

Features

# Vespers service celebrates Mary's multi-faceted image

By Teresa A. Parsons

The mother of all hope and fear. The queen of mercy and grace. The gentle woman and obedient handmaiden. The long-suffering, yet persevering parent.

Those were among the images of Mary evoked in song and dance, scripture and poetry during a vespers service on Friday, April 30, at St. Augustine's Church.

The handful of women scattered throughout the church were a study in diversity: old and young, black and white, Catholic and Congregationalist, some vowed to marriage and others to religious life.

They came to mark the end of the Marian Year, not with pomp or circumstance, but with a simple service that reflected tradition as well as the diversity of their backgrounds and talents.

Vespers, the sixth of the canonical hours of the Divine Office, is celebrated between 3 and 6 p.m., and usually comprises five psalms, their antiphons, a short lesson, a versicle (part of a scriptural verse) and response, a hymn, the Magnificat and its antiphon, and the prayer of the day.

As a few latecomers straggled into the church Friday evening, they were greeted by the gentle tones of handbells played by a choir of women from the Irondequoit United Church of Christ.

Interspersed among the traditional components of the service — many of which were led by St. Augustine's Choir — were solo performances by East High School student Renee Mills, who sang Vivaldi's "Ad Te Clamamus," and Loretta Doyle, who offered a soaring rendition of "Ave Maria." Actress Jacquelyn Dobson crooned a soulful version of "Amazing Grace," then recited Langston Hughes' tribute to "The Negro Mother."

"Mary transcends all colors and all socioeconomic lines," observed Dobson, director of the Office of Black Ministries, during the brief les-

son she offered to those assembled. "Raised above the angels, she prays for all of us, a queen of mercy and grace — the queen of mercy and grace."

The Shalom Dance Ensemble, directed by Paula Dumont and Elvie Chiarenza, offered two of its prayer/dance pieces, "The Gentle Woman," and "The Magnificat."

In "The Gentle Woman," five dancers explored themes of motherhood and birth. "The Magnificat," danced by Dumont and her teenaged daughter, Christy, employed the dialogue between Mary and Elizabeth to illustrate the experience of women sharing their joy at being in love with Christ.

The dance ensemble, established by Dumont nearly five years ago, combines a core of trained dancers with other participants, many of whom Dumont describes as economically, spiritually or emotionally marginalized.

"Our work comes out of prayer," Dumont explained. "We have a core of people trained in dance, along with others who take part to work out their spirituality through movement."

Friday's service was the third and final event organized by the Diocesan Commission on Women to celebrate the Marian Year.

In January, the commission presented a program entitled "The Roots of Mary" at Temple B'rith Kodesh in Rochester. Last month, Dr. Christine Bochen, chairperson of religious studies at Nazareth College, spoke on "Images of Mary."

"We wanted the last thing we did to be a prayer service, and we thought it would be most fitting to use the prayer of the Church appropriate for that time of day," explained Teryle Brewley, coordinator of the event. The vespers service was also timed to coincide with the feast of St. Catherine of Siena, a 14th century Doctor of the Church, as well as the sixth anniversary of the release of "Fire in the Thornbush," Bishop Matthew H. Clark's pastoral on women.



Paula Dumont (left) and her daughter Christy, both of the Shalom Liturgical Dance Ensemble, enact a scene between Martha and Mary. The presentation was part of the Marian Year vespers service Friday, April 29, at St. Augustine's Church, Rochester.

## Marriage Encounter weekend set for Keuka College in May

Married couples looking for an intimate weekend away from daily stresses are invited to a Marriage Encounter weekend slated for May 13-15 at Keuka College in Penn Yan. The

program is being sponsored by Worldwide Marriage Encounter.

Reservations are limited. Call (716)328-1260 for information.

## Cenacle Center to host retreat for co-dependents

"Reach Out and Touch Somebody's Hand" — a co-dependency retreat for adult children of alcoholic parents — will take place on May

6-7 at the Cenacle Center for Spiritual Renewal, 693-East Ave., Rochester.

Call (716)271-8755 for information.

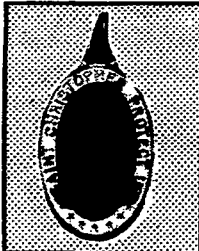
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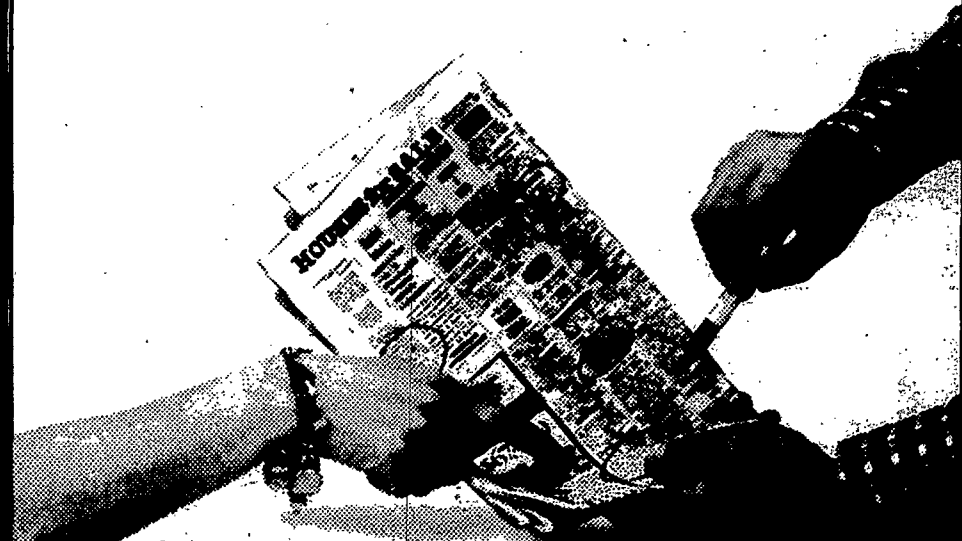
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