

Too much from too few: ministry and stress

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House, 72 Dorvid Road, Irondequoit, which provides living space for religious women "before they need further psychiatric care."

"We help them reclaim their power or gain it for the first time; to stand tall again," Sister Brown said of her ministry.

According to Sister Brown, the most prevalent problem facing the sisters who come to Spirit House is that "they've been living the very carefully taught message of not saying 'no' to everybody except themselves. They were taught not to be selfish."

However, Sister Brown emphasized, "We say that if you love your neighbor as yourself you ought to be arrested for murder, because you're killing yourself by constantly doing that."

Spirit House, which recently celebrated its 10th anniversary, houses seven to nine women at a time for average stays of about a year each. The residents meet in groups twice a week, but their recovery consists mainly of relaxing in the peaceful, stress-free atmosphere Spirit House provides.

Sister Bride Budgell, PBVM, made a 3,000-mile journey from Corner Brook, Newfoundland, to spend time at Spirit House.

"I needed to look at some issues in my life; losses and deaths that I hadn't dealt with in the past," said Sister Budgell, who plans to return to Newfoundland early this summer. "Going through (the problems) was painful for a long while, but you have to in order

to come to this point. No pain, no gain."

Sister Audrey Synnott, RSM, entered Spirit House after experiencing a series of anxiety attacks about a year ago.

"I was afraid to go out of the house. I wasn't even functioning well, so I had to do something," said Sister Synnott, who admitted that she'd "done a lot of people-pleasing in my life."

Sister Synnott will move back to her former residence at the Mercy Motherhouse, 1437 Blossom Road, Rochester, when she leaves Spirit House next month. She said she is "hopeful to apply the behaviors I've learned."

"(Sister) Mollie said that in this culture it's not acceptable for women to get raging angry, so instead the anger turns into fear," Sister Synnott observed. "I've learned that it's important to be open with your feelings."

Although no parallel dwelling has been established for them in the diocese, priests can also obtain similar counseling services from their peers through the Diocese of Rochester's Ministry to Priests.

Father Daniel Tormey, pastor at St. Mary of the Assumption Church, 99 Main St., Scottsville, has been director of Ministry to Priests since 1987. He said the program's purpose "has to do with the continuing general well-being of priests. We do some personal counseling and crisis intervention."

Father Tormey pointed to the diminishing number of priests as chief among the stresses faced by the clergy. "My personal opinion is that because

of this, priests don't necessarily have more to do — but they do have different things to do that might not have been a part of their training," he said. "There's more supervision of personnel and administration; an awful lot of new wrinkles. That's something that especially the pre-Vatican II priests have a hard time adjusting to."

The number of U.S. men studying to enter the priesthood has declined by 14 percent compared with figures from five years ago, according to Father Joseph O'Hara, research associate with Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research Apostolate in Washington, D.C.

The current statistics are even more alarming when compared to those of earlier periods. Seminarians have dropped by 34 percent over the last 15 years, and nearly 60 percent since 1967.

"The parish priest has a very, very difficult role," Father O'Hara pointed out. "His job description has gotten much more difficult, yet people still have the same expectations."

On top of their increasing job responsibilities, today's priests continue to struggle with challenges of personal vocation, including the "questions of celibacy and stress," Father Tormey said.

Ministry of Priests has existed for about 10 years and operates under the auspices of the Diocese of Rochester's Priest Personnel Department.

A newer option offered through that same department is the Employee Assistance Program, a counseling and referral service that began in March.

According to Father Robert Ring, diocesan director of priest personnel, the main difference between this program and Ministry to Priests is that the latter "is made up of priests who help with spiritual direction, but (Employee Assistance Program) deals with problems that are more likely to be well-handled in a secular arena."

Father Ring said that the situations faced by priests seeking this program may range from financial problems to caring for aging parents to drug or alcohol addiction.

Sabbaticals are another way for priests to get away from daily pressures, although these six-month leaves are not intended only for that purpose.

"Not only is it a time of relaxation, but it's also one of education," said

Father Terence Fleming, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Church, 3003 Dewey Ave.

"A sabbatical is not always an easy task. It is a challenge to grow and renew in your vocation," added Father Fleming, who took a January-June, 1991, sabbatical studying at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif.

A more short-term way to catch a break from the daily grind is by attending a retreat house or monastery.

Mount Saviour Monastery, located in Pine City just outside of Elmira, accommodates roughly 1,500 people each year for periods of three days to a week, according to Father Martin Boler, prior. Among these retreatants are many priests, religious and lay Catholics, as well as people from other religions.

"The various tragedies of life affect all of us," Father Boler commented. "This serves as a real refreshing period where people can put their own priorities in order. We don't do anything in a technical way; that's the kind of focus. We just all come together and pray together."

Married deacons and lay ministers experience pressures of a different sort as they try to make time both for ministry and personal lives.

"The hours you work are not normal 40-hour weeks," remarked Deacon Steve Graff, who directs the diocesan Permanent Diaconate Program. "There are evening and Sundays, and the biggest stress is balancing you family life with the call to be available. Where do you catch up with your family?"

Deacon Graff — who oversees 10 full-time and 76 part-time deacons — added that the Pastoral Center, parishes and other Catholic institutions in the diocese employ approximately 300 full-time lay ministers.

Stressful situations between pastors and the deacons assigned to them are typical of employer-employee tensions, according to Deacon Graff.

"I find that the employees' and supervisors' expectations of each other are different, and the two are not communicating," he said. "I try to tell the deacon to see a problem from the priest's point of view."

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Father J. Le Frois, Webster native

Josephite Father Joseph G. Le Frois, died Thursday, April 2, 1992, at St. Joseph's Manor, the Society of St. Joseph's retirement home in Baltimore, Md. He was 74.

A native of Webster, Father Le Frois had three brothers who also are priests.

He was ordained a priest in 1944 at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. Between 1948 and 1977 he served as pastor at parishes in Louisiana, Virginia, Texas and Mississippi.

In 1980, Father Le Frois was sent to the Josephite missions in the Bahamas, where he served both as associate pastor and pastor for all seven missions on Long Island. His final pastorate was in Welsh, La., from 1983 to 1985, when health problems forced him to resign from his post.

Father Le Frois suffered from Alzheimer's disease. He went on permanent sick leave in September, 1985, and



moved to St. Joseph's Manor, where he remained until his death.

Father Le Frois is survived by his brothers, Monsignor Marvin Le Frois, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Church in Valdosta, Ga.; and Benedictine Father Christian Le Frois, who is attached to St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pa.; and his sister, Rita Conrad of Rochester.

Correction

ROCHESTER — Due to erroneous information supplied to the *Catholic Courier*, the April 9 edition listed an incorrect date for a memorial Mass for Sister Lucetta Lougen, SSND.

The actual time and date for the Mass is 7 p.m. May 7 at Holy Ghost Church, 220 Coldwater Road.

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