

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Sister Del Santo readies for 'freedom' of SSJ vows

By Lee Strong  
Associate editor

ROCHESTER — Sister Donna Del Santo, SSJ, recalls a conversation she had with a female inmate of the Monroe County Jail, where she works as part of her job as a nurse with the Monroe County Health Department.

Upon learning that she was a woman religious, Sister Del Santo reported, the inmate asked, "Don't you get lonely?"

"I said, 'Yes. Don't you?'" Sister Del Santo replied, startling the inmate.

Sister Del Santo said she has had many such moments at the jail, where the inmates are surprised to learn about her vocation and her honesty about her life and feelings.

"Then," she said, "they start to open up about their lives."

"I've never experienced God more intimately than I have in jail," she added.

Sister Del Santo will be taking a break from her jail ministry Saturday, Sept. 26, when she makes her final vows as a Sister of St. Joseph.

The path that has led her to take those vows was not smooth, she acknowledged.

The Syracuse native attended Catholic grammar and high schools, and a Catholic college, D'Youville, in Buffalo, where she earned a degree in nursing. She then worked as a public health nurse for a small Catholic hospital in Kentucky.

Despite that continuous contact with the church, she said, "I wasn't that particularly church involved."

The stint in Kentucky was followed by two years as a VISTA volunteer in Texas. While there, she and a friend decided they wanted to travel around the world, so they headed to the friend's hometown, Rochester, in 1979 to look for work and

raise the needed money. Sister Del Santo became a recruiter for VISTA.

In February 1980, the father of a friend died and she wanted to get a Mass card. The nearest Catholic Church to where she lived was Corpus Christi, so she went there. The visit led to a lengthy conversation with Father James Callan, then the parish's administrator, about one of his dreams: a health clinic.

That clinic — now the Corpus Christi Center — opened in September 1981 with Sister Del Santo as co-director with Sister Sharon Bailey, SSJ. Sister Del Santo had by that time also become an active member of the parish, and had begun to provide music with a contingent of parishioners for Sunday Masses at the Monroe County Jail.

In 1991, Sister Bailey was elected to an administrative position with the congregation and planned to quit her job at the clinic. Sister Del Santo decided it would be a good time for her to move on as well, so she went on a 30-day retreat to consider her future.

"Then 'that' happened," she said.

"That" was a message that she should consider becoming a woman religious.

Her reaction was instantaneous: "I was very upset."

For the next year, even as she explored the calling, she fought it. But, she noted, "I was haunted. I was harassed."

When she finally signed the application papers in the summer of 1992, she said, it was just to get it over with. Now, however, she said, "It feels so right. It feels like the suit fits. I've sort of grown into it."

The decision to enter the convent, she explained, is "not some kind of pious whatever. I'm joining a band of wild women seeking justice and loving God."

From their beginning, she observed, the



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Sister Donna Del Santo, SSJ, a nurse with the Monroe County Health Department, prepares a syringe for a tuberculosis skin test at the county's TB Outreach Office at Bull's Head Plaza, 855 W. Main St., Rochester, Sept. 18. She makes her final vows Sept. 26.

Sisters of St. Joseph have been concerned with working with the poor and the needy. "We went into prisons," she said. "We took care of prostitutes. We took care of orphans."

Still, she acknowledged, she was initially afraid she would lose the freedom she so cherishes.

"But as I came to understand the vows, it was a freeing experience," she explained. "Obedience isn't someone telling me what to do. Obedience is telling me to listen to the voice of God, with others."

The latest way she is "listening with others" is through the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester Volunteer Corps. She is part of

five-member team living at the Holy Family Convent with groups of volunteers who reside at the convent while working with a variety of service projects.

Sister Del Santo sees the corps as a sign of evolving life in the congregation — a life rooted in the congregation's past.

"If you're talking about charisms, it's to unite neighbor to neighbor and neighbor to God," she said.

Meanwhile, she will continue to work at the jail, and to provide music for Sunday Masses there.

"That's my home church," she said. "That's where I've been the longest in my 18 years."

