

DIOCESAN NEWS

Mass celebrates Daughters' hospital service

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant Editor

ROCHESTER — The March 5 Mass of Thanksgiving for the Daughters of Charity was like a graduation, a funeral or a wedding, noted Sister Louise Gallahue, provincial of the Daughters' Northeast Province. Though a celebration, it was tinged with sadness and a sense of ending, she said.

The Daughters are leaving after providing 142 years of health care in Rochester, having started St. Mary's Hospital before the Civil War. Ascension Health, the organization that now includes the Daughters of Charity Health System, announced Dec. 1 it was cutting ties with Unity Health System, which comprises St. Mary's and Park Ridge hospitals.

St. Monica's Church was packed with more than 400 former and current staff members of St. Mary's Hospital and Unity, volunteers, women religious, priests, deacons and laypeople. Some 30 to 40 Daughters of Charity, most from outside Rochester and dressed in navy blue suits, represented their order.

"St. Mary's Hospital — Changing to Serve You Better," read a poster on a pillar in the back of the church. The poster advertised the hospital's walk-in care center.

Before the Mass, Sister Marie Burns, DC, outgoing Unity chairwoman, and other sisters had discussed how they would deal with the occasion. The consensus, she said, was that "we are happy to celebrate the history. We will keep as our focus the accomplishments of 150 years."

After the two-hour Mass, Sister Burns said, "I got through it pretty well, except for the bishop — he tore me up a bit."

Bishop Matthew H. Clark's homily brought tears to her eyes and others'. The bishop spoke of how the sisters lived out their motto, "The love of Christ impels us," and the virtues of humility, simplicity and charity.

"Sisters, I hope you can perceive in this assembly today ... that your departure from us is no easy thing," Bishop Clark said. "That we love you very much and hold in our hearts the deepest gratitude for more than a century and a half of service, for your witness, your generosity, for your clarity of why you do the work you do, why you are among the people you are among. Please know that you leave with our deep gratitude."

Noting the mixed emotions of many, he said, "We don't expect you to gather and integrate this all at once. It is going to take a while for you and us. But Sabbath time is so important, that we might do that."

"I think we were all very moved. This has



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Sister Mary Madeleine Drennan, DC, left, and Audrey Newell, a St. Mary's Hospital employee, wait to take part in a processional for the Daughters of Charity Thanksgiving Mass on March 5 at St. Monica's Church, Rochester.

been a challenging time for all of us," said Sister Betsy MacKinnon, DC, Unity's outgoing vice president of mission services. "We all need to learn to take Sabbath time."

Meanwhile, Sister Burns has been moving her colleagues to new missions, explained Sister Mary Madeleine Drennan, DC, who herself was to leave her volunteer clinic work March 8 for a post in Bridgeport, Conn. The last few Daughters were expected to leave by March 25.

"We call her 'Sister Servant,'" Sister Drennan said of Sister Burns. "She rented a Chevy Blazer from Enterprise for a month and has been taking people to new missions."

Sister Arthur Marie Donnelly, DC, former pastoral care worker, moved to Pottsville, Penn., but returned for the Mass. "I'm trying to be positive, thanking God for allowing us to be here," she said.

Connie Coots had worked with the Daughters for six years, and currently is administrative assistant to Unity's medical director, Dr. Joseph Salipante. She said she will miss Sister Burns telling her to "be good" when she hangs up the phone after talking with her.

"I'm Catholic," she added. "It will be difficult not to see 'the blues' walking around."

Coots added that she has confidence in the hospital system's future. "I think it has very strong leadership," she said.

Dr. Salipante noted that the Mass was a good chance not only for people to get to-

gether and bid the sisters farewell, but also to realize the hospital's work continues.

"The message is we are still here," he said.

The system has laid off about 20 of its 60 physicians and closed satellites for economic reasons, but the hospital is becoming more of a community center again, the doctor said. He noted that various practices are planning to move into the Bishop Kearney building on St. Mary's campus.

