

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Spirit House founder steps down from helm

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

She has spent years helping women religious realize they must care for themselves so they can care for others. Soon, Sister Mollie Brown, RSM, will have time to take her own advice. At the end of June, she will step down from co-directing Spirit House in Irondequoit.

"I refer to it as my recyclement," Sister Brown, 65, said jokingly.

Sister Brown founded Spirit House in 1981 as a therapeutic center for women religious. Since 1992, she has co-directed the center with Sister Mary Ann Ayers, RSM, who will become sole director of Spirit House July 1.

"I knew it was time to hand the reins over," Sister Brown said of her decision to retire.

Sister Ayers, who has worked at the center for 12 years, pointed out that Sister Brown will continue to serve as a consultant to Spirit House. Sister Ayers said Sister Brown provided much of her own inspiration to engage in counseling work with women religious.

"She's been a marvelous example to me, a mentor, and she certainly helped me with the clinical aspect of counseling," Sister Ayers said.

Sister Brown will also continue to oversee the center's weekly seminars and continue her private therapeutic practice at Spirit House. An author of articles and books on psychiatric nursing, social change and gerontology, Sister Brown said she plans to write more now. She also said she wants to establish more contacts with area professionals in the gerontological field, studying aging and its effects on people.

Sister Brown noted that she and Sister Ayers will travel to Ireland in August and will meet with women religious there to discuss establishing a therapeutic center for Irish women religious.

A registered nurse since 1954, Sister Brown holds graduate degrees in adult psychiatric nursing and human development.

Prior to founding Spirit House, Sister Brown had worked since the mid-1950s as a teacher at Notre Dame High School in Elmira, then as psychotherapist in Bath and a nursing instructor in Hornell.

In the late '60s and early '70s, she oversaw the process of creating six separate communities at the Sisters of Mercy motherhouse. Each of these communities takes a different approach to community prayer.

For example, Sister Brown said, one community of older sisters retained a more formal style of daily common prayer whereas a younger group of sisters developed community prayer that drew on a wide variety of styles. All six groups still exist and share a dining room and chapel at the motherhouse, Sister Brown said.

Sister Brown also taught nursing at the University of Rochester during the early '70s. Then, from 1975 to 1978, she was director of outpatient services at Genesee Mental Health Center in Rochester.

In 1977, she began researching the ideas that later jelled into her concept for Spirit House. The church's clergy and religious suffering from overwork and physical and mental exhaustion had few options to help them deal with their problems, while their colleagues at the secular world could avail themselves of various therapeutic centers, she said.

"There wasn't anywhere where women religious and priests could go off for a bit," Sister Brown recalled.

People in the religious life needed a different therapeutic approach than their secular colleagues, she said, because those who serve the church through a vowed life often felt guilty about wanting time for themselves.

"We help these women learn to play again," she said of Spirit House's work.



Bill Hawken

## Summer reading

Local authors of children's books — Alice DeLaCroix, Vivian VandeVelde, Patricia Costa Viglucchi, and Donatella Cardillo-Young — appeared together June 18 at St. Charles Borromeo School for Author's Day to help encourage summer reading. They read from their own works and autographed books for students in grades one through seven. Shown here engraving their new books, from left, are seventh-graders Nichole LeClair, Faith Pleckan, Crystal Schulz, and Jennifer Covotta.

"They take time out for themselves. It's a matter of not having to be in ministry all the time."

She has also stressed with her fellow sisters the fact that begrudgingly serving others is no service at all.

"If you aren't full, don't go to ministry," she said she told her colleagues. "The worse possible sin in social justice ... is to bleed your energy so that you then bleed others."

Since its founding, more than 100 women from a variety of religious orders from throughout the United States and Canada have stayed at Spirit House, Sister Brown said.

Spirit House offers weekly individual counseling sessions, groups, formal classes, massage therapy, community prayer and spiritual direction. Most clients stay about nine or 10 months, but an increasing number of clients who are dealing with such issues as childhood or adult sexual abuse are staying up to 15 months, Sister Brown said.

She added that Spirit House remains one of the few places at which women religious can receive intensive therapeutic help in the world. A similar center for women religious in Seattle, Wash., opened after Spirit House was founded, but has since closed, she said.

## Genoans reprint history of Catholicism in central New York

The Genoa Historical Association has re-published Father Bernard Leo Heffernan's 1925 book, *Some Cross-Bearers of the Finger Lakes Region*. The 222-page, illustrated book is a historical/biographical narrative about the development of Catholicism in central New York.

First published by John Anderson Publishing Co. of Chicago, *Cross-Bearers* has been out of print until this second edition. "Bernard Heffernan wrote this book with a deep and quiet love for the people who made up the early Catholic communities in central New York," Thomas Farrell Heffernan, the author's nephew, wrote in his foreword to the new edition.

The history "balances like a spinning top on one village," he wrote. That village is Aurora, on the east shore of Cayuga Lake, where Father Heffernan was born.

"If the book had begun not with the arrival of 17th century Jesuit missionaries, as it does, but with the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles, it still would have ended up in Aurora," the nephew, a professor of English literature at New York's

Adelphi University, stated.

Father Heffernan entered St. Andrew's Minor Seminary in 1909 and St. Bernard's Seminary in 1910, but finished at Mt. St. Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg, Md. He apparently was recruited by the Diocese of Rockford, Ill., where he was a pastor and chaplain, and also taught and wrote. Father Heffernan saw the *Cross-Bearers* published just three years before his death in Illinois after an operation. He is buried in St. Patrick's Cemetery of Aurora.

In *Cross-Bearers* he told of, western migration through New York, of how the Irish Catholic population exploded with the building of the Erie Canal, and of how the number of priests and Catholic churches rose correspondingly.

He wrote of priests such as Father Tom Hendrick, a Rochester priest from Penn Yan and a friend of President Theodore Roosevelt's. The priest served in several central New York churches, and became a bishop in the Philippines. And he told how the early priests covered extensive territories, for example, from Cayuga to Itha-

ca — by horse and buggy.

The Genoa Historical Association undertook the reprinting late last year, according to Gordon Cummings, Genoa town historian, because "It's something people would like to have — it's kind of a local history."

Father Robert F. McNamara, archivist for the Diocese of Rochester, said the book is the best chronicle of Catholicism in cen-

tral New York, from a historic and literary point of view, and is "quite well done."

The book is available from three sources: the Genoa Historical Association, Box 316, Route 34B, King Ferry, NY 13081; Tallcot Bookshop, Union Springs; and Talbothay's Books, Aurora. The price is \$30, plus \$2.50 shipping per book.

—Kathleen Schwarz

## Home for dying 'desperately' needs volunteers, monies

Elisha House, a home for the dying operated on the grounds of St. Augustine's Parish in Rochester, is in desperate need of volunteers and donations, according to Michael K. Sullivan, CSW, a member of the house's advisory board.

The home does not charge patients for their stays, and receives no government or insurance company funding.

Located at 370 Chili Ave., Elisha House has housed 70 terminally ill patients — 50 of whom had AIDS — in the past five years. But the house currently has one paid staff director and fewer than five vol-

unteers to care for patients on a 24-hour basis. Although some health aides provided by various agencies work night shifts, Elisha House would like to staff itself with all volunteers if possible.

Volunteers work four shifts, and are most needed during day and weekend hours. Training is available for volunteers.

For information on how to volunteer at Elisha House, call Episcopal Deacon Lynne McNulty at 716/464-8852.

Donations may be sent to: Elisha House, 370 Chili Avenue, Rochester, NY 14611.

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