

Mary

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"The longer a person lives and reflects the more that person can enter into what was (Mary's) life," explained Brewster, a 56-year-old mother and grandmother. "If we are changing (as women), then our relationship (to Mary) also has to change."

Although the culture in which Mary lived is far removed from that of modern-day women, Brewster noted, her human experience parallels what most women undergo today. At this point in her life, she said, she best identifies with Mary as a woman of faith.

"My appreciation grows for her as a woman," said Brewster. "She was a powerful woman who sought to respond to God in her daily life, rather than the non-person that has unfortunately been portrayed."

The "nonperson" to whom Brewster refers is the representation of Mary contained in the Scriptures. In the few instances when she is mentioned in the Gospels — only about 15 times — Mary is seen as submissive to her male counterparts.

The reason for such portrayals and for Mary's infrequent appearances in Scripture is the male-dominated society of Mary's time, explained Sister Mariella Frye, MHSB, of the Department of Edu-

cation for the United States Catholic Conference in Washington, D.C.

Sister Frye, a staff member for the U.S. bishops' committee drafting the pastoral response to the concerns of women, said it is wrong to believe that Mary was not in any way aggressive.

"The image of Mary as a passive, accepting everything that comes along woman that had no aggression is a wrong image," she stated. "She was a brave woman."

Mary's bravery becomes clear to some women only after they have children of their own. Only then do they recognize the great challenges confronting an unwed mother forced to leave her hometown and deliver her baby in a manager without any medical care.

"Having a child completely changed my view of Mary," acknowledged Maura Moynihan, daughter of New York Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

Moynihan, who had her first child three months ago at age 33, said that during her own pregnancy and labor she found it much easier to relate to the courage Mary evidenced during the nativity.

"I thought of Mary while in labor — it was so painful. All the Renaissance images of the Madonna and Child came to life for me during my pregnancy and when my son was born," said Moynihan, a freelance writer who lives in Manhattan.



In the Middle Ages, Moynihan noted, devotion to Mary was more widespread than was worship of Christ. Today, she said she sees Mary as an incredibly powerful figure who is somewhat suppressed by a male-dominated clergy and society.

"She was raised body-and-soul to heaven, and you can't get more powerful than that," she remarked.

Father Albert J.M. Shamon is quick to agree that Mary is a powerful role model for wives and mothers, but he challenges representations of her as an aggressive woman.

In fact, Father Shamon, administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Parish in Fleming, believes more wives should learn from Mary's example as "the perfect wife."

"Mary always saw everything as part of God's divine plan," said Father Shamon, who noted that the Blessed Mother did not complain to her husband about the difficult conditions in Bethlehem.

Mary's example also highlights the role women should play as mothers, Father Shamon said, adding that women who do not follow Mary's virtues of virginity and maternity exhibit un-Christian and pagan values.

"Today women want careers, but the greatest career is motherhood because it is a God-given career," said Father Shamon, who asserted that much of society has abandoned Christian principles.

Women who use artificial contraception, for example, are shying away from motherhood and being misled by the extreme views of the women's liberation movement, he said.

"Women see motherhood as a burden, and they think they should be out in the business world competing with men. Mary achieved her greatness by being a mother, not by going out into the world," Father Shamon asserted.

Mary Kelly, national secretary of the Blue Army of Fatima and president of its Rochester chapter, agreed with Father Shamon about the dangers society faces today, and attributed these dangers to a lack of respect for family life.

"Mary is our spiritual mother whether we believe she is or not," Kelly said. "We cannot lose the image of family with a mother and a father."

She also criticized feminist views of Mary. "I don't think feminist women understand Mary's position in salvation's history," Kelly said. "They are just trying to exploit her and make her more toward their way of thinking for their own political gains."

Nevertheless, Rosalie Muschal-Reinhardt views the Magnificat of Mary (Luke 1:46-55) as truly a liberating message for women.

Mary's willingness to become the mother of God was a "countercultural" act, Muschal-Reinhardt observed, because stoning was a common punishment for unwed mothers in Mary's time. Thus, she said, the Blessed Mother's acceptance of God's will is an indication that women should say "yes" to themselves and be countercultural in today's patriarchal society.

Muschal-Reinhardt, who has been teaching religion for 43 years, including a five-year tenure at Nazareth Academy, said

Mary is a model for the liberation of women. Moreover, she remarked that it often bothers her that Mary is constantly portrayed exclusively as a mother.

"I think that misrepresentation of Mary has been used to keep women in traditional, passive roles," observed Muschal-Reinhardt. "She is shown as a mother as if that was her only identity. I am a mother, but I am a woman first."

She said such depictions reinforce the belief that a woman's true vocation is motherhood.

"I don't think that is true for all women. What about women who cannot have children? Are they worthless?" asked Muschal-Reinhardt, the mother of four children.

Although she said motherhood is a choice that can liberate a woman, Muschal-Reinhardt said a woman should not feel compelled to become a mother. "Everybody's vocation is to be human. Although motherhood has made me more human, it is not the totality of my identity."

Throughout the experiences of their humanity, all Christians are called to make the world a place in which freedom and equality prevail, observed Monsignor William H. Shannon, who added that Mary's example calls women to be concerned with more than just themselves.

"If you think of the Magnificat, Mary had strong ideas about the social situations of her time. She was a woman involved in the revolution her Son started," commented Monsignor Shannon, professor emeritus of religion at Nazareth College.

