

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Religious commitments keep dancer on her toes

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

PENN YAN — If a moving hymn like "Take My Life and Let It Be" comes on the radio at home, Loretta Parshall can't help but get up and dance.

"A beautiful hymn will turn me on," she said. "I will drop everything. I will dance that prayer immediately."

Some people sing. Some play the guitar, she noted. "I don't think a body is ever too old not to want to express a prayer in motion. It's inborn. It's one of the gifts (God) gave to me."

At 83, Parshall still occasionally performs liturgical dance at special services. She's danced at her own church, St. Michael's, as well as others for ecumenical and interfaith events such as Church Women United World Day of Prayer. Privately she was doing liturgical dance long before it became more popular after the Second Vatican Council, she said.

"My mom said I danced before I could walk," she quipped. Always quite flexible, she'd show off when doing splits, or even when opening the gate for the cows on the family farm near Tyrone.

"I'd get a running leap, grab the top bar and throw myself over," she said.

Her family instilled a love of God when she was young. When her father came in at night, he'd sit in a rocker by the wood stove and the children would huddle around him to say their prayers — in Polish, she noted. Both parents were raised in Poland.

"Prayer time," he'd say, she recalled. "That was the way we were raised."

Her life revolves around church, she ac-

knowledged. "Absolutely," she said. "Every bit, because I am so tuned in to how the Lord suffered for ills of the world. Sometimes I feel his burden in a way. Like St. Teresa said, sometimes we can bless him more by the little things we do for his glory."

She starts each morning by kissing the feet of Jesus on a crucifix on her wall. On Mondays she's in church usually three times — for early Mass, Bible study and the evening rosary. She has a 20-year perfect attendance record in the Nocturnal Adoration Society; in October she was assigned to the 3-4 a.m. shift at St. Michael's, driving herself in to read Scripture aloud and pray with two other society members.

"We expose the monstrance the whole night; we don't leave it alone," she said.

After daily Mass she and about 14 others known as the Son Rise group meet at McDonald's, to socialize.

"I think the sharing we do at the breakfast group is one of the most fulfilling for our group," she said. "It just bloomed and bloomed. I think in fact that's where Martha's Ministry was born."

Martha's Ministry, of which Parshall is a member, serves receptions at the church for funerals. Also active in the community, Parshall served her usual 16 hours as a longtime poll inspector during this month's election. She even ran, unsuccessfully, for county legislator in 1981.

In addition, she helped start what became the Yates County Area Agency on Aging.

Whenever she sees a need or is asked to help out, she said, "I think, 'What if it will help somebody and do some good.' ...It snowballs."

So, however, do health concerns. In addition to degenerative arthritis, a bad eye and lung problems, she had a total knee replacement and also a triple heart bypass operation a couple of years ago.

"I thought I'd be in a wheelchair, but I was dancing again," she said. "I run up and down the stairs like I did when I was 50." Looking upward, she added, "Thank you Jesus."

Parshall was widowed in 1973 when her husband Elmer ("Putt"), who called her "Sunny," died while away on business as an engineer for the state. She remembered when he left, he seemed to have a foreboding, and had signed her up for real estate classes.

"I followed through," she said, adding that she thereupon sold real estate for several years.

She laughed recalling one of their first dates. When the music started Elmer turned to her and asked, "Can you dance?"

After they married she taught dance at home while raising their children. One of



Greg Francis/Staff photographer
Loretta Parshall performs a liturgical dance at an ecumenical World Community Day sponsored by Church Women United, at St. Michael's Church, Penn Yan, Nov. 6.



diocese. "He's the right man in the right place at the right time," she said, and was greeted with a round of applause.

"She's a mover and a shaker around here," said Father Peter Deckman, St. Michael's co-administrator. "She's a lovely, inspiring lady."

At the same time, he said, "She's sort of like a very quiet person." She's behind many a flower arrangement that appears unannounced around the altar, he said. "All of a sudden it's there and nobody knows who did it — that's Loretta."

Parshall, who's hosted groups at her backyard shrine to Mary, is a lector, eucharistic minister, lay presider for Communion services, member of the Parish Coordinating Committee, and a longtime member of the Catholic Daughters, currently presiding over St. Michael's Court 1173.

Marian E. Love of Clifton Springs, a fellow Catholic Daughter, said Parshall's "vigorous love of our church and God's people" is inspiring to

the couple's eight children died in infancy, and the others are now scattered from Ohio to Vermont. One son, Paul, took Parshall to visit her parent's homeland of Poland this summer for the first time.

After returning from the trip, Parshall helped prepare the Catholic Daughters of America priests appreciation dinner, held Oct. 4 at the church.

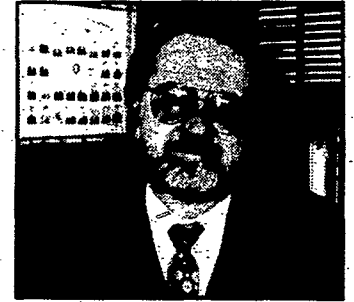
Presenting a toast at the priests' appreciation dinner, Parshall welcomed Bishop Matthew H. Clark by proclaiming her support for his work amid tense times in the

others. "She is just a stalwart of the parish," she said. "She is sweet — she is gracious — and we all love her," she told the *Catholic Courier*. "This dear friend deserves a special place in heaven, but we want to keep her here with us as long as God wills."

Other than planning to drive until she's 90, and hoping to visit her family more often, Parshall said she's open to whatever God sends her way.

"Whatever he's got planned for me is fine with me," she said.

Thoughts to Consider



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