

Considered callings

In this month's *Insight* section, three men reflect on their responses to God's call to serve others. Pages 12-13.



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Trio reveals range of women's gifts to church

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They share a history of being outsiders in one way or another.

Gabriela Jaskot arrived in Rochester a 16-year-old immigrant from Poland. Lillian Piersante had to contend with being Hispanic and divorced. Dr. Ruth Lawrence faced starting out in a profession that, at the time, was almost exclusively male.

Yet despite their diverse backgrounds, these three women also share a commitment to their faith and community — a commitment that has brought them recognition for their accomplishments.

Jaskot, Piersante and Lawrence were among the eight women honored at a dinner held Wednesday, June 7, at St. Bernard's Institute. The dinner, sponsored by the Women's Scholarship Committee of St. Bernard's Institute, was intended to raise money for the scholarship fund that aids women pursuing graduate theological studies at the institute. The dinner raised approximately \$3,900 towards that end.

At the same time, the dinner and awards raised awareness of the contributions Catholic women make to their church.

The event grew out of a discussion about the scholarship and women who had served the community in some way, noted Judith O'Brien, a member of the scholarship committee. The awards, she explained, "fulfill one of the purposes of the group: to talk and tell more about what women are doing in ministry."

In selecting the women to be honored, she added, the committee "decided we would have a spectrum of gifts and types of women in this group."

In addition to Jaskot, Piersante and

Lawrence, the honorees were: Sister Mary Bride Claire, RSM, major superior of the Sisters of Mercy from 1961-70; Mary Hall, long active in promoting awareness of the gifts and needs of Black Catholics; Nancy Kennedy, who serves on the boards of the DePaul Clinic and St. Bernard's Institute; Denise Mack, a pastoral administrator, religious educator and a spiritual director; and Sister Agnes Cecilia Troy, SSJ, superior general of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester from 1963-75.

Jaskot, for one, was surprised, but pleased, that she was included in such distinguished company. "At first, I made nothing of it," she said. "I never worked to be recognized for what I've done. What I did, I did from my heart."

What Jaskot did was to plunge headlong into the Polish Catholic community in Rochester after her arrival in this country in 1926. She has been active in both St. Stanislaus and St. Theresa parishes, of which she and her husband Stanley were founding members.

Over the years, Jaskot promoted Polish culture, becoming president of the Polish Women's Alliance, founding and becoming the first woman president of the Polonia Civic Center, being a founding member of the Sister City Committee of Krakow and Rochester. She also organized the *Rogwaj Polek* — the Children's Polish Dance Group — to help teach young people about Polish folk dancing, culture and traditions.

"I think every nationality, they should know where their parents and grandparents came from," Jaskot said. "Every nationality has a treasure, a background. Let them keep it up, not let it die."



Gabriela Jaskot, president and coordinator of the Polish Women's Alliance, has been the youth director for St. Stanislaus Parish for 40 years. Through her involvement with young people, she hopes to pass on the customs and traditions of her Polish heritage.

For Polish people, Jaskot said, religion is a vital part of the culture and has helped Poles survive various crises in their history.

Among these crises were the devastation

of the Second World War and repression of the Church and people by the communist government that has ruled Poland since the war. Jaskot has participated in a variety of fundraising efforts to help the people of Poland, and has traveled back to Poland several times to bring money and supplies. In 1974, Jaskot took over money she'd helped raise to build a church in Nowa Huta to help build a church in the town after the Polish government declared that the church could only be built with money from the United States.

Piersante, on the other hand, has struggled with parts of her Hispanic heritage.

"I've broken away from the traditional Spanish Catholic Church," Piersante said, pointing specifically to what she called the sense of "machismo" that lingers in that church. "They're a lot slower than the Anglo church," she observed.

Nevertheless, Piersante was formed by that culture, and has worked to blend Hispanic and Anglo cultures in her life.

The oldest of 16 children, Piersante moved from Puerto Rico to Rochester in 1955. Her family was poor, and she learned early in life about being helped by others. "My mom had some wonderful people who helped her out," Piersante said. "I focused on that, saying, 'When I grow up I'll help people.'"

To find out how to help others, Piersante had the examples of her mother and grandmother. "My grandmother always focused on how others were less fortunate than we were," Piersante said. "Even my mother, she always had enough rice to feed an extra person."

In high school, Piersante began volunteering at the Lewis Street Center and, through the Catholic Youth Center, working at day camps. She later worked at the Martin de Porres Center, in the home-care program of the Al Sigl Center and, through the church, with the Hispanic community and in religious education.

Her divorce temporarily alienated Pier-

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Ruth Lawrence, M.D., a professor of pediatrics at Strong Memorial Hospital, entered the medical profession at a time when the field was almost exclusively male. Her mother's desire for her daughter to get a good education provided impetus for Lawrence's enrollment in medical school.

Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier