

# Sisters of Mercy unite during founding event

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tion structure had served a purpose, but that it was not strong enough to permit further development.

Even though the federated communities had common constitutions, she observed, "It was clear that we would really need a body that would make those changes."

In order to implement the changes in structure dictated by the merger and to continue serving in the spirit of their founding, the newly formed Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas conducted its first meetings July 20-Aug. 3.

During the two-week session, 132 delegates from the 25 regional communities elected new leaders and devised a direction statement that will guide the member communities through their years of future service.

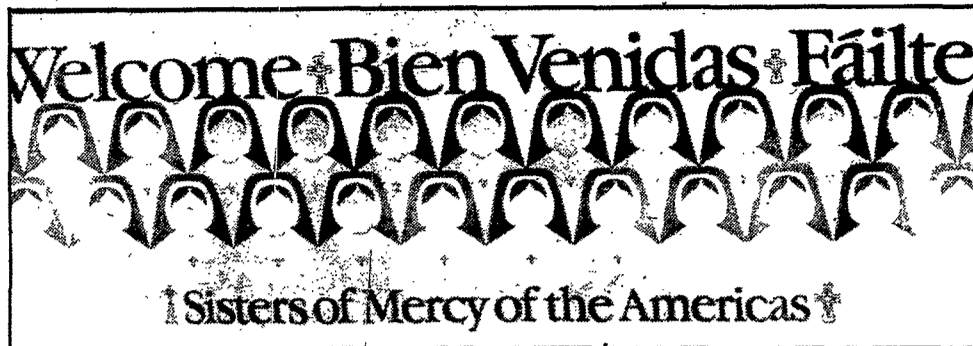
On July 28, the delegates elected Sister Doris Gottemoeller from a field of four nominees to be the institute's first president. A Mercy sister from Cleveland, Ohio, since 1953, she holds doctoral and master's degrees in theology from Fordham University, as well as a master's degree in chemistry from the University of Notre Dame.

Commenting on the new Mercy direction statement, Sister Gottemoeller stressed three areas in which the institute will focus its attention and energies. Those areas are: the world's poor, especially women and children; women trying to overcome oppression and achieve equality in church and society; and all Sisters of Mercy as they continue to support multi-culturalism.

"We need to help ourselves and other women achieve the fullness of their potential as human beings," the new president remarked. "There are all sorts of oppressions, overt and covert, recognized and unrecognized, and to achieve the fullness of what we can become we need to liberate ourselves from those oppressions."

Although the president noted that these issues have always been concerns of Mercy sisters, she said not enough is being done to address the actual problems.

"We need to coordinate our thrust on behalf of women — in church and in society, and we need to maximize our efforts on behalf of the economically poor. We don't make enough use of our synergies that we could achieve through our institutions," said Sister Gottemoeller, who



A banner in English, Spanish and Gaelic welcomes participants to the July 20 founding event of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Taking place in Buffalo, the celebration marked a merger among Mercy communities representing 7,400 sisters serving nationwide.

chaired the merger task force.

"We need to involve the employees of those institutions in the same vision, the same dream, the same mission," she observed. "I think what we hope to do is empower ourselves to do that more effectively and from a national platform."

Sister Gottemoeller said education about injustice and oppression is a major tool Mercy sisters can use to achieve their goals. Collectively, the sisters educate nearly 20,000 students in 40 high schools in the United States and Guam. Mercy communities also sponsor 18 colleges enrolling more than 35,000 students, she noted.

In addition to pooling their resources, Mercy communities will use the merger to rethink the ways in which they provide service, according to Sister Ann Miller. Until the merger, Sister Miller was major superior of the Rochester Mercy community. She now assumes the title of president of the Rochester regional community.

Although the mission statement will be a guideline for each Mercy community as they implement their own programs, Sister Miller said she hopes that all the Rochester Sisters of Mercy will be aware of the institute's goals.

"We would hope that our sisters teaching at Mercy High School see their work within the context of serving the economically poor even if it's just making their own students aware of that," remarked Sister Miller, who has belonged to the congregation for 45 years.

As a national organization, the institute has developed both short- and long-term

goals, Sister Gottemoeller said. Among the short-term goals are developing the institute's vision statements and organizing the institute's headquarters in Silver Spring, Md.

According to the new leader, however, the direction statement is long-term in its orientation.

"In four years, we want to be able to demonstrate some additional impact on the lives of the poor, especially women and children," she said. "There should be some measurable difference — that's what we need to be about."

