



# Sisters proffer contemplative Christmas

By Lee Strong

Eleanor Volpe sensed an atmosphere of peace and contemplation in the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse chapel when she attended Midnight Mass there last year.

"I was impressed by the stillness of the chapel, the contemplative aura, the beauty of the creche," Volpe said. "I think the experience was contemplative."

Bill McKenna, who likewise attended the Mass, was impressed by the quiet.

"It's a little bit different from the regular, run-of-the-mill Midnight Mass," McKenna acknowledged. "It's quieter, more leisurely, more prayerful."

Volpe and McKenna were among relatively few people invited to attend the Mass by the Sisters of St. Joseph. This year, the sisters are extending their invitation to a wider audience.

"What we're doing is opening (the Mass) up to anyone who'd like to join us for the service," explained Sister Virginia Hogan, music director for the Mass. "We did it last year, but we did it by word of mouth, not on a big scale."

"Our concept was we have a gift here," said Sister Juliana O'Hara, who chairs the motherhouse liturgy committee. "We have beautiful music here, and an excellent homilist (Monsignor William Shannon), so we decided to open it to more people."

The annual Mass has always been open to family and friends of the Sisters of St. Joseph, according to Sister O'Hara. Congregation members decided to broaden their invitation to the community at large this year in the belief that more people may be seeking such an alternative celebration. "There are people who are not allied with one church who are looking for a service that's in a quiet atmosphere," Sister O'Hara said. "People are so busy and things are so hectic that we thought (the Mass) might appeal to some people on Christmas Eve."

What sets the motherhouse Mass apart from other Midnight Masses, Monsignor Shannon believes, is its prayerful, contemplative atmosphere.

"There is a sense of quiet and prayerfulness — I think that's probably the most important thing here," he said. "There's no hurry about our liturgy. It gives people an opportunity to join in the singing, but also an opportunity to be reflective. It's something we can do that other places would find difficult."

An hour of quiet prayer beginning at 11 p.m. will help establish the atmosphere for this year's



Linda Dow Hayes, Courier-Journal

The Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse Chapel Choir practice a variety of hymns and responses in preparation for their Midnight Mass which will take place at the motherhouse on Christmas Eve.

Mass. During the first 45 minutes of the hour, the only sound in the chapel will be the greetings given by the sisters to each arriving visitor, and the distant strains of the the 35-member Motherhouse Chapel Choir caroling throughout the motherhouse.

John Bonczyk, who attended the Mass for the first time last year, fondly recalled the caroling. "It carries right through the convent itself — without amplifiers," Bonczyk said. "It's beautiful. An all-woman group singing in and of itself is very beautiful."

At 11:45, Sister Monica Weis will begin to softly play organ preludes as an aid to prayer. Then, at midnight, she will play the processional hymn, "Once in David's Royal City."

Another distinctive feature of the Midnight Mass is that the entrance procession will go to

the creche rather than the altar. Monsignor Shannon will then read the Roman Martyrology for Christmas. The priest explained that the Roman Martyrology is a form of devotional literature that used to be read in monasteries and convents. During the year, the martyrology lists the saints who died on particular days, giving details about their deaths. "It speaks of the birth of those who have been martyred into a new life," the priest noted.

On Christmas, the martyrology tells the story of Christ, linking the Messiah's birth to such events in history as the Great Flood, the birth of Moses and the founding of Rome. Following the martyrology, the Mass continues like a normal Midnight Mass, Monsignor Shannon explained.

Except for the music, that is. The music will include a mix of Gregorian chant, polyphonic motets, and traditional carols sung by the motherhouse chapel choir. According to Sister Hogan, the musical selections will vary from the kind of music most parishes can offer. "We have an unusually good music program — not the kind that most parishes can afford or have

access to," she said.

Following the Mass, guests will be invited to join the sisters for refreshments. Volpe remembered the hospitality last year as a high

point of the service. "The one thing that stands out is the hospitality of the sisters, the warm accepting spirit they have," she said.

The contemplative nature of the Mass, Volpe acknowledged, is a reflection of the sisters' life of prayer and service. What they are offering to the community is a chance to experience the results of that life, she said.

Monsignor Shannon cautioned, however, that in opening their Mass to the community, the sisters do not wish to draw people away from their own parishes. "We don't want to interfere with the work parishes are doing," he said. Instead, the sisters' Mass is available primarily as a gift for those who have no regular parish.

In addition to the prayerful, contemplative atmosphere of the Mass, Volpe believes it recaptures something of an earlier time. "I think the quiet and the contemplative atmosphere reflected the experience of what happened on the first Christmas," she concluded.

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## A notice for our readers

In compliance with our postal permit, the *Courier-Journal* will not publish an issue on Thursday, Dec. 29. We have endeavored to include all pertinent announcements in this issue. Our next edition will be published on January 5, 1989.

Because Christmas and New Year's Day fall

on weekends this year, the *Courier-Journal* staff will observe these holidays during the week of Dec. 26-30, and our offices will be closed during that period.

We look forward to seeing you in the new year.

## Buses to leave St. Jude's for ride to annual march

The annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., protesting the Supreme Court decision in 1973 to legalize abortion, is scheduled for January 23, 1989.

Buses will leave from St. Jude's Church, 4100 Lyell Rd., Rochester at 10 p.m. on Jan. 22, and will return around midnight on January 23. The fare is \$25 per person if reservations

are made by January 1. The cost will be \$30 thereafter.

Those planning to participate in the march should make checks payable to Dee Dries, and mail them to 88 Beldon Dr., Rochester, N.Y. 14623. Further information about the march can be obtained by calling 716/334-7562 or 621-8106.