## Heckling, applause greet transition team at Corpus

By Kathleen Schwar  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Masses at Corpus Christi went on as usual Sept. 19-20: Mary Ramerman, pastoral associate, stood at the altar, participating by saying prayers, mixing wine with water, and raising the cup several times; Father Enrique Cadena, associate pastor, invited everyone to receive Communion, receiving loud applause at one Mass.

However, heightening emotions over the parish's future erupted at times, with parishioners jockeying for the microphone at a couple of Masses.

Although changes in worship to conform to Catholic liturgical rules were not evident at those weekend Masses at the parish, changes are expected.

Kathleen Cannon, a temporary leadership team member, told the parishioners at the Masses the team welcomes their input — but at a Sept. 22 forum and in appointments. Parishioners can help explore ways for the parish to "live out its mission, vision and spirit, within the parameters of Catholic guidelines," she said. A priest's appointment to the parish is expected in four to six weeks.

However, Father Cadena, also a member of the transition team, told the *Catholic Courier* Sept. 21, "The bottom line is going to be our conscience ... Meaning we might not agree to some of the things we are being asked."

It was the team's first weekend together since its appointment by Bishop Matthew H. Clark. Also on the three-member team is Charlotte Bruney, temporary pastoral administrator at St. Vin-

cent de Paul Church, Churchville. Cannon is on leave as diocesan director of parish support ministries.

The bishop removed Father James B. Callan as administrator and reassigned him temporarily to Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Elmira, as of Sept. 11. He had cited the priest's continuing defiance of church law concerning women's liturgical roles, specific portions of ministry to homosexual people and intercommunion with non-Catholics.

While expecting "(e)verything is going to explode" at the forum, Father Cadena said he hadn't been prepared for the outbursts at the Sept. 19-20 Masses.

Bruney recalled that Saturday, "I was heckled all through my homily. They weren't in a position to listen even. ... One man got up, then about 40 moved into the sanctuary and a half dozen spoke. It was so obvious they were not listening to me."

Cannon was interrupted at the 11:30 a.m. Mass Sept. 20 by such comments as "Jesus Christ is our pastor" and "You can't hold back the spring," both greeted with applause. Her request that parishioners respectfully listen also was applauded.

Bruney, a former administrative team member at a church in the Archdiocese of Hartford, Conn., urged support for Bishop Clark and other Catholic Church leaders.

"The ones willing to listen, willing to dialogue, willing to turn a blind eye for long periods of time to experimentation are too few and far between and we need them," she preached. "We may not approve of everything they demand from us; and we may continue to challenge them. But we are fools to put them at risk."

## The Monthly Prayer Request For Priests

### PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

O my Jesus, I beg You on behalf of the whole Church: Grant it love and the light of Your spirit, and give power to the words of priests so that hardened hearts might be brought to repentance and return to You, O Lord.

Lord, give us holy priests; You yourself maintain them in holiness. O Divine and Great High Priest, may the power of Your mercy accompany them everywhere and protect them from the devil's traps and snares which are continually being set for the souls of priests. May the power of Your mercy, O Lord, shatter and bring to naught all that might tarnish the sanctity of priests, for You can do all things. AMEN

(diary of Sister Faustina, 1052)

Prayer Suggestions: Mass, Rosary, Fasting, Day Offering, Eucharistic Adoration, Offering Sufferings, Divine Mercy Chaplet

## October, 1998

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

Look for the November MPRP Calendar in the October 29th Courier.		Revs. 1	2	3
		Joseph F. Cloonan	Patrick L. Connor	Bishop Matthew H. Clark
4	5	6	7	8
Inactive Priests	Bernard F. Dollen	Thomas F. Corbett	B. Thomas Celso	Edward L. Palumbos
9	10	11	12	13
Paul J. McCabe	Eric Phillips	Timothy Niven	Severine S. Msemwa	Nicholas P. Alletto
14	15	16	17	18
Stephen R. Kraus	William D. Lum	Elected Pope John Paul II	Michael Mayer	Dennis J. Shaw
19	20	21	22	23
George Wiant	Laurence C. Tracy	Robert G. Miller, CSB	John H. Hayes	Scott M. Kubinski
24	25	26	27	28
William M. Barrett	Bruce F. Ammering	Thomas Bond, OCSO	Winfried M. Kellner	Brian Cool
29	30	31		
Peter Enyan-Boadu	Vocations	Seminarians		

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