

Ministry

Continued from page 3

Department of Social Services for financial support. After her baby is born — she is due Nov. 5 — Rodriguez will move into an apartment with furniture and supplies obtained through the help of Melita House. Her goal is to go to college to learn a profession.

Sullivan, on the other hand, became pregnant while she was living with her mother. Her mother, she said, decided that the pregnant teen could not live at home.

Four years ago, Sullivan had learned of Melita House after going there to wash windows as part of a project in her confirmation class. When she needed a place to stay, she contacted the staff at Melita House.

At the residence, Sullivan has been able to continue school, where she is enrolled in the 12th grade. Although she is not due until January, she plans to move into an apartment next month — furnishing it with help from the house. "I want to get everything situated before (the baby is born) and not get settled in just two weeks before," she explained.

All the women staying at Melita House are required to move out after their babies are born. In many cases, however, the women still need help when they are on their own.

In the early days of Melita House, former residents returned to the residence to seek help. Such a situation put a strain on the staff, Sister Kearsa observed. To solve this problem, the staff created the After Care Program to help those who have moved out of the house.

As part of the program, they come back to the house twice a month for a mother's support group and to hear speakers address

a variety of topics such as where to find child care and how to deal with the social service system.

Financing the ministry is an ongoing concern, Sister Kearsa acknowledged. Although the Sisters of Mercy sponsor the program, the order has not provided funding since it initially took over the house. The primary sources of funding are a contract with the Department of Social Services, United Way contributions, and private donations, Sister Kearsa said.

Donations include more than money. "We could not exist without the people who come down to bring us canned goods, paper products, meat fruits, vegetable and dairy products," Sister Kearsa said.

Still, Sister Kearsa said, with an annual budget of approximately \$140,000, the staff finds these sources of support for the house "extremely fragile and totally unpredictable," she observed.

If those sources dried up, or fiscal woes faced by the state government forced severe cutbacks, Sister Kearsa acknowledged Melita House could be forced to close.

Such a shut down would leave a huge gap for many young, pregnant women such as Gonzalez and Sullivan.

"(With Melita House), you don't have to be afraid of staying at somebody else's house or being with strangers," Gonzalez said. "You have a place to sleep. You have a place to go every day."

Activist

Continued from page 3

"I've met so few people in my life who've worked so hard to integrate their values into their life," he said of Day, who he remembered "on her knees praying for people" whose names had been sent to her by various petitioners. For hours at a time, Forest said, Day would go off and pray, especially for young people who committed suicide.

Forest worked on several religious and secular magazines and newspapers in the 1960s, and helped form Pax, which later became Pax Christi USA. He commented

that the Catholic peace group was created because, at that time, Catholics were "still nervous" about collaborating with Protestants in an ecumenical peace effort.

He also authored a pamphlet on Catholics and conscientious objection, the first of its kind to receive a New York archdiocesan imprimatur. He noted that the pamphlet assured Catholics that Christianity boasted a history of pacifism — dating to the earliest church — that supported modern-day resistance to war on religious grounds.

Like many of his colleagues on the left in the 1960s and 1970s, Forest considered a pro-choice attitude on abortion as "part of the feminist movement and the peace movement." However, a friend's illegal

abortion in the 1960s left him with an "intuitive realization" that abortion "was something awful."

Another significant moment in his conversion to a pro-life stance came when a colleague at a magazine he was editing confided to him that her husband had threatened to leave her if she didn't have an abortion.

"These are the things which drive people to abortion," Forest said of his colleague's dilemma.

Such desperate situations are why pro-lifers must embrace a consistent life-ethic, Forest stated, noting that pro-lifers insensitive to a pregnant woman's plight are the anti-abortion movement's "own worst enemy."

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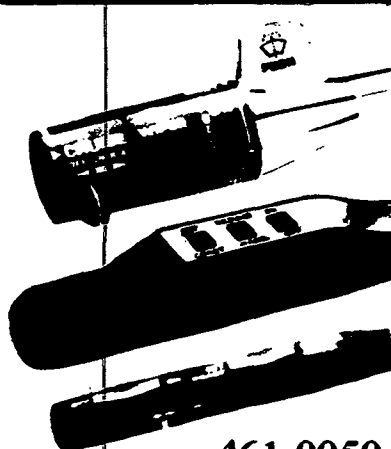
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