

Women religious face both hope, uncertainty

LCWR holds its meeting in Dallas

DALLAS (CNS) — U.S. women religious face a future filled with hope, but also with ambiguity and uncertainty, speakers said at an August 14-18 assembly in Dallas of some 830 leaders of U.S. women's orders.

The uncertainty results from "the charismatic and prophetic nature of religious life itself," said Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister Margaret Brennan, keynote speaker Aug. 15, the first full day of the meeting of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

Conference members are leaders of about 88,000 nuns in the United States.

Among those at the meeting from the Rochester diocese were Sister Ann Miller, RSM, and Sister Judith Heberle, RSM, president and vice president, respectively, of the Rochester Sisters of Mercy, as well as Sisters Janice Morgan, SSJ, and Sharon Bailey, SSJ, counselors of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester's Central Administration.

Sister Brennan, former head of the LCWR and now professor emerita of pastoral theology at Regis College, Toronto School of Theology, said a hallmark of religious renewal since the Second Vatican Council has been the rediscovery by church authorities and religious orders that religious life itself should be understood as a charisma, a gift of the Spirit for the church.

"It was with this mandate and challenge that we returned to the spirit and origins of our beginnings, seeking in them for sources of revitalization in our life and ministry that would find expression in new ways," she said.

Sister Miller told the *Catholic Courier* that the idea of looking to the "spirit and origins" of congregations' beginnings provides a source of hope for the future of women religious.

"We made a statement after (the meeting) was over," Sister Miller said. "In it, we said we are being invited to claim with renewed enthusiasm our place as ecclesial women who have a unique charisma in the church. We have a very important future in the church."

This "unique charisma" is important in part because of increasing opportunities for women to serve in the church than previously had existed, Sister Miller continued.

"Years ago, people were saying (religious life) is the way women could serve the church," Sister Miller said. "Now, there are many ways for women to serve in the church. People (at the conference) were saying that we have a charisma that calls us to live a unique way of serving in the church."

Continuing this line of thought, Mercy Sister Janet Ruffing, a theologian at Fordham University in New York, speaking at the conference, used the image of dying embers that burst into new flame to describe women religious today.

Reviewing several recent studies of religious life in a talk Aug. 17, Sister Ruffing said many of the major changes affecting women's orders are the result of living in a transitional era.

While some research points to weaknesses such as tensions within communities, declining numbers and confusion about religious identity, she said, other research suggests signs of new vitality.

From one perspective, she said, a

look at the research suggests that "the clock is running out. We are aging very rapidly. Some of our congregations will decline and die."

On the other hand, she said, the same research shows that "many communities are energized by a renewed understanding of their charisms."

"There is evidence of a profound experience of God and an explosion of ministerial creativity and variety," Sister Ruffing continued. "There is a commitment to serve the poor."

"I remain convinced," she added, "that whatever religious life will be in the coming millennium, it will rise up again from the dying embers of the present moment. Despite the enormous challenges religious life as an institution faces in the next 10 years, there are new experiences of God and fresh passion for ministry which continue to burst into flame within and among us."

Sister Morgan told the *Courier* that she is already seeing signs of this "fresh passion" among women religious — and that this is a sign of hope for her.

"Our numbers are smaller, but we seem to be doing even more," she Morgan said.

When congregations of women religious began serving in the United States, Sister Morgan noted, they founded schools and hospitals because there was a need for such institutions.

But now, Sister Morgan said, ministry in hospitals and schools is increasingly being assumed by others, and women religious are moving into other areas of need such as working with people with AIDS, or helping homeless women and children.

"We're willing to move out, to branch out to wherever the need is," Sister Morgan said. Still, she acknowledged, some uncertainty exists, because "we don't know what the future life for us as religious women will be. Religious life may look completely different in the future."

Includes reporting by staff writer Lee Strong.

Hispanic Mision opens



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Carmin and Julio Rosa (top) sing along with musicians outside Rochester's Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church, 53 Ontario St., during the opening of the Hispanic Mision Aug 23. Bishop Matthew H. Clark (bottom left) practices his Spanish during a speech to the more than 500 people in attendance. Evelyn Vargas (right), who has attended the Mision the last four years, acts out a skit under the direction of Sister Julia Norton, RSM.



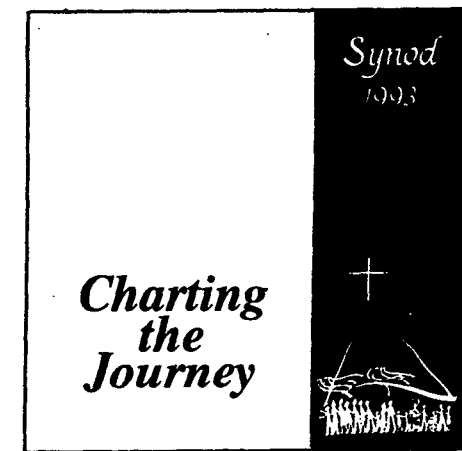
Bishop appoints implementation panel

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark has appointed a 15-member Synod Implementation Commission to oversee implementation of the recommendations approved following the diocese's General Synod October 1-3.

In addition to three members each from the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Priests' Council and the Stewardship Council, the commission will include four members appointed at large.

Bishop Clark and Father John M. Mulligan, vicar general of the diocese, will serve as ex officio members.

According to a diocesan statement, the commission will be charged with assisting Pastoral Center staff in re-evaluating services in light of synod recommendations; approving three- to five-year plans for each Pastoral Center ministry area about how recommendations will be implemented and communicating these plans to the diocese in June 1994; helping parishes re-evaluate services and structures in light of recommendations; and receiving annual reports from parishes about progress made in implementing the



recommendations.

The commission will hold its first organizational meeting Sept. 8.

Diocesan Pastoral Council representatives are: Dr. Angela Palmieri, chairwoman of the DPC and retired vice president of student affairs and professor of behavioral studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo; Philip Ponzi, chief executive officer of Imaging and Sensing Technology Corporation in Horseheads; and Jack Howell, an electrical engineering supervisor at Eastman Kodak Com-

pany in Rochester.

Representatives from the Priests' Council are: Father Daniel J. Condon, pastor of St. Patrick Parish, 46 Stanley St., Mt. Morris; Father Charles J. Latus, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Parish, 26 Mendon-Ionia Road, Mendon, and chairman of the Priests' Council; and Father Daniel P. Tormey, pastor of St. Mary the Assumption Parish, 99 Main St., Scottsville.

Stewardship Council members are: Dr. William Pickett, president of St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Ave., Pittsford; Judith A. Toyer, an attorney specializing in litigation; and Robert Turissini, retired senior vice president of the International Division of Corning Glass, Inc.

At-large members are Luisa Baars, director of the Daybreak Alcoholic Treatment Center in Rochester; Luann Irwin, a quality specialist for the Xerox Corporation; Sister Ann Miller, president of the Rochester Regional Community of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas; and Sister Rosemary St. Peter, superior general of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester.