

# Educator keeps pace with 62 years of catechetical changes

By Teresa A. Parsons

If professional religious educators are defined as those who receive salaries for their services, then Ellen Mahaney wouldn't qualify.

Throughout the 62 years during which she has served parishes in King Ferry, Lansing and Aurora as a catechism teacher and coordinator of religious education, she has never sought or received any payment — at least not in dollars.

Instead, she has earned the distinction of being probably the single best-known and best-loved resident of Cayuga Lake's southeastern shore.

Simple longevity is only part of the reason. She has lived all her 83 years in the area — the last 58 of them on a large farm a mile down Route 90 from Our Lady of the Lake Church in King Ferry.

The honored position Miss Mahaney occupies in the hearts of so many of her neighbors has more to do with her lifelong habit of giving.

There's hardly a Catholic living between Aurora and Lansing whom Miss Mahaney hasn't prepared to receive Holy Communion or confirmation. This year, she is beginning to notice some members of a third generation passing through her classrooms. Other newcomers she may have missed are most likely sending their children to her.

Non-Catholics encountered Miss Mahaney at Lansing's public elementary school, where she taught second graders for nearly 30 years. During the previous 15 years, she taught in the same kind of one-room country schools she attended as a girl.

During free moments when she wasn't teaching, Miss Mahaney brought the Eucharist to sick parishioners, kept track of parish finances, put together the bulletin, arranged fresh flow-

ers on the altar or laundered the altar linens.

"I never thought of getting any money for any of it," she said. "I feel I do it for the Church and for God. It's just part of my responsibility to help where I can."

"Of course if I was married and had a family, I could never have done it," she added. "But the thought never entered my head that I didn't want to do any of it."

Teaching was among the only occupations considered suitable for a woman when Miss Mahaney graduated from King Ferry High School in 1923. Fortunately for her, teaching was the only thing she ever wanted to do.

Despite the demands of instructing first through eighth grades in a one-room school which she also cleaned and maintained, Miss Mahaney's hunger to educate wasn't satisfied.

So in 1925, she taught the first of many, many first Communion classes at Our Lady of the Lake. In those days and for years thereafter, religious education in King Ferry began and ended with preparation for first Communion and confirmation. "The priest told you what to do and you did it," she recalled.

When All Saints Church in Lansing became a mission of the King Ferry parish in 1935, Miss Mahaney began teaching religious education there as well. The public school where she taught during the day was right across the street from All Saints. Once a week, she would assemble Catholic students after school and escort them across the road for catechism class.

In 1959, the year her mother died, Miss Mahaney continued to teach, but relinquished the coordinator's position to a group of Sisters of St. Joseph who were headquartered in Ithaca.

Ten years later, she was forced to retire from her full-time teaching post in Lansing after a bout with the Hong Kong flu, which left her throat partially paralyzed. In the early 1970s,

the last of the sisters pulled out of King Ferry and Miss Mahaney was once again asked to serve as religious education coordinator.

She continued to divide her time between Our Lady of the Lake and All Saints parishes until 1982, when four parishes along the southeastern shore of Cayuga Lake were joined in a cluster administered by a single parish staff. All Saints then became a mission of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Ithaca, and Miss Mahaney began to coordinate the combined religious education programs of Our Lady of the Lake and St. Patrick's Parish in Aurora, where she was baptised as a child.

Altogether, 58 students have registered for

teachers now," she explained with a smile.

So much about children and Church teaching has changed from the days of the Baltimore Catechism, when Miss Mahaney began her ministry, through the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and up to the latest Sadlier textbook series, which she'll be using at Our Lady of the Lake this year.

The material and methods she used in her early classes were much the same as those she recalled from childhood. "The Baltimore Catechism was it. That's what you learned," she said. "I remember when I was young the priest would come down and question youngsters about their lessons right in church while you

*'The Church's thinking is entirely different now. Children learn more about their faith. They used to just go to church and sit and never say anything. Now we get the children to participate ... I think it makes them more aware of what's going on.'*

*Ellen Mahaney*

this year's classes, which began last Sunday. Because Our Lady of the Lake Church has no parish center or school building, four classes meet in the rectory and four gather in the church. Miss Mahaney seldom teaches anymore, unless one of her eight volunteer teachers is absent. "I'm more kind of the boss of the

were sitting with your family."

Nowadays, religious education relies less on rote learning and more on explanation and individual experience. Miss Mahaney agrees with those who complain that the experiential approach has at times been overemphasized. But

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## Mercy sister planning final professional of vows

Sister Rosemary Sherman will celebrate her profession of perpetual vows to the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester on Sunday, October 4, at 2 p.m. in the Mercy motherhouse, 1437 Blossom Road. As the theme for the celebration, she has chosen "I have loved you with an everlasting love," Father Ray Fleming, pastor of St. Mary's Church of the Deaf, will preside at the liturgy, which will be fully interpreted for the deaf and hearing-impaired.



Sister Sherman works as business manager for St. Mary's Parish and as a visiting instructor for the School of Business Careers at RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf. She earned a master's degree in business technology from RIT in 1978.

The daughter of Francis and Julia Sherman of North Chili, she became a candidate in the Mercy congregation in 1979.

## Catechesis workshops scheduled throughout diocese in September

The Office of Religious Education of the Rochester diocese has announced that Father Ronald Oakham, o.carm., a member of the team of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate, will present three workshops on lectionary-based catechesis in mid-September.

*Rooted in the Word I* is designated for people who are working in their parish Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process.

"The Rite provides that a suitable catechesis be provided in tune with the liturgical year and the proclamation of the Word. Lectionary-based catechesis is a catechetical process rooted in the Word, which provides the foundation for formation of people preparing to become part of our Roman Catholic communities," Father Oakham said.

Father Oakham is former director of the RCIA for the Archdiocese of Newark, NJ. He was keynote speaker at the Rochester diocesan convocation on the RCIA at Keuka Park in August, 1986.

The workshops are slated for: Monday, Sept. 21, 7 p.m. at St. Mary Our Mother Church, Horseheads; Tuesday, Sept. 22, at 9:30 a.m. at Finger Lakes Office of Religious Education, Geneva; and Tuesday, Sept. 22, at 7 p.m. at St. Theodore's, Rochester. The fee is \$10. Pre-registration is recommended.

Call the Office of Religious Education (716)328-3210 for information.

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