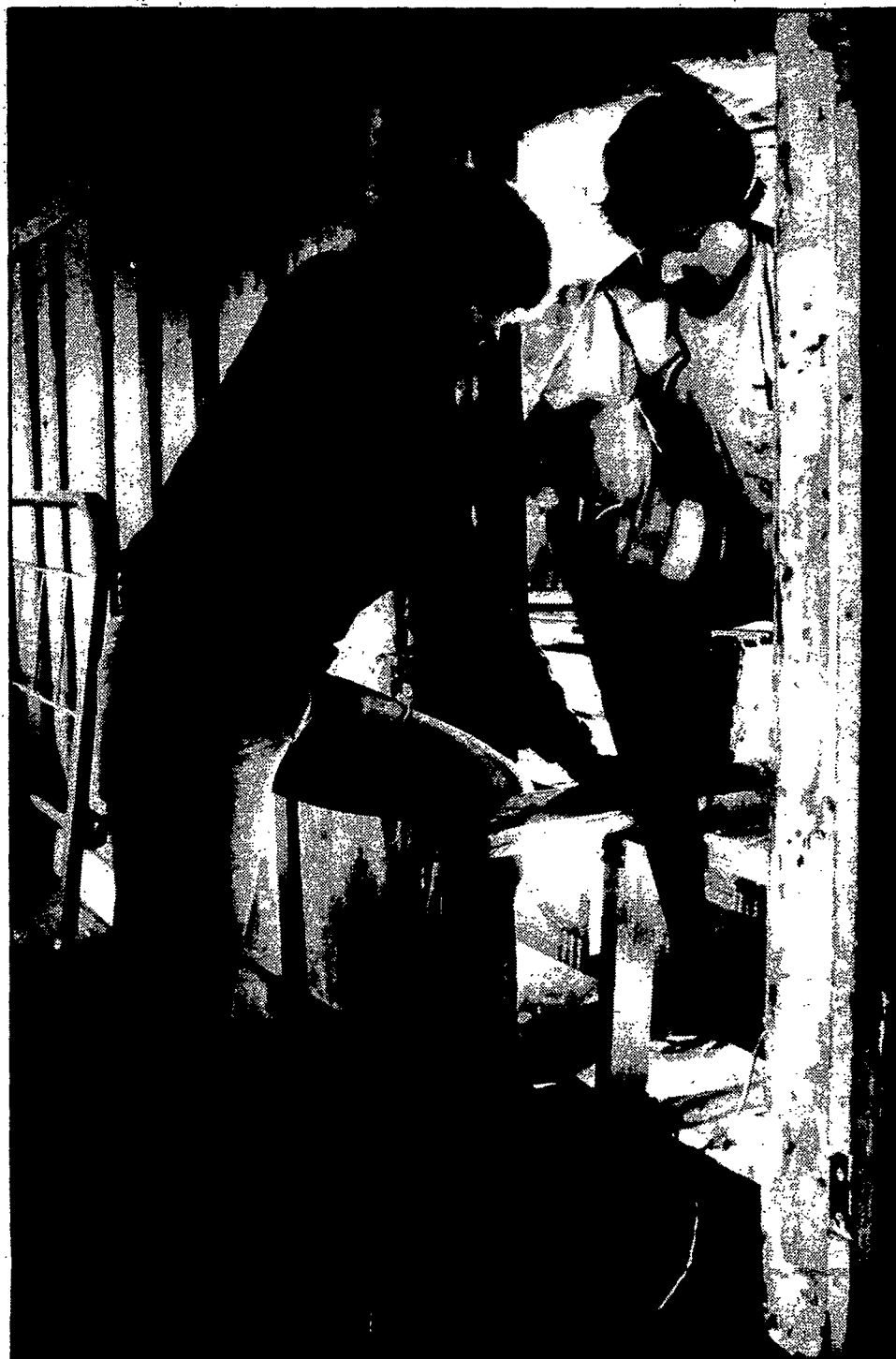


# Mission links young people with the needs of a community



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Christine Zimbelmann, Christian Goetting and Patty McCollum take a breather from tearing out lath and plaster walls.



Jennifer Porter and Erica Rierdan collaborate on rip-sawing a board, which has to be cut by hand because of the age of the wood.

## Students chose service over sun, sandy beaches

By Teresa A. Parsons

Most of Jennifer Falchi's friends spent their spring break sunning themselves on Florida beaches.

Falchi, on the other hand, was about a dozen miles northeast of Clearfield, Pa., in an elderly widower's kitchen, wiping coal dust off the walls and listening to the story of his life.

A freshman from SUNY College at Geneseo, Falchi wasn't doing the work to earn extra money for the spring semester. Nor was profit the motive for nearly 40 other college students from Geneseo and Buffalo State who spent their spring break at the Young People Who Care Mission in central Pennsylvania's Appalachian region.

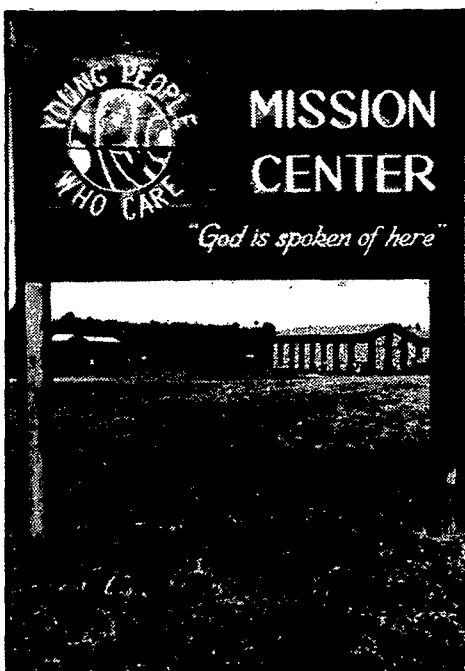
On the contrary, members of both college's Newman Communities had spent much of the fall semester raising money to pay for the opportunity to serve at the mission.

