

Merton Society slates gathering at Nazareth

ROCHESTER — The second general meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society will take place June 13-16 at Nazareth College, 4245 East Ave.

The first general session was held in 1989 at Bellarmine College in Louisville, Ky.

Using the theme "A Huge Chorus of Living Beings"— taken from Merton's *The Sign of Jonas* — this year's meeting will focus on concern for God's creation in all its aspects, according to Robert Daggy, president of the society.

Speakers for the meeting will include Daggy, editor of *Introductions East and West: The Foreign Prefaces of Thomas Merton*, who will speak on the topic, "Choirs of Millions: Thomas Merton and God's Creatures;" Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, who will focus on "Thomas Merton and Social Justice;" and Father M. Basil Pennington, OCSO, a noted spiritual writer, who will deliver the keynote address, entitled "A Huge Chorus of Living Beings: Synthetic Listening — Evolutionary Response."

The conference will also feature a "panel of Merton Friends," including Robert Giroux, Merton's editor and publisher; W.H. Ferry, one of Merton's confidantes; Brother Patrick Hart, OCSO, editor of *The Asian Journals of Thomas Merton*; and Sister Mary Luke Tobin, SL, a peace activist who was one of the women observers at the Second Vatican Council.

Monsignor William H. Shannon, former president of the Thomas Merton Society

and author of *Thomas Merton's Dark Path*, will moderate the panel discussion. The retired diocesan priest also edited *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, a collection of letters written by Merton.

Concurrent sessions during the gathering will cover such topics as Merton and education; Merton and the natural world; Merton and writers; Merton and spirituality; Merton and the theologians; Merton and the visual world; and teaching Thomas Merton.

In addition to the speakers, the meeting will offer the following four workshops: *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander: Belief, Craft and Commitment*; Merton's Holographic Notebooks on William Faulkner; *Washington Watches the Monk: The Individual and U.S. Government Files*; and "You Old Hesychast, You!": Stories from Merton's Desert.

The four-day gathering also will include a recital of Merton songs, and a Mass at the Sisters' of St. Joseph Motherhouse.

Fees for the full conference are \$40 for International Thomas Merton Society members and \$50 for non-members. The cost of single-day registration is \$20.

Limited accommodations are available for out-of-town participants.

To register or to obtain information, contact Christine Bochen at Nazareth College, 716/586-2525.

— Lee Strong



File photo
Trappist priest, author and theologian Thomas Merton died in 1968. The second general meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society will take place June 13-16 at Nazareth College, Rochester.

Ecumenical body led way to community of churches

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — After 20 years of encouraging ecumenism in the greater Rochester area, Genesee Ecumenical Ministries was unofficially voted out of existence Sunday, June 2, 1991.

In its place, Rochester-area Christian churches have created the Greater Rochester Community of Churches.

The new body will comprise representatives from denominations, congregations and church-related organizations. Together these entities will continue GEM's efforts to promote common goals and to foster dialogue among Christians, noted the Rev. Lawrence Witmer, executive director of GEM.

"Our primary reason (for the restructuring) is to nurture a more widespread participation in ecumenical life in the community," the Rev. Witmer said. "Our purpose is to involve organizations at the grass-roots level."

GEM's board of directors made the decision to restructure the ministry during the board's Feb. 28 meeting, the Rev. Witmer said.

At that time, the Rev. Witmer reported, the board concluded that the organization needed to be more broadly based, including more than nine denominations and one organization — United Church Ministries.

As of May 29, the new community of churches had achieved a membership of seven denominations, 41 congregations and 12 organizations.

Among the members of the GRCC are the Diocese of Rochester; Holy Family and Corpus Christi parishes; the Catholic Family Center; and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester.

Although she said the time had come to restructure GEM, former GEM president Margery Nurnberg pointed out that the ecumenical organization had served a valuable function in the Rochester community.

"GEM was an absolutely marvelous organization," said Nurnberg, director of the department of ecumenical and interreligious affairs for the Diocese of Rochester. Among GEM's accomplishments she cited the sponsorship of the Judicial Process Commission, the Commission on Refugee Resettlement and Services, and the Jewish-Christian dialogue.

"But it's been outgrown," Nurnberg remarked. "It's time for a new organization that's broader based, that's more inclusive."

Nurnberg observed that GEM pioneered cooperation among denominations and created an environment in which the new

organization will be able to foster joint efforts at the congregational level.

"The community of churches would not have been possible if GEM had not come first," Nurnberg added.

The first general assembly of the new organization took place June 2 at Bethel Full Gospel Church, 321 East Ave. During the meeting, participants elected initial members of the community's board of directors and approved a constitution for the community.

The board of Genesee Ecumenical Ministries will meet later this week or next to officially dissolve the organization, the Rev. Witmer said. At that point, GEM's staff will become the staff of GRCC, he added.

Once more churches and organizations have joined GRCC, the board will be expanded this fall to comprise about 45 members, the Rev. Witmer said.

Ultimately, the GRCC board will include approximately 30 members elected by the assembly, and two representatives appointed by each member denomination.

The GRCC board will oversee the operations of the organization and its staff, while the assembly — which will meet two or three times a year — will elect members to the board and deal with constitutional amendments.

The basic structure and constitution of the new ecumenical group was created by a 30-member reorganization committee formed by the GEM board in February. The committee was headed by James Ramerman, a Corpus Christi parishioner and an independent consultant who works with church organizations.

Ramerman said the committee wrote a mission statement for the new body, and invited denominations, congregations and organizations to join.

GRCC will have a different power structure than GEM, Ramerman noted.

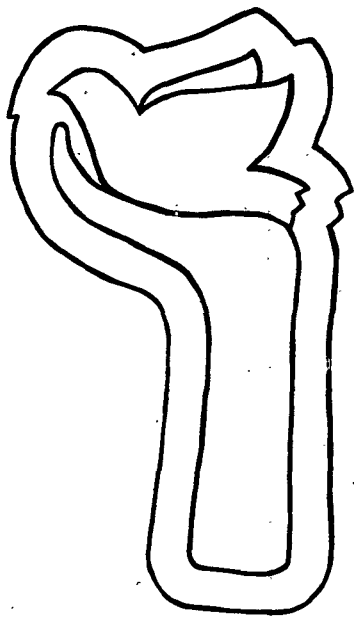
"Originally, (in GEM) the denominations had much more say so," Ramerman explained. In the GRCC, however, power will be "much more spread out and diversified and grass roots."

The inclusion of such organizations as the Catholic Family Center and the Judicial Process Commission may have a decided effect on the activities of GRCC, the Rev. Witmer suggested.

"These organizations are on the cutting edge as far as doing ministry," the Rev. Witmer said. "I think they will constantly be pulling the churches into more activities and ministries."

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