

DIOCESAN NEWS

Maryknoll sister spread the Word through art

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

When Bertha Josephine joined the Maryknoll Sisters in 1925, it was because she wanted to travel to the missions and spread the Gospel as her colleagues were doing.

But a heart condition made extensive travel too dangerous for the young woman from Chili who took the name Sister Marie Pierre Semler, MM.

Instead, she wound up spending 68 years serving her worldwide community from its headquarters in Ossining, where she lived and created more than 1,000 pieces of religious art before she died in 1993.

In a poetic twist of fate, however, the sister who couldn't travel to the missions became well-known to her Maryknoll sisters throughout the world because of the art she produced here in New York, according to Mary Hoysic of Farmington, who is married to Sister Semler's grandnephew, David Hoysic.

"It bothered her all her life that she was unable to go to the missions," Mary Hoysic said. "Yet, so much of her work was taken to the missions that, in a sense, she was there."

Hoysic and her husband, in cooperation with the Maryknoll Sisters, are offering Catholics in the Diocese of Rochester an opportunity to view Sister Semler's sculptures and paintings. The couple, who belong to St. Mary's Parish in Canandaigua, will take a number of pieces to any parish in the diocese and set up an exhibit so that parishioners may view the late sister's work after weekend Masses.

The Hoysics have already exhibited Sister Semler's work in many private homes, and at Church of the Resurrection in Fairport in June of last year. Although they offer reproductions of her work for purchase, the Hoysics charge no admission to any exhibit, and Mary Hoysic emphasized that they are doing this out of sheer



Corky Lee

This cast stone work by the late Sister Marie Pierre Semler, MM, is entitled, "Compassion." Relatives of the Chili native are making her works available for local exhibition.

love for their late relative's artwork.

"We felt as though the work should be seen by as many people as possible," Hoysic commented.

Actually, Sister Semler's artwork was seen by thousands of U.S. soldiers fighting in Europe during World War II, Hoysic said, noting that Sister Semler's pieces were reproduced on prayer cards.

Hoysic also recalled that Sister Semler enjoyed taking people through her workshop whenever they came to

visit her. If anyone raved about a particular piece, Sister Semler would give it to them, Hoysic said.

The 1995 book *Oasis in the Night* documents Sister Semler's work, and points out that she began her career by illustrating *Maryknoll Magazine*, the order's periodical that details the missionaries' work.

Over the years, Sister Semler created a wide variety of work, frequently sculpting the Madonna, the Holy Family, the Last Supper and the infant Jesus in his crib, *Oasis* notes.

In her later years, Sister Semler became intrigued by the idea of creating sculptures from items found in the natural world.

"In awe of nature in all of its mysteries and splendor as reflected in the most minute details in rocks, stone, wood, coral, broken shells and fungi brought to her as gifts from around the world, and with a heart humble and attentive, Semler made accessible the inherent, astonishing tales of nature violated and the Creator's mercy and redemption," the book states.

Interestingly, Hoysic observed that Sister Semler only took one series of formal art classes in her life — four years of evening drawing courses while she was a teenager in the Rochester area.

She was offered an art scholarship to Rochester Institute of Technology, but her superiors at Maryknoll urged the young religious to pursue her art "untarnished" by a teacher's influence, Hoysic said. Sister Semler was named head of Maryknoll's art department soon after joining the order, Hoysic added.

On a personal note, Hoysic remembered that Sister Semler never let her tremendous talent go to her head, and that the nun had a great sense of humor.

"She felt that humility was the most important quality that you could possess," Hoysic said.

Parishes interested in exhibiting Sister Semler's work should call the Hoysics at 716/398-2009.

Awards honor sharing 'Light'

Finger Lakes Social Ministry will present its 1996 Sharing the Light Award to Geneva residents Mary E. Luckern and Lucile Mallard. The two women will receive their awards during a Wednesday, June 12, dinner at Geneva's Club 86.

According to LuAnn Irwin, president of the ministry's board, the award recognizes individuals who have served the community selflessly. The first awards, granted last year, went to Msgr. Gerard Krieg of St. Stephen's Church and the Rev. James Gerling of the Presbyterian Church in Geneva.

Luckern taught in the Geneva schools from 1953 to 1966, and since 1968 has been principal of North Street Elementary School. She has received numerous national and regional educational awards.

A native of Seneca Falls, where she attended St. Patrick's School, Luckern has lived and worked in Geneva all of her adult life. She has been active with the Geneva Historical Society, Ontario Day Care, Lakefront Committee, Master Plan Committee, the League of Women Voters, among other organizations, and has been a lector at St. Stephen's Parish for several years.

She said her greatest achievement has been "to help guide our priceless possessions — our children — to grow and to develop into contributing members of our worldwide community."

Mallard, of the Mt. Calvary Church of God in Christ, has counseled residents at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Canandaigua for 29 years. She is president of the Geneva-area branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and a member-at-large of the N.Y. State Conference of NAACP Branches.

Tickets for the 6:30 p.m. awards dinner can be obtained from the Finger Lakes Social Ministry at 315/789-2686.

Kessler resigns from diocesan personnel post

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

A weekend motorcycle excursion to Washington, D.C., is a pretty long trip — but that's minor compared to another voyage awaiting Mary Kessler.

Kessler and her husband, Gary, plan to spend Memorial Day weekend motorcycling to and from the nation's capital, where they'll take part in "Rolling Thunder." The annual event unites tens of thousands of bikers from around the country who honor deceased Vietnam War veterans.

Upon her return from Washington, Kessler will remove her helmet and begin her final month as diocesan director of human resources. She is leaving her position June 30, ending an 11-year stay in the Diocese of Rochester.

Kessler, 45, announced her resignation in early April. She is moving to Los Angeles, due to her husband's new position as vice president of human resources for Honda America.

Kessler came to the Rochester diocese from the Detroit area in 1985, serving as coordinator for marriage preparation and family ministry in the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry. (That diocesan ministry office is now known as Catholic Family Center.)

One year later Kessler became diocesan director of personnel services, overseeing all parish personnel. In 1991 she succeeded the late Bob Mason as director of human resources, and was replaced in personnel services by Barbara Pedeville. No successor has yet been selected for Kessler's current position, which oversees all diocesan personnel — both lay and clerical.

Looking back over her tenure, Kessler said she's happy with several areas of progress among the diocesan work force during that time.

"When I came here, I was pleased to see a strong presence of pastoral associates. Some of them are now parish pastoral administrators," she noted.

In addition, Kessler is proud that the

diocese has developed compensation guidelines for all parish staff positions, "from janitor to youth minister to pastoral," she said.

Kessler admitted that managing personnel matters for an entire diocese can present "an enormous number of challenges." However, she added, "We have an incredibly strong staff. We all work together."

This sense of teamwork will provide Kessler with many pleasant memories of her years in the Pastoral Center.

"The people I work with are the most highly principled, faith-filled people dedicated to ministry that I know," she said. "How could you not be happy

when you work with people like that?"

Kessler has no full-time employment plans at this stage, but hopes to perform consulting work for the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators. She is a six-year NACPA board member as well as past president.

Though she'll be thousands of miles from Rochester, Kessler said she plans on maintaining frequent contact with her many friends in the diocese. Her most frequent correspondence will be with daughters Jennifer, 26, and Kristen, 23, both Rochester residents.

"We have a home computer, and I expect to be E-mailing to people here quite often," Kessler remarked.

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