Among the measurable differences Sister Milliken hopes for is an annual increase in vocations to Mercy life. Vocations to the order — and to most other religious orders in the U.S. and Europe — began to decline in the early 1970s. In addition to the dwindling numbers, Mercy communities also are struggling to support a population that is aging at a significant rate.

Yet Sister Barbara Moore, RSM, a Rochester delegate to the chapter meeting in Buffalo, said she doubts the Sisters of Mercy will ever again experience such huge numbers as they did earlier in the century.

"We have been emphasizing the dignity of baptism, so whatever someone does is now considered a ministry. Some are called to marriage, and some are called to our lifestyle," said Sister Moore, former executive director of the Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry.

Sister Beairisto pointed out that the vocations decline itself serves to discourage women from entering religious communi-

ties.

"The question always comes up if no one is entering, the community is aging and finances are a struggle, why do you make that choice?" she remarked.

"I think that an exciting thing for me about the institute is that, hopefully, in a better way we can give a witness and challenge even to one another about our call to be people of Mercy," commented Sister Beairisto.

Like Sister Milliken, the new institute president said she hopes the merger will have a positive effect on vocations.

"We hope that we will have a higher profile and a clearer identity," noted Sister Gottemoeller. "I think people are still searching for meaning in their lives and ways in which to commit their lives to something meaningful."

"Maybe we'll be able to tell our story better as a result of this," she continued.

Even amid the discouraging statistics, Sister Milliken said the institute offers two benefits.

First, she said, it will strengthen the individual communities, especially the smaller ones. Secondly, it will help them to minister more effectively through combined efforts and resources.

Nevertheless, Sister Gottemoeller acknowledged that some Mercy sisters may continue to fear a loss of local autonomy. But over time, she said, those feelings should soften.

"It is going to be a challenge to find the right balance between local initiative and creativity, and central service and direction," she explained, noting that the merger will have no immediate effect on Mercy health-care or educational institutions.

"Some communities will feel a loss of the complete autonomy that they had, but you hope that the overall benefits of the coordination and services they receive will more than compensate for it," she said.

And Sister Moore observed that solidarity is more important than independence.

"It's wonderful to be walking arm-in-arm with so many people who have the same values, who occasionally see things differently, but at the basis have the same commitment," Sister Moore remarked.

"Now that's a real sense of encouragement," she concluded.

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**Obituaries**

## Sr. M. Johanna Mannering, at 81

Sister M. Johanna Mannering, SSND, a guidance counselor at Bishop Kearney High School, died unexpectedly on Monday, July 29, 1991, in Boston, Mass. She was 81.

A Mass of Christian Burial for Sister Johanna, who served as teacher and principal at several schools in the Rochester diocese, was celebrated Thursday, Aug. 1, at Immaculate Conception Church in Malden, Mass.

Born in Brockton, Mass., on July 18, 1910, Sister Johanna entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame on Oct. 14, 1928. She took her first vows on July 22, 1931, and made her perpetual profession in 1937.

From 1934-37, Sister Johanna taught in schools throughout New York City, Baltimore and Albany. In 1938, she was assigned to Ss. Peter and Paul School in Rochester, where she taught until 1946. While teaching at the diocesan school, she also earned a bachelor of arts degree in education from Nazareth College of Rochester in 1944.

In addition to teaching the seventh- and eighth-grade at St. Joseph's School in Rochester from 1946-55, she also taught several high school courses.

She left Rochester to earn a master's degree in English from Villanova University

in 1959, before going on to teach in schools in New Jersey and Massachusetts. Sister Johanna returned to Rochester in 1967 to serve as principal of St. Joseph's Business School and as superior of the school's SSND community.

She remained principal of St. Joseph's until it closed in 1971. Sister Johanna stayed with the senior class, which continued together at St. Monica's School in Rochester, until the students graduated in 1972.

Sister Johanna joined the faculty of Bishop Kearney High School as an English teacher later that year. She then became a guidance counselor at Kearney, where she served until her death.

During her years at Bishop Kearney, Sister Johanna took on a number of additional duties, including upkeep of the convent chapel. She also accompanied the Kearney Parents Club on several of its trips, visiting such places as Europe, the Caribbean and New Orleans.

Sister Johanna is survived by her sister and brother-in-law, Angela and Thomas Mannering of West Roxbury, Mass., as well as many nieces and nephews.

Arrangements for a memorial service in honor of Sister Johanna had not been set as the *Catholic Courier* went to press.

**COMING UP . . .**

## Education '91: August 15

Multi-cultural education will be the theme of this year's special pull-out supplement marking the start of the new school year. Among topics to be included are religious education for adults; the marketing of Catholic schools; and programs for specially challenged children.

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