

SSJs Hold Reunion for Former Members

"The singleness of purpose of our lives — for however many years we were there — makes a strong bonding," said Sister Beatrice Ganley SSJ.

The spokesperson for the congregation said the phrase expressed the theme un-

derlying comments of the present and former members of the Sisters of St. Joseph who attended a reunion, the first of its kind for the Rochester congregation, at the motherhouse Sept. 1.

The chapel, accommodating 600 persons, was filled

for the welcome remarks of Sister Elizabeth Anne LeValley, superior general.

Sister Elizabeth Anne spoke of the purpose of the day, an attempt to put in right order the basic relationship "with those who have walked most intimately

with us when their commitment called them to be a Sister of St. Joseph."

She expressed the sense of "excitement, anticipation, and a pulse we would like to name the Spirit" with which the present members of the congregation had been awaiting the day, treasuring this "time to become reacquainted on all levels."

She also alluded to the sense of loss and grief experienced by the Sisters over the departure of so many of their members. "But," she said, "let us name these feelings and know their richness and let us move on to hope and life... which is already evident in this gathering."

Following the gathering in the chapel, a buffet dinner was served. There were tours of the motherhouse, a slide presentation, and a songfest in St. Joseph Convent and Infirmary.

Most of the day, however, was given over to renewing friendships, sharing memories and a mutual updating about the activities of each one's life.

One former Sister remarked, "It was astonishing to see the changes which have occurred since 1968 when I left, and very confusing to feel almost closer now to members of my band than I did then. My life is still muddled by the values I learned while in the convent for eight years."

The afternoon concluded with a liturgy celebrated in the motherhouse chapel by Msgr. William Shannon.

"I say we come together as Christian people on a journey," he told the

assembly. "But there is a special significance for this coming together today. For once you traveled the same path on that journey and were united as Sisters of St. Joseph."

"Now you are united in the consciousness that for that journey there is not just one path, but many. You travel different paths, but with no one being better than the others."

"I say that you are united today; and I truly believe that you are. Yet it is easy to say this, much more difficult to grasp exactly is what it means."

"This coming together is surely a joyful reality, but also a complex one. Mixed with the sincere desire to be one, there are, I am sure, other feelings: feelings of having been hurt, and also feelings of having hurt."

"There may be sentiments of residual anger coupled with not easily defined feelings of guilt."

"Facing all this is part of the struggle for authenticity and integrity."

"And of course you cannot make these things away simply by willing it. What we can do is to let all adverse feelings be dissolved — if even for a while — in the unconditional love that the Lord Jesus has for all of us. And it is this unconditional love that we gather here to celebrate in the Eucharist."

After the liturgy, there was a supper, but no formal conclusion to the day. Many stayed until after twilight, and some continued the celebration in smaller gatherings in the homes of some of the former members.

Nearly 300 former members returned for the occasion, some from as far away as Florida, California and Alaska.

"It was a 'dies Domini' a day after which no other can be the same," said one participant.

SSJs Set Election Events

The social justice committee of the Sisters of St. Joseph has scheduled a series of events in preparation for the Nov. 6 general election.

"The events are being presented as a way to help voters be informed about the candidates and issues and as an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about party platforms," according to Sister Christine Wagner SSJ, chairman of the committee.

City Councilman Paul Haney, a Democrat, and County Legislator Joanne VanZandt, a Republican, will

speak on their parties' platforms regarding economic, foreign and military policies, 7:30-9:30 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 20 in the congregation's motherhouse, 4095 East Ave.

Douglas Call, a Democratic candidate for the 30th congressional district, will speak and answer questions at a coffee hour, 9:30-10:30 a.m., Sunday, Sept. 30 also at the motherhouse.

His opponent, Republican Fred Eckert, will do the same, 9:30-10:30 a.m., Sunday, Oct. 21.

Participants in the Sunday

coffee hours are also invited to attend the congregation's 11 a.m. Mass.

Further information is available from Sister Christine, 381-3891, or 586-1000.

Resolve Meets

Dr. Gerald Zelikovsky, an urologist from New York City, will speak on "Male Infertility: Cause and Treatment" at the Resolve for Rochester meeting, 6 p.m., Monday, Sept. 24 at Helen Wood Hall, 225 Crittenden Blvd. The program is free and open to the public.

Sweet-Arts

The Sweet-Arts Cake Club will hold its 11th annual cake show, 10 a.m.-9 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 6; and noon-4:30 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 7 at Long Ridge Mall. Persons interested in cake decorating are invited to the club's meetings as a guest. The meetings are held at Community Christian Church on Chili Avenue. Further information is available from Diane Schneider, 16917 Ridge Road, Holley, N.Y. 14470.

Bishop to Discuss Pastoral in Apalachin

APALACHIN -- Bishop Matthew H. Clark will visit St. Margaret Mary's Friday, Sept. 21, to discuss "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," the pastoral letter by the U.S. bishops.

The bishop also will attend a pot lock supper at 5:30 p.m., to which parishioners

are invited. Any family attending is asked to bring a dish to pass (salad or dessert). The parish will supply plates, utensils, meat and beverage.

At 7:30 in the church, Bishop Clark will share his insights on the pastoral letter and answer questions on it.



Father Bruce Ritter

BRIGHT, BRITTLE LAUGHTER



She came to us a year ago last July—she came, like many of our kids, at night because she was on the street and hungry. When we went to where she was, Grace was sitting in a

corner, suspicious and fearful. She remained sitting when I asked her the couple of questions we always ask: How old are you? Where are you from? Do you need a place to stay? Are you hungry? She nodded yes.

She let her be led, reluctantly, upstairs to her new room—let us give her a shower, some clean clothes, and last, but not least, a warm meal.

She stayed a month, and to the delight of all of us, seemed to like it here. Grace grew with adolescent leaps and bounds: the start of a job, a high school equivalency program, the beginning of some love-giving and getting. She also fell back periodically: into her sadness, lying about where she got her money, her habit of bright, brittle laughter, wanting to go back to Joey who beat her up all the time. There were many confrontations, meetings, and conferences about Grace during that summer. What did she really want? What was the best thing for her? What should she do next?

One afternoon, I walked into the lounge and saw Grace lying rigidly on the couch cuddling her teddy bear. She said that she was leaving because no one cared about her except her teddy bear. She said these things smiling her ever-present, glass-hard smile, and when I grinned back at her (thinking she was into her usual playful pouting), Grace

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

started to cry, and screamed: "Stop making fun of me. This is the only thing I care about. You don't care. Leave me alone. I'm leaving." She didn't. She stayed for another two weeks before, filled with a bitterness she could not understand, and spewing curses, she walked out.

"She came at night because she was on the street—and hungry"

I see Grace from time to time. The most recent was last week on the street with a friend. She told me of her guy and the Fifth Avenue apartment where she was living; of another boyfriend with a motorcycle whom she was on her way to visit now. He's the one who wouldn't be seen for her a few months back when she committed herself to a psychiatric hospital for depression. (It's better than overdosing, she said, like when I was 14 in New Jersey). She seemed to want me to approve, knowing I wouldn't, yet wanting something—maybe the same things we gave her a year ago, whatever they were. And then her bright empty smile and the winking out of a little more hope in a face now older and just a little bit harder.

"We wanted her to change. She wouldn't, couldn't. Maybe just..."

I thought of Grace when writing this because she came to us for free, was able to stay because of the personal and financial sacrifices that others, like yourself, make. She left, to be free, when it started to cost her too much: we wanted her to change. She wouldn't, couldn't, maybe. Maybe just didn't want to.

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