

Trip offers time to ponder future of religious

I continue some reflections on my recent visit to South America to visit our Sisters who are in missions there. Last week I wrote of my experience with our Sisters of Mercy in Chile. This week I offer some comments about our days with our Sisters of Saint Joseph in Brazil.

It was a joy to join in the celebration of Sister Marie Jose's profession as a Sister of Saint Joseph. The liturgy took place in the parish church of her hometown, Cachoeira Alta on the Feast of Saint Sebastian. Maria Jose was radiant with happiness. Her family and the townsfolk supported her with affection and provided a festive supper after the ceremony.

Maria Jose joins Nega and Joana as professed Brazilian Sisters of Saint Joseph. Sandra and Bete live in the community with the sisters now and are thinking seriously about working toward permanent membership in the congregation.

I asked these young women why they chose to relate to a congregation of women who were based in Rochester, N.Y. They replied that they admire both the simplicity of the Sisters' lives and the manner in which they relate to the people among whom they serve. I understand their admiration on both counts and I share it. I also admire the courage of these young women who, in my opinion, are blazing some new trails in consecrated religious life. I wondered often while in their presence how the next 30 years will continue to shape and mold them.

During our stay in Brazil we spent time with 13 women (including Bete and Sandra) who live the life of a Sister of Saint Joseph. Four of them are Brazilian women and they are the four youngest of the 13. I wonder what those numbers will look like at the end of those same 30 years.

Katherine Popowich is the veteran member of the group in Brazil. I think she has been there for 35 years. She has seen a lot of life there and has done much good for many people. The years may have slowed her gait, but they have not diminished her passion for the good of the people. Just now Katherine commits herself to better health care for the poor of Goiania. In pursuit of that goal she serves as a community representative on the municipal health commission.

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

Our Sisters work in Goiania, Itaguacu, Cachoeira Alta, Paranaiguara and San Felix, Mato Grosso. But they all gathered for Maria Jose's profession and they stayed on in Paranaiguara for three days of meetings. They told me that they were going to reflect on their life and ministry since last they met, make some changes in some community assignments and elect a new leadership team to a three-year-term.

I did not participate in that agenda but did enjoy very much an hour-and-a-half session with them on the first morning of their meeting. They had asked me to update them on what's happening in the diocese these days. I enjoyed that opportunity because it allowed me the opportunity to tell the sisters about the great things you are doing. It was also a pleasure to be reminded of their continuing interest in the life of our local church, and to respond as best I could to their questions about it.

It has been a delight to share this experience with my niece, Grace Early. Grace has never been in this part of the world before. It was pleasure to note her excitement about it all, to hear her questions and observe her ability to respond with lively interest to the many places we visited and the numerous people we met. I have always enjoyed these opportunities to spend time with our sisters in South America. Grace brought a new dimension to it all by the enthusiasm she showed all through our travels.

For years, the Sisters of Saint Joseph have worked very closely with priests from the Irish province of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. I have met a number of those good friends over the years and have come to

respect them a great deal for their zeal, their commitment to one another and to the people. In the pastoral patterns of the region, they typically serve several communities, moving from place to place as best they can in service of the people. They refer in their conversations not to how many priests serve in the parish but to how many parishes does the priest serve.

I was particularly interested in the theme in light of discussions our presbyterate has been having for the past few years. It is no secret that, for reasons that are quite understandable, a fair number of our priests would not welcome a regular ministry to several communities at one time. This is not for want of generosity. Rather, their misgivings are born of a fear that they would have no roots in any community and could be seen as ones who comes for the sacraments but, aside from such celebrations, have little relationship with the people. I take encouragement in this regard from the positive experience of our Oblate friends as I do from several of our diocesan priests who serve multiple communities now and find the experience to be quite a positive one.

As I think and write about these days with our Sisters in Chile and Brazil, I am very much aware that both the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of Saint Joseph are growing older and fewer in number. If the current trends continue, it will not be too long before both of our Rochester-based congregations will have only a few professed members. Given the incredible past and present contributions both groups have made to the life of our church, such a continuing trend would be a serious loss to all of us. I know that consecrated religious life has many forms and that it has evolved a great deal over time. I am not afraid of change or of the challenge and opportunities it can offer, nor are our women religious. What I am concerned about is whether we are adequately presenting religious life to young people as a beautiful and rewarding vocation.

I am grateful to all of the sisters for their generous ministry which enriches the local churches in which they serve and our own. I thank them as well for the gracious hospitality they extended to Grace and me. I ask all of you to please to pray for them and the beautiful people among whom they serve.

Peace to all.

The Monthly Prayer Request For Priests

Will you pray for a priest each day?

FOR HOLY CHURCH AND 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. I ask You, Jesus, for a special blessing and for light for the priests before whom I will make my confessions throughout my lifetime. Amen.

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

February, 1999

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Revs. Frederick Brinkman, CSSR	2 Michael F. Conboy	3 Thomas F. McManus, SJ	4 Francis J. McNamara, SJ	5 Robert C. McNamara	6 Bishop Matthew H. Clark
7 Pope John Paul II	8 Inactive Priests	9 Dr. Neil R. Miller	10 Charles L. Mockevicius	11 Robert Moore, OCSO	12 Jeremiah P. Moynihan	13 Kip F. Corriveau
14 Brian Murphy, O. Carm.	15 Lawrence V. Murphy	16 Richard C. O'Connell	17 Edward Ondrako, OFM Conv.	18 Robert F. O'Neill	19 Richard J. Orlando	20 Walter Plominski
21 Richard M. Quinn, Msgr.	22 Leo J. Reinhardt	23 John E. Roach	24 William M. Roche, Msgr.	25 Paul J. Ryan	26 Thomas H. Watts	27 Vocations
28 Seminarians	Look for the March MPRP Calendar in the February 25th Courier.					

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