

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Nazareth studies deepen SSJ's Brazil commitment

By Kathleen Schwar  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — When the Sisters of St. Joseph began considering an exchange between Rochester and Brazil of members of their congregation several years ago, Brazilian Sister Joana Mendes was interested — but not merely to visit.

"I said I didn't want to go there just to visit, see people and not be able to communicate," she said. She was interested only if she could stay for an extended time, learn the English language and pursue a religious studies degree.

After four years in Rochester — and earning a bachelor's degree from Nazareth College — she is ready to return to Brazil July 23.

"There are great needs there," she said of her homeland. "I am very excited to go back and give some of what I received here."

Sister Mendes, 34, the youngest Sister of St. Joseph of Rochester, is the only Brazilian sister the community has brought to Rochester thus far. She entered the congregation in 1984 as one of the first two native Brazilians to join the SSJs of Rochester. Of the 12 SSJ-Rochester sisters now serving in Brazil, four are native Brazilians.

Sister Mendes said her stay here was a means to help broaden horizons.

"The world has changed so much, we can't just see ourselves as South America or North America, or Brazil or the United States," she said. "We have to have a more global perspective of the world we want to serve."

One of the challenges of serving in

Brazil is that the Brazilian church is facing a far more severe priest shortage than the church in the United States, Sister Mendes noted.

As of 1995, in Brazil there were 15,500 diocesan and religious-order priests for 135 million Catholics. In comparison, the United States had 47,000 priests for 58 million Catholics.

Because of the shortage, she has been granted permission by her bishop in Brazil to officiate at weddings, perform baptisms and conduct funerals.

"We had to do that. There was no one else to do it," she said, adding, "There is never Mass every Sunday there."

She worked in the Prelazia (a "junior" diocese under formation) of Sao Felix do Araguaia, in the state of Mato Grosso, where there were only nine priests, some of them serving communities hundreds of miles apart.

Beyond learning about her homeland, she reported, what intrigued Sister Mendes' fellow Sisters of St. Joseph in Rochester was why she was so intent on earning her religious studies degree in this country.

The answers were several. She fell in love with Nazareth College, which her order founded and where she could combine religious studies with liberal arts, and where liberation theology studies consider not only the poor in general but focus on black, women, and gay and lesbian issues. Also, in Brazil her studies could have taken twice as long, because of student and faculty strikes mostly related to economic concerns.

Most of all, she emphasized, education empowers her.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Sister Joana Mendes, SSJ, packs pictures, her Nazareth College diploma and posters she has collected over her four-year stay in Rochester at her Peck Street residence July 8. She leaves for her native Brazil July 23.

"In Brazil, a solid education is seen as subversive because educated people challenge a society structured upon a flawed democracy, filled with corruption and paternalistic behavior, a system that destroys the lives of so many innocent people, exposing them to starvation, disease and violence," she wrote in a parting message for the next congregational newsletter.

Having specifically studied the oppression of people other than the poor, she said, "only makes stronger my commitment to work for liberation of the person as a whole."

And thanks to her experience here, she can tell her fellow Brazilians that the United States is more than the consumer society some consider it to be.

"People are suffering here too, there is poverty, there are great needs and people

really give their lives to serve," she said.

People in both countries have the desire for social change, she noted.

Once she returns to Brazil, Sister Mendes plans to work briefly in missions in Sao Felix do Araguaia, where she had been a pastoral associate. She also will coordinate an upcoming 10-day visit to the state of Goias of Nazareth, St. John Fisher, Keuka College and Colgate Rochester Divinity School students who plan to shadow the sisters. And she hopes to pursue a graduate degree in theology.

Sister Mendes is looking forward to seeing her family, whom she has missed.

And it will be the people of Rochester that she will miss most from her four-year stay.

"I get attached to people very easily," she said.

