CHILI ART - Group will meet at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 23 at the Chili Community Center, 4400 Buffalo Road, North Chili. Guests are invited to the meetings and more information can be obtained by calling Debbie Letson, 538-6473. Also works by Ted Miller are on display now through the end of February at the Chili Town Library.

FAMILIES - And Friends of the Mentally Ill and Emotionally Disturbed, a self-help support group, meets at 7:30 p.m., Monday, Feb. 27 at the Reformation Church, 11 N. Chestnut Street. Free and open to the public. Contact person is Sharon Kaplan at 647-1548 after 6 p.m.

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