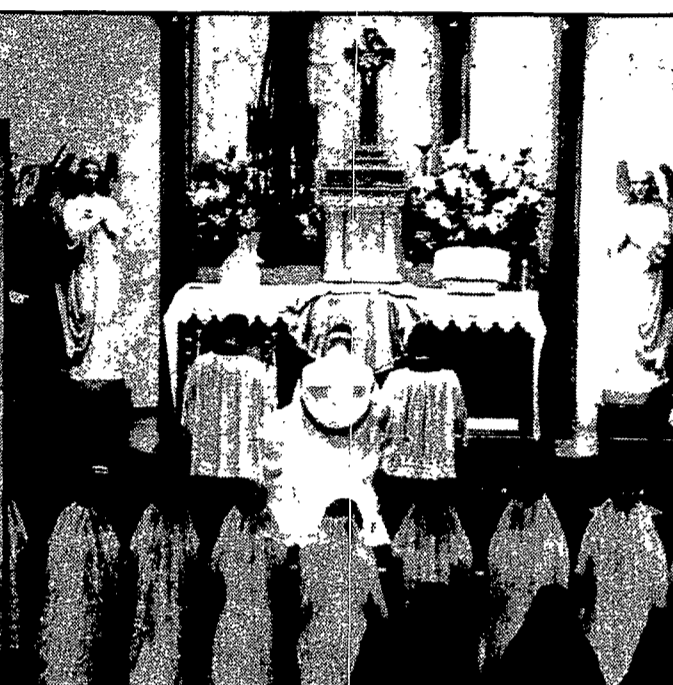


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the eight-page
Senior Lifestyle Section
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Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Clockwise from left: Agnes Goodsell, who has served as a eucharistic minister at Rochester's Our Lady of Lourdes Church for 10 years, considers her ministry "a wonderful privilege;" a group of Sisters of St. Joseph in Rochester receive their habits during a 1951 Mass; Deacon Owen Bowers of Avon's St. Agnes Parish found few opportunities to serve the church before Vatican II.

Vatican II forged path to ministry for seniors

By Lee Strong, Staff Writer

Elizabeth Deneen clearly remembers Jan. 18, 1976. On that day, Deneen became the first woman eucharistic minister at Elmira's Ss. Peter and Paul Parish.

"Father (Edward) Foy asked me as I was going into Mass," recalled Deneen, whose parish is part of Elmira's Eastside Catholic Churches.

Deneen, 83, said she initially hesitated to answer her pastor's question because she wasn't certain how she felt about performing a role which — in her youth — had been reserved solely for priests.

During Mass, however, she said, "I thought if I were a shut-in, I wouldn't care who brought me the Communion. It was important that I was receiving the Lord."

And those thoughts led her to be commissioned as a eucharistic minister shortly thereafter on that January day.

Deneen's path to liturgical ministry stretched back to well before Vatican II — which took place from 1962-65 — to a time when the church didn't allow a lay person to have such a role.

The church Deneen had known for more than 50 years of her life was one where liturgies were celebrated in Latin by a priest whose back was turned to the congregation. That church had been clergy-centered. Little room was left for direct lay involvement in the Mass or in most parish activities — except in a few pious or service societies.

But the Vatican Council swept away many aspects of the church that Deneen had known.

Beyond opening the door to lay eucharistic ministers, the council also led to such innovations as lay lectors, the vernacular Mass celebrated with the priest facing the congregation, parish councils and the permanent diaconate.

Those and other changes in the church led to pain and confusion among a number of people who knew and were involved in the church before the council. Some people continue to be troubled — as eviden-

ced by such efforts as that to restore the traditional Latin Mass.

Others simply assented to the transformation of the church, as was the case with Elizabeth Mull.

"I guess you accept those changes," remarked Mull, a parishioner of St. Mary's Parish in Waterloo. Her son, Father Thomas P. Mull, is pastor of Rochester's Sacred Heart Cathedral and priest consultant for the diocesan liturgy office. "It was something Vatican II wanted you to do."

But still others, such as Deneen, welcomed the changes.

"The changes don't bother me because they haven't changed any of the fundamentals of the Catholic Church," Deneen observed. "Anything that's changed is what you'd classify as 'accidentals.'"

Mary Locke is even more enthusiastic about those changes.

"I exult in the post-Vatican II church," declared Locke, who currently attends Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Church, 534 Oxford St. "I was delighted that the day was coming in my own lifetime that the altar was turned around and the priest was speaking my language and that we could respond. I thank God that these changes came about."

Locke, who grew up in Boston, Mass., was among those who began seeking more lay involvement in the church long before the council. She dates her efforts from the time she met Dorothy Day — co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement — while pursuing graduate studies at Columbia University in New York City during the 1940s.

That encounter and ongoing involvement in the Catholic Worker movement led Locke to speak for greater lay involvement in the church.

"I knocked on doors for participation of the faithful in the church," Locke recalled. "The priests would tell you in Latin, 'Women should be silent in church.'"

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