The doctor had worked with the sisters for more than 20 years. "They taught us how to care for people, to value human life," he said. "We won't forget them and will continue their good work."

"It is very humbling to know about the importance the Daughters have had all

these years," Sister Gallahue noted after the Mass. "It speaks to me of the continuity of a community in an area in a particular time."

Acknowledging speculation about whether Unity will carry on Catholic principles, she said, "There's no board of an organization that would (guarantee) our philosophy and values would continue in the institution. As members of the board change and new individuals come on, the commitment to those values could change. They can't bind the next board."

She added that she did not expect any immediate change at Unity, "but it could happen as the board changes."

Timothy McCormick, Unity's president, said the health system was committed to disallowing abortions, and that Unity is the "only pro-life environment" in the Rochester hospital community. Physician assisted suicide also is banned at Unity, but sterilizations continue at Park Ridge.

Noting that Unity had been in discussion with ViaHealth about possible affiliations, however, Sister Gallahue noted, "If the only route to their continuing is to join a larger system, and both of those larger systems (in the Rochester community) are inconsistent with our values, we cannot be a part of Unity. That's why Ascension Health, which is our sponsoring organization, withdrew from partnership with Unity."

Meanwhile, the Daughters had been pouring money into the health system "without a turnaround," she added.

"I am not naive in regard to the environment in health care today," she said to the congregation. "We leave in hope that Unity Health System can be positioned in a competitive arena, to, if necessary, join with others to continue quality health services to the people of Rochester with a special focus on those who are poor."

Obituary

Father Holberton, chaplain

Father William Holberton, a longtime chaplain in the Rochester Diocese, died March 6, 2000, at St. Luke's Hospital in Bethlehem, Pa. He was 78.

Father Holberton was born in Hackensack, N.J. He graduated from Lehigh University with a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1943. He attended St. Bernard's Seminary and was ordained by Bishop Lawrence B. Casey — at the age of 30 — on May 27, 1961, at St. Mary's Church in Corning.

"We all used to kid him because he was quite a bit older than us," remarked Father Richard Brickler, pastor of Rochester's St. Boniface Church, who was in Father Holberton's ordination class.

Father Holberton served as assistant pastor at St. Anne Church in Rochester from 1961 to 1963. He then spent 18 years as chaplain at Strong Memorial Hospital.

"He covered (his chaplaincy) very thoroughly. He was very precise, exact and organized, and also very friendly," said Father Brickler, noting that Father Holberton had

been an accountant at Corning Inc. and was a convert to the Catholic faith.

After taking two years' leave to care for his ailing parents, Father Holberton spent one year (1983-84) as chaplain at the Sisters of Mercy motherhouse. He then logged six years (1984-90) on the chaplaincy staff at Bishop Kearney High School before retiring in 1990. He then moved to Bethlehem, where he assisted in campus ministry at Lehigh University and also helped out at area parishes. A World War II Army veteran and Civil War buff, he earned a master's degree in history from Lehigh in 1993.

Father Holberton's funeral Mass was celebrated March 9 at Holy Ghost Church in Bethlehem. Interment was at Hackensack Cemetery in New Jersey.

Father Holberton is survived by a brother, Thomas Holberton II; nephew, Thomas Holberton III; and niece, Susan Alex.

Donations in his name may be made to the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, Griffin Road, PO Box 196, Elmhurst, PA 18416.

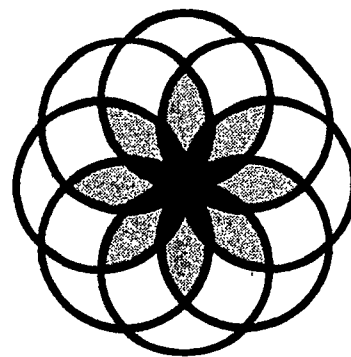
—Mike Latona

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