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Ministry of Justice and Mercy Diocesans Help Prisoners and Those Freed from Prison

First in a two-part series

By John Dash

Sister Barbara Moore pushed back the stray lock of hair which had fallen across her brow as she hung up the telephone receiver.

"I was just calling one of our volunteers," she said, "just to find out how things were going and to invite her to an evening of sharing we have scheduled."

"We don't have an organized structure for this," she said, pointing to cards on her desk with names and telephone numbers. "But through a simple phone call we can keep in touch."

The volunteer the Sister of Mercy was calling belongs to Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry, and every week or so visits someone awaiting trial at the Monroe County Jail.

Sister Barbara is executive director of RIJM, an ecumenical effort whose "fundamental purpose is visitation of pre-trial men and women in Monroe County Jail," she said.

That pre-trial time is "a

Diocesans are active in two relatively new and very different ministries to the imprisoned and their families and to those who have been released from penal institutions.

The Church has long had formal ministries to the jailed, principally through its chaplains. This account, however, deals with, first, an ecumenical organization which visits those awaiting trial and advocates on their behalf, and second, a parish organization which helps ex-offenders find skills and readjustment to life outside prison.

very anxiety-filled period. It's during the first few days that most suicide attempts are made," she said.

RIJM is now about 14 years old. It was started, as a spinoff from Church Women United, by Robert Bonn.

It is funded by a host of religious bodies, ranging from judicatories, through congregations to individuals.

Its goals also include:

- Training and guidance of volunteers who visit the jail.

- Education of the community concerning the criminal justice system and the needs of incarcerated persons.

- Advocacy for prisoners as the need arises.

- Working for systemic change within the criminal justice system.

- Assistance for and ministry to families of incarcerated persons, RIJM's report for 1983 stated.

That last goal is reaching fruition through a year-old program called FAST (Families Anonymous Support Team).

FAST was founded by a young woman who asked not to be named, but who said last week that when her brother was imprisoned, "I found the system very harsh and cold..." She also found that friends and neighbors shunned her and her family. And during her visits with her

brother, she also saw others in her same predicament.

"Seeing those others," she said, "I thought there must be something I could do. I searched for a place, and I knew I couldn't do it alone. So I presented a proposal (to RIJM). I wanted at least a place to go."

FAST, she said, provides the families of imprisoned people, that "place to go and find understanding. If you haven't been there you can't understand," she said.

The board of RIJM, Sister Barbara said, last month expressed its pleasure over the growth of FAST, "and it has now become a permanent part of the organization."

In addition, RIJM has recently "added a jail issues committee, composed of lawyers, a judge, a literacy volunteer and volunteers," she said. The function of the committee will be to "broaden the view of the jail. For example, jail facilities and rules."

As she spoke, Sister Barbara was often interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. Her assistant, Elizabeth McCarran, was on vacation, and Sister Barbara had to field all the details of the office's functions.

One of the telephone calls, was from a local public defender, congratulating RIJM on the county's recent decision to move jail records back to a place accessible to the public. Another call was from the head of a statewide agency providing legal services to prisoners.

Sister Barbara points with



Photo by Terrance J. Brennan. Sister Barbara in her offices at Downtown United Presbyterian Church.

pride to the RIJM board of directors, headed by a priest, and including representatives from every major faith in the community and from a number of organizations and corporations.

The board's diversity, she said, "puts us at discussion tables to effect change — where we can hopefully bring certain voices and

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Photo by Terrance J. Brennan

Deacons Alexander Bradshaw, Patrick Sullivan and Stanley Kacprzak with Father Michael Conboy (seated), director of the diocesan deacon intern process.

Deacon-Interns 'Grow Toward the Priesthood'

By Terrance J. Brennan

According to Father Michael Conboy, the emphasis of the diocesan deacon intern process this year "will be centering around a deeper understanding of spiritual community living and ministerial growth."

"I met with all the priest and deacon interns and found them to be enthusiastic and anxious to share ministry in the life of the Church," said Father Conboy, director

of the intern process and pastor of St. Margaret Mary Parish on Rogers Parkway.

This office, formerly directed by Father Edward Steinkirchner, comes under the auspices of the Division of Personnel, Staffing and Development.

Three of Father Conboy's charges are Deacons Alexander Bradshaw, Stanley Kacprzak and Patrick Sullivan.

Rev. Mr. Sullivan is a

graduate of the theological seminary in Darlington, N.J. Deacons Bradshaw and Kacprzak have completed three years of study at the North American College in Rome.

All three have been placed in diocesan parishes to serve their internships, and all three are scheduled to be ordained priests in the Spring or Summer of 1985.

Rev. Mr. Kacprzak's
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Church Teachings Difficult But Are Benefit to Humanity, Pope Says of Humanae Vitae

By John Thavis

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II said July 25 that Church teachings against artificial birth control account for the difficulties faced by couples and are "truly beneficial to the human community."

"To many people the Church's teaching on the regulation of birth will appear difficult to put into practice," the pope told several thousand people in St. Peter's Square. "Indeed, its observance would not be possible without the help of God, who upholds and strengthens the human will."

"Yet to anyone who reflects well, it will be very clear that efforts to put this teaching into practice make the human person more noble, and are truly beneficial to the human community," he said.

"Humanae Vitae" (Of Human Life), the 1968 encyclical in which Pope Paul

VI spelled out the Church's stand on birth control, and "Gaudium et Spes" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) of the Second Vatican Council deal with people's situations in difficult modern circumstances, including issues of conjugal love and birth control.

"Whoever believes that the council and the encyclical do not take into account enough the difficulties present in real life does not understand the pastoral concern that was at the origin of those documents," the pope said.

"Pastoral concern means searching for the true good of the human person and promotion of authentic human values," he said, and "the only true good of the human person consists in discovering ever more clearly God's plan concerning human love and putting this divine plan into practice."

"Humanae Vitae," the pope added, not only outlined the "binding moral norms" regarding birth control and married love, but addressed the practical questions of the contemporary person.

Among such questions, the pope said, were social, political and economic concerns about the worldwide population growth. Contemporary moral theologians, as well as scientists in particular fields, had raised concerns dealt with in the document, he said.

"Above all are the questions of the couples, which are at the center of the council's constitution and which are taken up again with appropriate precision in the encyclical," the pope said.

The pope's talk was the third in a series of discourses on the encyclical, expected to last into this fall.