

WOMEN

Two who make a difference

By Katharine Bird
NC News Service

Not long ago Franciscan Sister Marla Lang took a much-needed break from her duties as pastoral administrator of two Wisconsin parishes in the Diocese of Superior. But then she was told about the death of a 19-year-old parishioner in a car accident.

Figuring that the girl's family needed her ministry more than she needed a vacation, Sister Lang immediately returned to the parish. She helped comfort the family and plan the Mass of Christian Burial. A priest from a parish 12 miles away came to celebrate the liturgy, as he does for weekend Masses.

Since 1981 when the former priest-pastor retired, Sister Lang has divided her energies between the 130 households of St. John the Baptist Parish in Bloomville, Wis., and the 90 households of St. Augustine's Parish in Harrison 17 miles away — a parish that doubles in size during the summer resort season.

Her appointment to the parish calls for her to "take care of all pastoral and administrative responsibilities," she said. As the only full-time minister in either parish, "everything is delegated to me as to a pastor" except officiating at the sacraments, Sister Lang said.

Asked how parishioners responded to her, Sister Lang admitted it was "very painful" for many people at first. "They never heard of a woman doing this before," she said. "There was a lot of fear and a sense of loss" when, in the priest-short diocese, a priest was not assigned to the parishes. "Others felt the diocese was punishing us."

She added that she proceeded very carefully during the first year. "I did a lot of listening, to pick up the pieces," the Franciscan said. Her aim was "to build trust and to let people know I'm there to be of service to them."

Then, as now, she spent considerable time visiting families. "A lot of ministry is being with people in different ways," she commented. So, a typical day might find her going to youngsters' ball games as well as working with the parish council.

Sister Lang tries "to spend equal time in both parishes" and frequently puts in 60 hours a week. She depends on volunteers a lot. In fact, the sister said, she sees her ministry in terms of "enabling people to use their gifts."

Today parishioners wholeheartedly accept her ministry, Sister Lang indicated. "They still have a priest for the sacraments but they have me too" for many other pastoral duties, she said.

Greer Gordon also knows what it is like to pursue an unusual

career path. As the director of adult religious education, she is the only woman on the administrative level with the religious education office of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

"As the only feminine presence on this team," Ms. Gordon said, she takes care to present herself in a professional and feminine way. In her view, many church people haven't learned yet how to relate to someone like her — a well-educated single woman deeply committed to a church career.

Ms. Gordon spends 65 percent of her time in parishes. A typical day, often stretching from early morning to late night, finds her consulting with directors of religious education, working on an enrichment program for married couples involved in Pre-Cana work and addressing parish leaders.

Both women admitted that they feel lonely at times in their unusual careers. But both indicated they receive a great deal of support from women involved in other kinds of church ministry. And both gave full marks to the clergy they work with for their sensitivity.

Sister Lang said that she is invariably invited to attend regional clergy meetings. At the present time she is the only woman at these meetings.

But, not for long, Sister Lang thinks. She knows several other sisters in the diocese who are preparing to become pastoral administrators like her.

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)

Women of the New Testament

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

The first Christian community St. Paul founded in what we now know as Europe was at Philippi in Macedonia or northern Greece.

When Paul arrived in Philippi, he found a little Jewish congregation meeting down at the river bank.

Luke, writer of the Acts of the Apostles, tells the story: "We sat down there and spoke to the women who were gathered there. One who listened was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple goods from the town of Thyatira. She already revered God and the Lord opened her heart to accept what Paul was saying."

Luke adds that Lydia and her household then were baptized. It would seem that Lydia became the first to be baptized there.

And Lydia extended to Paul and

his group an invitation: "If you are convinced that I believe in the Lord, come and stay at my house" (Acts 16:13-14).

Notice that Paul preached "to the women." Apparently they were the only ones there and Paul did not wait for the men to show up.

Lydia was a gentile who had been attracted to Judaism. That's what is indicated when we read that "she already revered God."

She was, moreover, a businesswoman. Either she had her own firm back in Thyatira, a commercial center in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), or she was the firm's representative at Philippi.

In any event, Lydia apparently was rather well-to-do, with a house in town to which she could invite the missionaries.

As a businesswoman, she was forthright and authoritative, ac-

customed to taking the initiative. One can sense an undertone of surprise in Luke's remark: "She managed to prevail on us." Well, Lydia was a manager to begin with! And we can imagine that she had a forceful personality.

Women figured prominently in the ministry of Jesus. And they were the first to be favored with an appearance of the risen Lord. So it is not surprising that we meet active women of the church in the New Testament. One of those women was Lydia. Another was named Phoebe. Paul speaks of her in Romans 16:1-2.

Phoebe, it seems, was from the port city of Cenchræ near Corinth. Writing about her, Paul said: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deaconess of the church of Cenchræ. Please welcome her in the Lord, as saints should. If she needs help in anything, give it to her, for she

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