

Seneca Falls gathering considers women's future

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

SENECA FALLS — Judith Nichols, pastoral associate at Sacred Heart Church, Auburn, remembered going to Mass as a 5-year-old child with her mother, and asking her what was going on when the priest held up the Eucharist.

"That's Jesus," she remembered her mother telling her. "He's holding up Jesus."

Nichols recalled telling her mother that she wanted to do the same when she grew up. But her mother informed her that only boys could become priests. Instead of considering this an injustice, Nichols said she used to pray to become a boy so she could grow up to be a priest.

Nichols said she didn't want another generation of Catholic girls to have to contemplate making the same prayer, and shared her concern with 55 people who attended a breakfast, interfaith service and discussion at St. Patrick's School hall, Saturday morning, Sept. 12.

The morning's activities were organized by Suzanne Schnittman, coordinator of the diocesan Synod Goal No. 2 — the Consistent Life Ethic — and Gloria Ulterino, team coordinator of diocesan Synod Goal No. 3 — the promotion of the Dignity of Women in Church and Society.

The service — which featured an ecumenical choir — and discussion were the latest in a series of events that have taken place in Seneca Falls this year to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of the women's rights movement.

Nichols was one of four speakers who took part in a panel discussion on what kind of legacy women wanted to hand down to future generations. The participants also talked about how societal and family situations had influenced their



Greg Francis/Staff photographer
Bobbi Plummer, left, and Norma Mitchell, members of an ecumenical choir, sing during a women's conference sponsored by the two Diocese of Rochester offices and held at St. Patrick School hall, Seneca Falls, Sept. 12. The event also included a breakfast, speakers and a small-group discussion.

views of themselves, and their female relatives and friends.

The other panel participants were Judy Norman, a parishioner at St. Joseph's Church, Penfield, and a lawyer who specializes in health care law; Dr. Mary Labanowski, an internist at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, and a parishioner at St. Louis Church, Pittsford; and Doris Tucker, a member of Calvary Lutheran Church, Waterloo, who works with the area poor.

The discussion was moderated by Mary Grace, a member of St. Patrick Parish's committees on social ministry and on the dignity of women.

Nichols' thoughts on ordination were echoed by Helen Elam, a parishioner at Henrietta's Good Shepherd Church. At the Sept. 12 event, a costumed Elam acted the part of the Rev. Antoinette Brown

Blackwell, a 19th century suffragist from Henrietta who was the first woman minister ordained in the United States. During a monologue describing Blackwell's life, Elam briefly broke out of character and protested the Catholic church's denial of ordination to women.

"I think it's coming," she said of women's ordination. "It's got to come, or we're going to rebel," Elam added — a remark to which the audience responded with laughter.

Just as Nichols shared her desire that women be ordained in the church someday, Norman noted that she hoped to leave

younger women a legacy of using power correctly. The male lawyers with whom she works seek and exercise power regularly, she said, and so should women.

"Most of the men in my firm don't have a problem with power," she said. "They might have a problem with the wise exercise of it, but they don't have a problem with the concept."

"Power is not a dirty word," Norman added. "But the exercise of power with wisdom and grace is very important."

Labanowski said she hoped to let younger women know they can be both mothers and professionals. Younger women she has met in the medical profession struggle with the fear of either losing the opportunity to be mothers so they can be professionals or of sacrificing their careers to stay at home with their children. Yet it's not an either/or proposition, she noted, but something that women need to work out together with their mates and families.

Tucker recalled being greatly influenced by an aunt of hers who was a missionary in India. Her aunt used to tell her sad stories of how she had seen so many Indian children suffer and die from starvation. Such stories planted the seeds of compassion in her, Tucker said, and parents need to plant similar seeds in children today.

"I think we need to look at our children and grandchildren and find the good parts in them and never let them go," she said. "What do I want to pass onto the next generation? I think the knowledge that the true joy in living is giving."

Obituaries

Sr. Frances Macaluso, librarian

Sister Frances Macaluso, SSJ, (formerly Sister Josephine Ignatia) a librarian at St. Mary's School in Dansville during the 1980s, died at St. Joseph Convent Infirmary in Rochester on July 19, 1998.

A native of Mount Morris, Sister Frances grew up attending the Church of the Assumption, and entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester in 1943. She first served as a cottage supervisor at St. Joseph's Villa in Greece from 1944 to 1958. In 1958, she became a housekeeper at St. Anne's Convent, Rochester, a position she subsequently held at Our Lady of Good Counsel Convent, also in Rochester.

She left Good Counsel in 1965 to become a receptionist and instructor at School of the Holy Childhood, Rochester, from which she went to St. Rose School in Lima. There, from 1966 to 1969, she served as secretary, librarian and catechist.

In 1969, Sister Frances became a classroom assistant and teacher at St. Francis

deSales School, Geneva. She held those positions until 1979, when she became a teacher at St. Mary's School, Elmira, where she moved to Dansville.

Due to failing health, Sister Frances retired to her order's motherhouse in Rochester in 1989, and, in 1993, transferred to the infirmary.

According to a statement from her order, Sister Frances "was a quiet person," and was "loved and appreciated by the children she taught."

Sister Frances is survived by one sister-in-law, Sara (Joseph) Macaluso; nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews as well as her fellow Sisters of St. Joseph.

A funeral Mass was celebrated July 22 for Sister Frances in the Motherhouse Chapel. Burial took place in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Rochester. Contributions in her memory may be made to: St. Joseph's Convent Infirmary, 4199 East Ave., Rochester, N.Y. 14610.

Brother Simon Wong, OCSO, baker; 68

Brother Simon Wong, OCSO, a Cistercian monk who had resided at the Abbey of the Genesee in Piffard, Livingston County, for most of the past four decades, died Aug. 17, 1998. He was 68.

Brother Simon was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. During the Korean War, largely because of his Chinese heritage, he worked in counterintelligence during his stint in the U.S. Army. He then attended college briefly and worked in his family's restaur-

ant business before joining the Cistercians of the Strict Observance in 1960 when he arrived at the Abbey of the Genesee. Brother Simon spent the bulk of his working hours in the monastery's bakery and as overseer of the monastery's laundry operation.

In 1987, Brother Simon traveled to Korea to help spread the Cistercian way of life. He stayed for two years then returning to the Abbey of the Genesee.

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