

Spirit House

Continued from Page 3

Church often gives us," Sister Mollie said. "One of the things we hope is that they'll get comfortable with the being part of themselves rather than just the doing part."

Sisters are also encouraged to invite visitors to Spirit House. "We try to support and sustain their network of friends and family since that's who they're going back to," Sister Mollie said. "We want to create as much of an open community setting as possible and still keep the therapeutic context."

Spirit House is funded by the congregations that use the program. The decision not to seek funding from any diocese was a conscious choice on the part of the staff. "We pull from all over the country, and this lets us be much more free," she said.

It also forces staff to keep costs to a minimum. Few insurance companies offer coverage for preventive mental health care, so the fees paid by congregations are seldom reimbursed.

Some of the other six or seven similar communities across the country have as many as two dozen members. But Spirit House accepts no more than 12 residents at a time, including staff. That limit has produced a waiting list for the past two years — something Sister Mollie regrets, but has learned to accept.

"We decided that we don't have to save the

world, just a little piece," she explained. "Growth most often happens in small groups . . . if you get too large, then it becomes like those bakeries where you take a number and wait your turn. People shouldn't have to wait their turn to share their pain."

When a resident is ready to leave the community, her primary therapist refers her to another therapist in her local area for follow-up care.

Six to eight weeks after returning to her congregation, the sister invites friends, congregation members or relatives to a transition workshop. Presented by Sister Mollie, the workshop ensures that the sister and the community are readjusting to one another. "That allows enough time so that people feel safe enough to share and have developed some questions," she explained.

Before she leaves Spirit House, each sister also plans a farewell prayer service, which "is always a profound experience," according to Sister Mollie.

She recalled one 62-year-old sister who arrived unable to sit still. As the months passed and she relaxed, her pace gradually slowed down. Before she left, the sister offered her farewell to the community in the form of a dance, beginning with the raucous "New York, New York," and closing to a mellifluous Hawaiian tune.

"No matter how hassling it gets, watching something like that happen is incredible," Sister Mollie said. "Sometimes, I feel like a cock-eyed optimist, but it works."

Vatican report on 38 U.S. seminaries calls for halt to moral theology dissent

By Jerry Filteau

Washington (NC) — A Vatican report on U.S. seminaries calling for a halt to any form of "confusion" or "dissent" in moral theology teaching deals with an issue central to the disciplining of Father Charles E. Curran, the controversial Rochester-based moral theologian at The Catholic University of America.

The report, written by the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education and released in Washington, said "emphatic clarification and redress" is needed in some U.S. seminaries because seminarians studying moral theology are not learning clearly "what the church teaches."

The report, reflecting in-depth studies of 38 U.S. free-standing theological seminaries, said that "the majority" of them offer "moral theology characterized by balance, fidelity, pedagogic appropriateness and pastoral sensitivity."

But in some moral theology programs there is confusion, and in a few there is "dissent," the report said.

Father Curran was told last summer by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that "one who dissents from the magisterium (church teaching authority) as you do is not suitable nor eligible to teach Catholic theology." The congregation called for revocation of Father Curran's ecclesiastical license to teach.

The seminary report urged bishops to consider linking their seminaries to ecclesiastical theology faculties. Such faculties, like

the one at Catholic University, are chartered by Rome, and their teachers need approval from the Vatican to teach.

Father Curran and a number of other theologians claim his views on dissent are limited and fall within the mainstream of views held by professionals in that field.

Aside from the specific moral issues on which Father Curran dissents, mainly in the area of sexual morality, the main issues in his case center on the nature and scope of church authority. Is it possible to dissent from church moral teaching? If so, what are the limits of that dissent?

Father Curran said, "The possibility of legitimate dissent, I think, is admitted by many" of the moral theologians teaching in U.S. seminaries. The 750 or more theologians who signed a statement supporting the legitimacy of his dissent included a number of seminary professors, he said.

The new Vatican report on seminaries emphasized a pastoral concern in its treatment of dissent. "The present errors and debate over the authoritative character of the moral teaching of the church should not be permitted to confuse the seminarian or lead him to think that the teaching of the ordinary magisterium is somehow non-binding," it said.

The report said that in the "few instances of dissent" that were reported, it was not clear whether "dissent" meant "difficulty" with a church teaching or actually rejecting or contradicting it.

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