

## CONTINUED...

## Prayer

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as you know we are undergoing a sea change," she said in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*. "that doesn't happen very often, maybe once every couple of hundred years, in the very definition of what religious life is going to mean in this country for the Catholic Church."

For now, she sees a future in communities committed to prayer and common living, especially cloistered, contemplative ones. In Indiana, for example, she noted, the Benedictine Sisters in Beech Grove and in Ferdinand are growing. The Beech Grove sisters number about 90, down from a peak of 140, but have four who entered last year, three temporary vows, three novices, three postulants and one in pre-entrance. "For a community of 90, that is dang good," she remarked.

"The reason both are doing well, or better, is they are emphasizing their communal prayer aspect," she speculated.

While recognizing a search for deep spirituality among newer women religious, Sister Janet Korn, RSM, of Rochester said that need can be fulfilled in apostolic religious communities as well. Service just happens to be the visible aspect, said the interim director of Melita/McAuley Housing.

"Our work flows out of prayer," she said, acknowledging she wouldn't be happy cloistered. "It provides a purpose to service and our life. It grounds us in love."

The vast majority of women religious are satisfied with their lives, Sister Wittberg said, citing a *Los Angeles Times* survey of more than 1,000 women religious published in 1994. And they were unlikely to leave even if offered the opportunity to become priests, it determined. For example, 74 percent "definitely" would choose to become a nun again and 19 percent "probably" would.

## Do calls differ?

The Second Vatican Council stressed that by their baptism, all Catholics have vocations, and essentially left women religious as "laity," nuns were forced to develop a new ideology, Sister Wittberg wrote in her 1994 book.

A key question still faces theologians, religious and lay people, Sisters Wittberg and Chittister have acknowledged: "How does the call of religious differ?"

"Lay people, thank you, teach as well as nuns can. Lay people, thank you, nurse as well as nuns can," Sister Wittberg said. "If (nuns) don't wear habits, they live by themselves in apartments and each do their own ministry, people are going to say, 'I can do that without entering,' which is true."

Nuns have lost their niches in regard to status, or image, in society and the church, and in certain mission roles, she has noted.

"What religious life is doing is going through an absolute paradigm shift, a sea change, from something that teaches little children in schools and nurses people in hospitals, which was the absolute need in the 19th and early 20th centuries of the church, to a religious life that meets our hungers," Sister Wittberg told the *Courier*.

"And Americans have a terrible hunger for spiritual depth and community connectiveness. We are very individualistic and lonely people."

Religious communities, she said, have "something today that people are hungering for. And it drives me nuts they aren't better at letting people know what they've got."

"Any community out there that emphasizes community and prayer, prayer in common as well as contemplative, in whatever variety or flavor most congruent with their charism (a) has a greater chance of surviving and (b) definitely and emphatically is worth joining."

Yet, people with "true vocations" are ig-

## 'SisterSite' offers history, updates on religious

Anyone interested in learning more about religious life owes it to herself to do her homework, said Sister Patricia Wittberg, SC (see article, Page 1).

Technologically speaking, such research has been made easier with the arrival of SisterSite on the Internet. It can be found by searching for SisterSite at [www.geocities.com/wellesley/1114/index.html](http://www.geocities.com/wellesley/1114/index.html).

SisterSite is an outgrowth of Sister L, an Internet discussion group founded in 1994 that has about 1,000 subscribers, mostly nuns. SisterSite describes itself as a "clearinghouse for in-

formation on women's religious congregations, the history of religious life, and the contemporary concerns of women in church and society."

Communities with links to it include Benedictines, Carmelites, Sisters of the Cenacle, Daughters/Sisters of Charity, Daughters of St. Paul, Dominicans, Franciscans, Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St. Joseph and Ursulines.

Margaret Susan Thompson, a historian at Syracuse University, administers the site with Sister Ritamary Bradley, of the Sisters for Christian Community; both co-founded Sister L.

noring them, she bemoaned. In religiously pluralistic America, many people turn instead to the Assemblies of God, the Southern Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, or other faiths, some of which she believes restrict women "in unhealthy ways."

She calls this type of person a "religious virtuoso," whose life is centered on the spiritual, who has a need for more than church on Sunday, and whom she considers among the church's most potentially committed. The church must maintain places for such people who are so driven, she said, whether it be religious orders, the Blue Army or charismatic groups.

In countries more solidly Catholic than the United States, she said, religious life is actually on an upswing. She cited Italy, France and Spain, where there are "tons of new communities, almost all focusing around prayer and community."

The U.S. decline, she speculated, may continue till some 20,000 nuns remain.

"My guess is that 10 years from now or so a lot of communities will have diminished to the point of irrelevance," she said. Such congregations as the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of St. Joseph, however, have

the momentum to keep going, she added.

Noting historical ups and downs of religious life, she wrote in *Pathways* that throughout the first 1,500 years, "the primary purpose of real religious life in Western Christianity was the perfection of the virtuoso's own soul and (especially for the mendicant friars) the salvation of the souls of others."

"Whatever other ministerial services these groups happened to render (preaching, sheltering the homeless) were peripheral to their main goals."

And today, she wrote, "I would argue ... that the primary rationale for the existence of any form of religious virtuosity — in Western or Eastern Christianity, in Buddhism, Hinduism or Sufism — is to enact a spiritual response to the basic dilemmas of its surrounding culture."

Religious life is vital for the Catholic Church, she said, "and there are folks out there for whom it is a pearl of great price or treasure in the field ... and I would simply urge if you think you are one of them, you know that hunger because it keeps bugging you, and not to write off religious life as an answer to that hunger."

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**ADOPTIONS** The Catholic Courier does not publish adoption advertising. To obtain a list of agencies that serve birth mothers and adoptive parents, call 716-328-4340. Agencies wishing to be included on this list may send information to the Catholic Courier.

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The Diocese of Rochester, New York, is in the process of selecting a pool of qualified candidates who will be considered for Pastoral Administrator openings in the spring hiring process. (In other arch/dioceses, this position is also called a Director of Parish Life.) In this position, a lay person, religious or deacon is responsible for providing leadership in all areas of parish life for a parish or cluster of parishes within the twelve-county area of our diocese.

Applicants should possess a graduate degree in Theology or Pastoral Ministry or equivalent coursework combined with experience, with a Master of Divinity degree and one unit of CPE or CPT preferred. The ideal candidate will have a solid base of experience in a wide variety of parish/pastoral ministries and at least three years of demonstrated successful pastoral leadership in a parish organization, including responsibility for managing financial and human resource functions.

Special requirements include active membership in a Roman Catholic faith community, residence within the Diocese and ability to relocate, if necessary, once a parish location has been determined. Salary commensurate with experience and education; excellent benefits.

Interested candidates should send resume and cover letter, describing specific qualifications, by OCTOBER 22, 1997, to:



**Pastoral Administrator  
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