

Mercy sisters adopt death-penalty resolution

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Sisters of Mercy of Rochester have adopted a congregational statement opposing the death penalty.

The statement, formally ratified May 8, 1990, declares that the congregation opposes any form of the death penalty and pledges "to promote legislation and other means of action that provide: alternatives to the death penalty, systemic change in the criminal justice system, (and) programs of support for families of victims."

The decision to ratify the statement followed four months of reflection and discussion as part of a "congregational stance process." During that time, pro-

fessed sisters in the congregation considered such issues as the effectiveness of capital punishment as a deterrent, discrimination in the application of the death penalty, and what Scriptures say about capital punishment.

At the end of the process, the statement passed with a vote of 192-9, and two abstentions.

With approval of the resolution, the Sisters of Mercy Ministry and Justice Committee may now speak for the congregation on death penalty issues, according to Sister Sheila Miller, RSM, the sisters' social justice coordinator.

The Rochester-based congregation can also become part of the Rochester Area Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Sister

Miller said. Previously, she was a member of the coalition, but was only able to speak for herself or the Ministry and Justice Committee, not for the congregation.

Copies of the statement were sent to all legislative officials representing areas where members of the congregation currently serve.

Sister Miller acknowledged that some of the legislators objected to the language of the statement, which bluntly describes the death penalty as "state-sanctioned" murder. "Some of the legislators ... said it wasn't murder, it was self defense," Sister Miller observed. "Self defense is when you have no other way to defend yourself. We feel that there are ways for society to

defend itself other than taking a life."

Alternative methods for dealing with those who commit murder might include the life-without-parole sentence being touted by New York Governor Mario Cuomo, Sister Miller said. Some form of compensation for families of murder victims might also receive congregational support she said, noting that the sisters will look carefully at any alternative that comes to their attention.

As part of their discernment process, Sister Miller said the sisters looked at studies which showed the death penalty did not serve as a deterrent, was often applied in a discriminatory manner depending on the race of the victim, and proved to be considerably more expensive than imprisonment.

In addition to worries about the moral and practical issues surrounding executing those guilty of murder, Sister Miller noted the congregation's concern over studies claiming that between 1900 and 1985, 350 innocent people have been sentenced to death in the United States — an average of more than four people per year.

"Can you call killing an innocent person 'self defense'?" she asked.

The statement opposing the death penalty is only the third such congregational stance the Sisters of Mercy have taken. In 1982, the congregation passed a stance opposing nuclear weapons, and in 1988, the sisters passed a resolution supporting sanctuary and pushing for immigration law reform in the United States.

Sister McNiff steps down at St. James

HORNELL — Sister Mary René McNiff has resigned after 24 years as chief executive officer at St. James Mercy Hospital. The announcement was effective July 1, 1990.

At a meeting on June 22, the hospital's board of directors appointed Paul Shephard to replace Sister McNiff. His appointment marks the first time the hospital has been headed by someone other than a Sister of Mercy.

Sister McNiff is taking a six-month sabbatical, which will include a theological update at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind. Following the sabbatical, Sister McNiff will return as the chief executive officer for a new parent corporation, Mercy System of the Southern Tier.

The resignation was announced to department heads in a letter, which detailed the hospital's new corporate structure that will take effect in six months. The new corporate structure includes St. James Mercy Hospital, Inc., and SJM Properties, Inc., which manages the medical office buildings.

Two new corporations will be made up of St. James Mercy Foundation, which will "raise money for services that, though financially marginal, are important for people in the area, such as dialysis and clinics," and the Mercy System of the



St. James Mercy Hospital

Sister Mary René McNiff

Southern Tier, according to Janis Conklin, director of community relations.

The Mercy System of the Southern Tier will coordinate the activities of the hospital, SJM Properties, and the St. James Mercy Foundation.

According to Conklin, Sister McNiff had

planned to step down as CEO of the hospital for several months, and the culmination of the hospital construction project provided the right timing for such a career change. Sister McNiff will begin her new position on Jan. 1, 1991.

Shephard has been a member of the hospital's administration team for 21 years. He is a graduate of the University of Buffalo, where he received a bachelor of science degree in pharmacy. He also earned a master's of business administration degree from Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Active in professional and community organizations, Shephard and his wife, Connie, live in Hornell. They have eight children.

Kearney alumni set reunion gatherings

Alumni of Bishop Kearney High School are seeking the addresses of lost graduates as they plan several reunions.

Class of 1966: graduates will gather for their 25th reunion in November, 1991. For more information, send your address and phone number to the school, or write Maureen Bleier Agosto, 60 Townsend St., Rochester, 14621.

Class of 1970: plans in November, 1990, to mark its 20 anniversary of graduation. Those who need information should write Ginny (Reinhardt) Singer, 1623 Bridgeboro Dr., Webster, 14850.

Class of 1971: plans a get-together in May, 1991. To receive reunion information, write Tom Erb, 337 Raiford Ave., Rochester, 14622.

Class of 1980: will celebrate its 10th reunion in November, 1990. For more details, write Vanessa (Capogreco) Moran, 185 Hartsdale Rd., Rochester, 14622.

Class of 1985: set Sept. 28, 1990, as the date for its five-year reunion. Alumni who haven't already received information should write Vina (Platania) Crandall, 70-B Romona Park, Rochester, 14615. Reunion ticket money is due July 31.



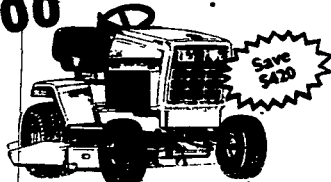
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Priest to lead meeting on congress in Syracuse

ROCHESTER — Volunteers from the Rochester diocese are needed to help promote the 1991 National Congress of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Syracuse.

Father John Ahern of Syracuse will host an informational meeting at the Knights of Columbus hall, 670 Thurston Road, on July 24 at 7:30 p.m. Contact John Nolan, 716/328-8594, for information.

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