Sisters of Mercy honor jubilarians

Bishop observes event with Mass at motherhouse

EDITORS' NOTE: This is the first in a series of articles honoring women religious celebrating their jubilees this year.

By Lee Strong and Mike Latona
Staff writers

The Sisters of Mercy of Rochester honored 20 jubilarians during an afternoon liturgy on Sunday, Sept. 20, at the sisters' motherhouse, 1437 Blossom Road, Brighton.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark celebrated the liturgy, which was followed by a dinner and individual tributes.

File photo
The Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse is located at 1437 Blossom Road in Rochester.

After leaving teaching, she engaged in social work and conducted a retirement home. She also served as a parish visitor at Mount Carmel Parish, Rochester; St. John's Parish, Clyde; and the sisters' infirmary.

Sister Burkhartzmeyer also writes poetry and corresponds with Henry Clune, the noted Rochester historian.

Sister Mary Eileen Fitzgibbons taught in diocesan elementary schools for 47 years — 35 of those years in Elmira schools.

In Elmira, the Hornell native taught at St. Patrick's from 1937-58; St. Cecilia's from 1960-66; St. Mary's from 1971-75; and Our Lady of Lourdes from 1975-79. She also taught at St. Louis, Pittsford; St. Joseph, Penfield; and in three Rochester schools, St. Mary's downtown, St. Andrew's, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Celebrating 75 years

Former principal heads list as order's longest professed

Sister Mary Florence Sullivan spent 40 of her 50 years in education at Our Lady of Mercy High School. She arrived at the school, located at 1437 Blossom Road, in 1928 to become part of the founding faculty, and ultimately served as its vice principal from 1948-57. Sister Sullivan became principal from 1957-68.

A Rochester native, Sister Sullivan entered the Sisters of Mercy in 1916. She later earned a bachelor's degree in English from Canisius College in 1927, and a master's degree in history in 1928.

Sister Sullivan taught at several Rochester elementary schools before beginning her career at the high school: Mount Carmel (1916-17); St. Mary's, (1917-18); St. Andrew's (1919-21) and

Holy Cross (1921-28).

Our Lady of Mercy created a scholarship in her honor in 1986.

In addition to her teaching and school administration duties at Mercy, Sister Sullivan founded the school's newspaper, *The Quill*, and literary magazine, *Mercedes*.

Sister Sullivan was also a member of the congregation's executive council from 1961-67. She was the congregation's archivist from 1968-85, and assistant archivist from 1985-87.

In 1985, she completed a history of the congregation's early years in the Rochester diocese, entitled *Mercy Comes to Rochester*.

Sister Sullivan now lives in Lourdes Hall, the Mercy infirmary. She will celebrate her 96th birthday on Nov. 22.

Sister Mary Sylvester Gehl taught in diocesan elementary schools for 40 years before tutoring and working in clerical roles in schools for three more years.

A native of White Mills, Pa., Sister Gehl spent her longest teaching stints at St. Patrick's, Elmira (1935-41) and St. Vincent's, Corning (1941-46, 1959-60). She also taught at Holy Family, Auburn; St. Ann's, Hornell; St. John's, Clyde; St. Rita's, Webster; St. Louis, Pittsford; and St. John the Evangelist on Humboldt Street, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Salome's and St. Andrew's, all of Rochester.

Sister Mary Leon Gilman was primarily a kindergarten and first-grade teacher in diocesan schools from 1931-86. During that time, she also tutored for five years.

She spent 26 years at St. Thomas the Apostle School (1934-60) and 18 at St. Andrew's (1968-86). Sister Gilman also taught at Mount Carmel, Rochester; St. Cecilia's, Elmira; St. Louis, Pittsford; St. Mary's, Bath; and St. Mary's, Corning.

Celebrating 70 years

After 50 years in schools, religious took lessons to jail

Sister Mary Julia Ryan has come out from behind bars after serving in volunteer ministry at the Monroe County Jail for 19 years.

The South Wales, N.Y., native tutored inmates in English and math and performed library work in the jail from 1972-1991.

Sister Ryan began jail ministry after a teaching career spanning 48 years.

"Somebody asked for volunteers to go to the jail library," explained Sister Ryan of her decision to volunteer at the jail in 1972. "After a while, somebody was hired to work in the library, so I started to teach English and math to the non-sentenced inmates because they didn't have anyone to teach them."

Sister Ryan acknowledged that people have wondered if she feared for her safety, but she said, "I really didn't feel fear at all."

The inmates, Sister Ryan observed, "are very human, just like other people."

She has even maintained correspondence with some of her former "students" over the years — some who were released, and some who are still incarcerated.

The inmates who came to her classes did so voluntarily, Sister Ryan said. "I thought they were trying to go right and get a job. I think they were glad of

the education that they got while they were in jail."

In recognition of her efforts in the jail, Sister Ryan was given a special plaque in 1987 by Monroe County Sheriff Andrew Meloni.

Prior to beginning her jail ministry, Sister Ryan taught primarily in high schools. From 1931-57, she served at Auburn's Holy Family High School, then she taught from 1958-72 at Our Lady of Mercy High School in Rochester.

Sister Ryan began her teaching career in diocesan elementary schools, serving at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, St. Salome's and Holy Cross, Roches-

ter; St. John's, Clyde; St. Vincent's, Corning; and St. Ann's, Hornell.

In addition, Sister Ryan was a volunteer tutor and family visitor in the Sisters of Mercy inner city ministry in Rochester's Joseph Avenue neighborhood (1965-74), tutored at Mount Carmel School (1972-74) and assisted in the Mercy High School Media Center (1969-88).

Celebrating 60 years

Sister Mary Roberta Burkhartzmeyer spent 31 years teaching in diocesan elementary schools — where she specialized in first grade — including 18 years at St. Ann's, Hornell.

The Towner, N.D., native served at St. Ann's from 1937-54, and 1961-62. She also taught at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and Holy Cross, both of Rochester; St. Rita's, Webster; St. Louis, Pittsford; and St. John's, Clyde.

Sister Mary Rosaria Hughes has served as a program planner and grant developer in the Southern Tier area since 1988 — a service she provided for the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry from 1980-86.

An Elmira native, Sister Hughes has served as the executive director of the Wayne County Community Action Program (1971-80); as senior training officer with the Office of Economic Opportunity's Multi-Purpose Training Center at Atlanta University, Ga. (1968-71); and was the administrator of the Tanglewood Community Nature Center (1986-88).

From 1933-68, Sister Hughes taught in diocesan elementary schools, including 21 years at Holy Family School in Auburn as a teacher (1941-47) and then as principal and teacher (1951-66).

She also taught at Holy Cross, St.