Some of Falchi's friends told her she was crazy. Even after almost a week at the mission, she struggled for words to explain why she had chosen coal dust over white sand beaches.

"There's so much out there and not a lot of time. I'm not content to sit back and read about it," she said. "I want to see and experience it for myself."

Falchi didn't have any trouble, however, in defining what she had gained from the experience. "I learned that what you read in textbooks and newspapers about people and poverty is true," she said. "It's good to know that there are people who realize that and try to do something about it."

"We all have stereotypes," she added.



Located in south-central Pennsylvania near Frenchville, the main mission center of Young People Who Care houses a retreat center, dorms, kitchen facilities and a chapel. The new religious Community of Anawim is also headquartered there.

"By doing something kind, you can change an older person for someone else and see them smile."

The Young People Who Care Mission is dedicated to illustrating that Falchi's attitude is fairly common among teenagers and young adults.

"It's important that people are aware that young people are willing to be generous with their time," said Sister Theresa Dush, founder of the mission. "When young people are energized as a group, they can be a link to meeting very real needs in our country."

Pennsylvania has more homebound elderly

people living in poverty than any of the other 12 states in the Appalachian region has, Sister Dush said. The plight of Pennsylvania's elderly is particularly acute in isolated rural areas, where residents often lack transportation, medical care and decent housing.

Unemployment is also high, although the rumbling of coal trucks is ever-present in Clearfield County, which has one of the highest concentrations of surface strip mining in the United States.

The local economy has been crippled in recent years by the closing of several major industries — the Harbison Walker Brick

Yard, Piper Aircraft and General Cigar.

In response, the mission's staff — a community of just 11 people — coordinates outreach centers, home visits, parish ministry and renovation work. Their efforts are spread out over a 100-mile radius.

Six staff members are women in various states of profession or formation with the Community of Anawim, a new religious congregation established by Sister Dush. Five others, including three men, are long-term volunteers who commit themselves to serve for six months or more.

Because there are so few in number, the community depends heavily on an influx of short-term volunteers during spring and summer vacations. Young people have traveled to the mission from as far away as Indiana and Wisconsin.

Sister Dawn Marshall believes that college students in particular come to the mission in order to regain their sense of perspective on life.

"When you're in college, that becomes your whole view," she explained. "You tend to forget the world and people's needs. When students come here and see that there are real needs, they feel good about doing something about them."

This was the third year members of SUNY Geneseo's Newman Community spent spring vacation at the Frenchville mission. Another group of nearly a dozen Geneseo students worked with a rural ministry team in Tioga County, New York.

Each group usually stays at the Frenchville mission for a week, during which time they rotate assignments. Crews of five or six volunteers spend two days in direct service to the community, two days working for the mission, and two days serving each other on kitchen duty.

Soon after breakfast each day, the mission staff deploys crews of volunteers on service projects across the county.

## Anawim community based on 'trust in the Lord'

Sister Theresa Dush jokingly refers to herself as the "Mother Teresa of Frenchville."

Yet the similarities between the Community of Anawim and the Missionaries of Charity founded by Mother Teresa of Calcutta are more than coincidental. Both illustrate a movement among religious communities toward a new — or perhaps renewed — idea of poverty and service.

Founded under the auspices of Bishop Michael J. Murphy of Erie, Pennsylvania, the Community of Anawim accepts both men and women who take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Members earn no salaries or stipends, carry no insurance and maintain no pension funds.

"We live in total dependence on the Lord," Sister Dush explained. "Our services are directed toward people whose needs are not being met anywhere else. We'll do it until we can find others to do it, so we're constantly working ourselves out of things."

A native of Clearfield County,

Pennsylvania, Sister Dush was professed to the Sisters of Mercy in the Diocese of Erie for more than 20 years. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, which challenged religious communities to renew themselves and return to their founding charisms, she experienced a personal conversion.

"I found myself living an upper-middle class life, and that wasn't what I'd wanted to become," she said. "I felt the Lord calling me to poverty and total dependence on Him, to a greater spirit of availability and hospitality to people, and to an intensified prayer life."

When the bishops of the Appalachian region issued their 1976 pastoral letter, "This Land is Home to Me," Sister Dush responded to its call for the establishment of rural centers dedicated to prayer, hospitality and outreach.

She approached the bishop of the Diocese of Erie and her congregation's major superior, asking permission to establish such a center. Officials from the diocesan Campaign for Human Devel-

opment suggested Clearfield County as a location.

What began as Sister Dush's own individual quest soon began to attract others as well. "Young people came and wanted to pray with me, work with me and trust in the Lord with me," she said.

Curiosity drew Sue Thibault to the mission three years ago. A native of Coalport, she was familiar with the community's work at Good Shepherd Mission and signed on for a year of volunteer work.

Now the coordinator of Marion House, Thibault plans to make her first profession to the Community of Anawim this August.

Sister Ruth Ann Madera, the only member of the community so far who has professed final vows, once worked in a Clearfield County factory.

"I remember praying that God would change my life. He answered me," she recalled. "I came to work here for a week and it turned into 10 years."