

Sisters of Mercy celebrate Mercy Day

Last Saturday I had the happiness of celebrating Mercy Day with the Sisters of Mercy of the Rochester Regional Community and their Associates, of whom I am an honorary member.

Mercy Day is the annual celebration in which our sisters commemorate both the feast of Our Lady of Mercy and the day in 1827, September 24, when Catherine McAuley — the beloved founder of the Sisters of Mercy — opened the first House of Mercy in Dublin, Ireland.

That house, devoted to sheltering homeless women and girls, visiting the sick and the poor, and educating poor girls, became in 1831 the first convent of the Sisters of Mercy. From that beginning has flowed a long and generous history. Today there are about 15,000 Sisters of Mercy doing works of mercy throughout the world.

On this festive occasion the local congregation also honored 15 sisters who have given 75, 60 or 50 years of service as Sisters of Mercy. Together they have served the people of our diocese for 855 years.

Part of the grace of the day was the jubilarians' memories of those days when they taught 50 students in a classroom or cooked hundreds of meals for generations of kids at Camp Stella Maris.

I didn't get a chance to do so on Saturday, but one day I would like to ask Sister Mary Evangelist to tell me some of the stories of her 75 years in the congregation and, especially to reminisce about my predecessors with whom she has served. The years of her religious life embrace all of our diocese's bishops, except Bernard McQuaid who died in 1909.

Another wonderful memory of the day came at the end of the Eucharistic Liturgy. That was the commissioning of the sisters to their respective works of mercy. As the assembly invoked

along
the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

God's guidance in song, each sister came forward in an act of thoughtful obedience to receive in an embrace of the Leadership Team her appointed work for the coming year.

I wish you could have been with me to see the peace and joy on the face of each sister as she accepted her mission. I was especially moved by the radiance of the senior sisters as they came forward to assume the spiritual ministry of prayer for us and the whole church.

We had a relaxing, festive meal in the community dining room, at the end of which we were all invited to join in dancing to music provided by a friend of the community who is a disc jockey. I did not join in that part of the evening for two reasons: One was that I was a little tired by then and still needed to do some work to prepare for Sunday's schedule. The other was that no one ever called me Twinkle Toes on the dance floor and I was concerned that, after so many years away from it, I might expose dear friends to bodily injury!

Later on I learned that Catherine McAuley encouraged her sisters to "dance every evening." I love the spirit of that counsel, so much so that I decided that, if invited to dance another time, I would most certainly accept.

As I reflect on my experience of the day, I am struck by a couple of thoughts that bring me joy. One is that religious life as a particular way of following Jesus Christ within the church is very much alive and well in our midst. Another is the realization that all of the women religious who serve in apostolates in our diocese do, indeed, bring song and dance to our local church in the generous way in which they go about their daily work.

Cathy Solan is just beginning her candidacy as a Sister of Mercy. Cathy works in my office, and it has been a joy to follow her journey to this point in her life. I have not talked with her in any deep or detailed way about her vocation. I can only surmise that somehow a phrase in the Mercy Constitutions that always impresses me must also have touched her: "We, as Sisters of Mercy, freely responding to a call to serve the needy of our time, commit ourselves to follow Jesus Christ in his compassion for suffering people." There are comparable sentences in the constitutions of other congregations, expressing their particular charisms and missions. To me they all bespeak a way of life that is challenging, fulfilling and altogether rewarding.

One of my duties as bishop is to promote and encourage a flourishing of religious life. That task is made a joy when I see on a daily basis the inviting example and powerful Christian witness of our women and men religious. They are dear friends who try, as best they humanly can, to embody the compassion of Christ for all of us.

Let me invite you to say a word of thanks to these friends when you see them. Let me ask you further to pray that the men and women who carry in their hearts some attraction to religious life will prayerfully explore that possibility.

Peace to all.

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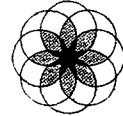


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