### 69TH ANNUAL SOLEMN NOVENA TO SAINT ANNE

1999 Theme: Contemplative Prayer: 14th Century Wisdom for Today  
Guest Preacher: Father Patrick Eastman

Nine Days of Prayers, at 7:30 pm  
Vespers, Sermon, Novena Prayers

Saturday, July 17	<b>Setting the Scene</b> <i>Jeremiah 1:1-10a</i>
Sunday, July 18	<b>Why We Pray</b> <i>Psalms 166:1-2, 12-14, 17-19</i>
Monday, July 19	<b>Fastened on God</b> <i>Psalms 8:1-9</i>
Tuesday, July 20	<b>God's Enduring Love</b> <i>1 John 3:1-2</i>
Wednesday, July 21	<b>God is our Mother</b> <i>Isaiah 66:10-13</i>
Thursday, July 22	<b>We are God's Work of Art</b> <i>Ephesians 2:4-10</i>
Friday, July 23	<b>Nothing can Separate Us from God</b> <i>Romans 8:35-39</i>
Saturday, July 24	<b>Trusting Hope</b> <i>Matthew 6:25-34</i>
Sunday, July 25	<b>All Shall be Well</b> <i>Revelation 21:1-7</i>
Monday, July 26	<b>Feast of Saints Anne &amp; Joachim, at 7:30 PM</b> Solemn Celebration of the Eucharist



For the Novena Days  
Organist: Brink Bush  
Cantor: Colleen Liggett

For the Feast Day  
Choirmaster: Daniel Brondel  
Choir of Saint Anne Church



The Reverend Patrick Eastman was ordained a priest for the Catholic Diocese of Tulsa, Oklahoma in August 1984. Born in South-West England in 1937, Father Patrick served as priest of the Church of England from 1969 to 1983, when he and his wife, Maureen, were received into the Roman Catholic Church. Father Patrick holds Masters degrees in Theology from Oxford; Philosophy and Psychology from Sunderland, England; and Monastic Studies and Spirituality from St. John University in Collegeville, Minnesota. He has been a Benedictine Oblate since 1963. He is the founding editor of *Monos* and the Spiritual Leader of *The Monos Community*. His interests include Thomas Merton and Bede Griffiths, together with the study and practice of contemplative spirituality, Zen and the recovery of the Christian Wisdom Tradition.

#### SAINT ANNE CHURCH

1600 Mt. Hope Avenue Rochester, NY 14620-4598

The Church building is air-conditioned, wheel-chair accessible, and looped for the hearing impaired.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER AND  
PARISH SUPPORT MINISTRIES PRESENT

## Leadership Days

August 17-19

N.Y.S. CHIROPRACTIC COLLEGE SENECA FALLS, NY

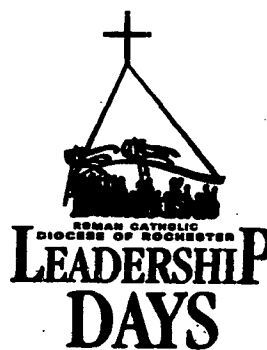
"The Many Facets of the Church  
As a Reconciling Agent"

FEATURING

Bishop Matthew H. Clark, Bishop of Rochester  
Rev. Robert Kennedy, Assistant Professor of Liturgical Studies and  
Coordinator of Student Formation at St. Bernard's Institute;  
editor of *Reconciling Embrace: Foundations for the  
Future of Sacramental Reconciliation*.  
Rev. Richard Fragomeni, Associate Professor of Liturgy and  
Homiletics, and Chairperson of the Department of Word and  
Worship at Chicago Theological Union.

#### HIGHLIGHTS:

- Over 50 workshops offered and a variety of vendor displays
- Overnight accommodations are available on campus
- Affordable registration and accommodations
- Air-conditioned classrooms and accommodations!



For more information or to register for Leadership Days, please contact Parish Support Ministries at (716) 328-3228 or (800) 368-7177, ext. 328 or email weinzler@dor.org by August 2.