



**Sharp statement**  
 Leaders of the Catholic and Episcopal dioceses of Rochester believe that U.S. military action against Iraq could not be considered a "just war." Page 3.

# CATHOLIC COURIER

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## Lay orders:



## Sowing seeds of spirituality

By Lee Strong  
 Staff writer

**B**y the time she was in college, Elizabeth Annechino had drifted away from her Catholic faith. But she soon discovered she could not live without it.

"I became disillusioned with the emptiness of life and realized what I was hungry for was God," Annechino recalled.

The search for an end to her hunger eventually led the parishioner of St. John the Evangelist Church, Spencerport, through the Charismatic Renewal to the Franciscan Secular Order — more commonly known as the Third Order.

"I found the secular order had the fullness of the Holy Spirit," Annechino said.

Pat Albrecht, too, felt a need for deeper spirituality. "I was looking for something in my life," the Clyde native said. "More encouragement, more support."

That need directed Albrecht to the Religious Sisters of Mercy's Associates Program in 1988. "I think I'm much more aware of the need for all of us to listen to one another in their ministries," said Albrecht, now the associates program's first lay director.

Pat Brewster was a wife and a mother living on Long Island when she likewise felt a yearning for more in her spiritual life. That desire — shared by her husband, John, and a friend, Pat Brunk — inspired them neither to join a third order, nor to associate themselves with an established religious community.

Instead, they purchased land in Hornell, moved their families there, and founded Holy Trinity Monastery.

**"W**e don't consider ourselves a lay community," Brewster observed. "Our vision would be for men and women from all vocations in the church — married, single, priests, celibate — to come together and live a Benedictine life."

"It really is a basic living out of the call of baptism in our lives," Brewster added.

Although Annechino, Albrecht and Brewster each chose different means to fill their spiritual hunger and to live out their baptismal calls, the three reveal the range of responses by lay people who long for deeper spirituality and community while somehow remaining in the world outside a religious order.

One path for these lay people is to join communities that incorporate some elements of orders of men and women religious, but do not require them to take formal vows. Such communities of lay people have flourished since the Second Vatican Council — in large part because of the focus the council placed on the laity and on the renewal of religious

life. The third orders, which for many years had experienced a gradual decline in membership, have likewise experienced a resurgence in recent years.

In the Diocese of Rochester, these various communities include several third orders, groups associated with religious congregations and such communities as that at the Holy Trinity Monastery or the Anawim Community in Corning.

"The people are looking for community, and I think they are looking for meaning in their lives," noted Sister Rita Jongen, coordinator of the Sisters of St. Joseph's Agrege Program. "I think there's a real search for values and people who hold values. I think people with values are seeking each other out."

"I think that you can see it in people who come together in prayer," said Franciscan Father Regis Rodda, spiritual assistant for the Rochester-based Glory of Yahweh chapter of the secular Franciscans.

"You see it in people who come together in action. I can see it more and more — the need for it to happen, the desire for it to happen," Father Rodda said. "The world is so impersonal, it just brings out the need for, community, for acceptance, for a place to heal our wounds."

**T**he roots of the third order movement — and in some ways for the other lay communities — reach back to the 13th century — to St. Francis of Assisi, Father Rodda noted.

"It's such a powerful charism that he had — the power of the spirit working in the world — that lay people came to Francis and wanted to live that way of life, but couldn't take vows because they were married," Father Rodda said.

In response to that desire, Francis, who had already created orders for men and women religious, formed the third order. The members of his third order made promises similar to the vows taken by the religious — poverty, chastity, obedience — but modified to fit their state as people living in the world.

The response was immediate, Father Rodda said. "Europe was covered with fraternities within a few years," he said.

"It was like a flash fire. It just caught on."

Soon, other religious congregations were forming similar lay orders — including the Dominicans and the Carmelites. Each lay order reflected the spirit of the particular religious order to which it was attached.

The lay Franciscans are traditionally concerned with works of charity and mercy, following the ex-

Continued on page 22