Like the Mary seen at Cana, today's women must be persistent and rely on God's guidance in their daily lives, remarked Sister Joan Sobala, SSJ, pastoral assistant at St. Mary's Church, Rochester.

"(Mary) is an example of a woman who saw a need at that time and did what she had to do to fulfill that need," Sister Sobala said.

Likewise, Mary could be presented as a woman confronted with an immense challenge, according to Father Johann Roten, director of the International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton, Ohio.

Noting that the request made of Mary at the Annunciation was no small favor, Father Roten said it should be emphasized that Mary gave a responsible answer only after expressing doubts.

"She says 'yes' based on a free decision. She is not just passive in the face of challenge and personal decisions," remarked Father Roten, who said women should follow Mary's example when dealing with difficult decisions in their own lives.

Although some Christians continue to debate whether Mary is a model of passivity or of assertiveness, some see her as a combination of both qualities — a balance of femininity and strength.

That's exactly the view expressed by Dr. Ronda Chervin, a professor of philosophy at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, Calif. The author of several novels, including *Feminine, Free and Faithful*, Dr. Chervin said Mary does not have to be seen as one extreme or the other.

"She is an enormously powerful figure yet still gracious, sweet and loving," said Dr. Chervin, who is also a consultant to the U.S. bishops' committee writing the pastoral response on the concerns of women.

Dr. Chervin said this combination of qualities is best seen in Mary of the apparitions. Although her role of bringing God's messages to the world is a powerful one, Mary always appears as a beautiful woman, she said.

"As prophetess to the world, she is giving some direction to women," commented Dr. Chervin. "Surrendering to God and being His handmaid doesn't mean you don't have great power. Strong, holy women aren't women as doormats."

"If you are faithful, you can be feminine and free," she concluded.

Diocese

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RSM, currently the director of the Division of Education. The ministry will encompass not only a number of services currently provided by the Division of Education — including training and development for school personnel, religious education, and continuing education — but also such activities as deacon formation (formerly under the Division of Personnel) and marriage preparation (formerly under the Division of Social Ministry).

Qualified Pastoral Ministers will be directed by Robert Mason, current director of the Division of Personnel. This ministry will incorporate many functions of the personnel division, and provide supervision for college, hospital and institutional chaplains (currently housed in the divisions of Special Pastoral Ministries and Social Ministry); and for the Misioneras Guadalupanas (Division of Urban Services).

Parish Support Ministries consolidates a number of parish-oriented services that previously had been scattered among the eight diocesan divisions. Father Peter Clifford, currently co-pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish on Rochester's Humboldt Street, will head the new ministry.

Among the functions that will fall under the umbrella of Parish Support Ministries will be: parish census and auditing services, parish facilities consultation, auditing and asbestos abatement service, and computer services for parishes, (from the Division of Support Services); liturgical services, ecumenical and interreligious affairs, and parish council consultations, (Division of Special Pastoral Ministries); parish social-ministry leadership development, and ministry to divorced, separated and widowed Catholics (Division of Social Ministry); the diocesan tribunal (Division of Bishop's Ministries); and many of the functions from the Division of Urban Ministry.

Social Ministry — like the current Division of Social Ministry — will be headed by Father John Firpo. The new ministry essentially absorbs the functions of the old division, except for assorted functions that have been moved to other ministries. In addition, Social Ministry will now take on the community-organizing process from the former Division of Urban Services.

The internal support group will encompass legal services; finance; information systems; development and communications; as well as various ad hoc teams or

groups created to meet specific needs.

Father Kevin McKenna, canonical adviser to Bishop Clark, will direct Legal Services, which will provide consultation on issues of canon law.

Father Peter Bayer, chancellor of the diocese and current director of the Division of Support Ministries, will direct Financial Services. Financial Services will include such activities as management of the Pastoral Center facilities, health-care processing, and payroll/benefits administration.

Information Systems, directed by Joan Zaia, will provide computer support to the pastoral center agencies, mailing services, and printing and copy centers. Zaia is currently director of the Department of Information Systems and Research within the Division of Support Ministries.

Development/Communications Services will encompass all the functions currently offered through the Office of Development and Public Relations, including fundraising, publications and public information. Mark Seeberg will continue to direct development efforts, and Elizabeth Brown to direct communications.

Father Clifford noted that the new alignment of the Pastoral Center gives a clear indication of the priority being given to serving diocesan parishes.

"I think that there has been at times a perception — real or otherwise — that the Pastoral Center's work has not always fully aligned itself with the needs of parishes and the practicalities of day-to-day parish life," Father Clifford said. "I sense that there is a strong and heartfelt desire to be sensitive to that critique and to focus and direct the Pastoral Center's work in as full and complete a way as possible to the present pastoral and parish needs."

Because the diocesan budgetary process had already begun under the current divisional structure, the directors and staffs of the new ministries will spend the next two months revising their budgets. Father Mulligan noted that the revision process will be made somewhat easier by the fact that the diocese had already developed a budgeting procedure focusing on functions rather than divisions.

The directors of the new ministries and services will begin meeting with their staffs immediately to determine internal structures, Father Mulligan said.

EDITORS' NOTE: The Catholic Courier issue of May 16 will provide reaction to the new diocesan organization from parish and diocesan representatives.