

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Sisters sing to support religious' retirement

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

Admittedly, a trip to Los Angeles the first week of June was a major draw. But two Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph say their trip had a significantly greater purpose than seeing the West Coast.

Sisters Eileen Conheady and Barbara Gulino, both second alts, blended their voices into those of an all-nun group known as Sisters in Song to produce "Sisters in Song Rejoice!"

Sisters in Song has sold 70,000 of its first two albums. Proceeds support retirement of men and women religious.

Released a few weeks ago, "Sisters in Song Rejoice!" is not a Christmas album, but is an inspirational production, Sister Gulino said.

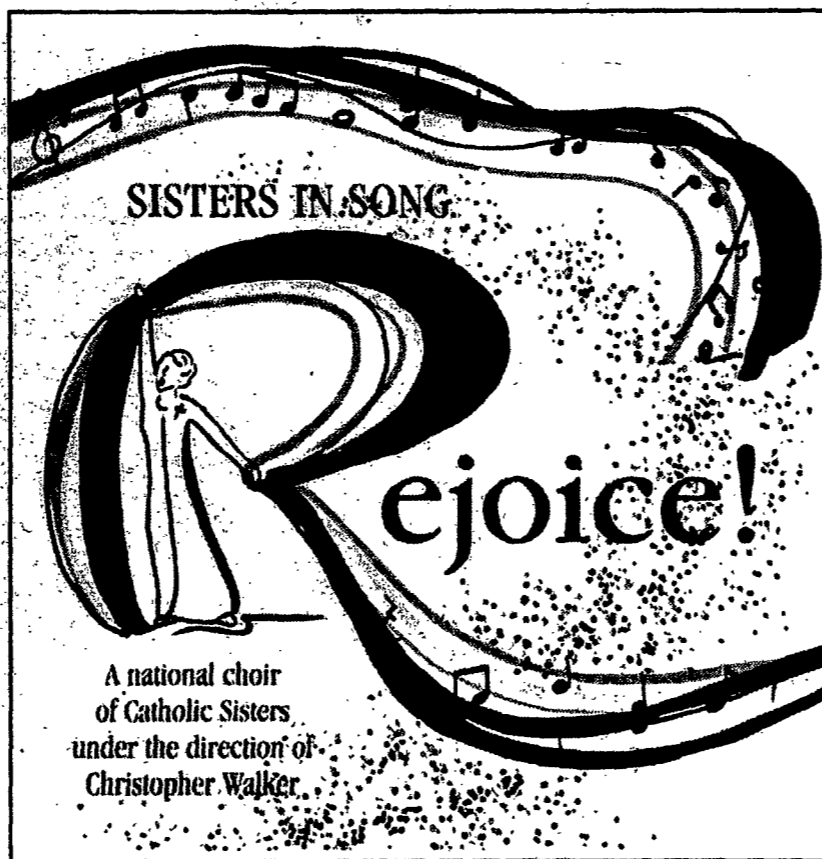
"They are very reflective, moving melodies," said Sister Gulino, a Unity Health System chaplain who works with nursing-home residents and chronic-care patients. "There is a lot of feeling in them."

Sister Theresa LaMetterey, a Sister of St. Joseph from Orange, Calif., was project director for the new album, for which 675 nuns auditioned. With the exception of 11 solos interspersed among the 15 songs, she said, "anytime you hear a choir singing you're hearing an 80-voice choir."

Sister Diane Branch, another Rochester Sister of St. Joseph, had sung for the previous two CDs, along with Sister Conheady, who works full-time in community outreach for Rochester's Holy Rosary Parish.

Noting that the proceeds support retired religious, Sister Conheady, 69, said, "It seems like a beautiful way to raise money for them, not for myself so much — you know how you never think you're old — but the retirement needs of other people. Some of those are in small communities without a retirement fund."

"What struck me was what can be accomplished when you have just one goal and put every bit of energy into that particular project," said Sister Gulino, 64. "We had to sign off the whole world in order to accomplish what we needed to accomplish."



Sisters in Song, a national choir of Catholic religious women, recently released their third collection of music. "Rejoice" includes a "Celtic Alleluia" and versions of the "Salve Regina" and "How Great Thou Art."

The first two Sisters in Song projects featured the voices of 60 nuns. But when Sister LaMetterey and Christopher Walker, the liturgical music composer who conducted the sessions, heard and reheard the audition tapes, they couldn't whittle the list to fewer than 85. Walker was a co-composer of the "Celtic Alleluia," Sister Conheady pointed out, which is on the album.

Thanks to donations from groups as varied as the Serra Club and the Sisters of St. Joseph Health System in southern California, 80 of the 85 invited sisters were able

to sing, Sister LaMetterey said. They ranged in age from 35 to 78, and came from 28 states and 58 religious orders.

The album was recorded in less than a week. "Sometimes we were up until 11 at night," Sister LaMetterey recalled.

Some of the sisters, including those from Rochester, were treated to trips to the Getty Museum and the vibrant Hispanic community centering on Olivera Street in Los Angeles. They also walked the boardwalk on Santa Monica beach.

Proceeds from the CD and cassette sales go to the National Religious Retirement Fund and Support Our Aging Religious, a nonprofit organization in the Washington suburb of Silver Spring, Md. Known by its acronym, SOAR, it assists religious orders in financial need. The first two albums garnered \$500,000.

Although the Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph do not profit directly from sales, they did, for instance, receive a \$20,000 grant in 1998 from SOAR for medical security equipment and for renovating space in their infirmary, according to Sister Janice Morgan, president. And from the National Religious Retirement Fund they have received \$25,000 toward retirement planning. The sisters have had their own fund and have participated in Social Security since the 1960s.

Still, Sister Morgan said, "We feel as though we can always look for more. The concern is we are not fully funded for our retirement."

"I would never say we are deprived of anything," Sister Gulino said. While the SSJs may not have the equipment, space or personnel of other retirement or nursing facilities, she said, "Our gift is our care, support and love of one another, which can be over and above what they need, in my mind."

EDITORS' NOTE: "Sisters in Song Rejoice!" is available for \$15.95 (CD) or \$10.95 (cassette) at Cornerstone Crafts, SSJ Motherhouse, 4095 East Ave., Rochester; and by calling Sister Gulino at 716/368-3268 or Oregon Catholic Press at (800) 548-8749. A Web site is set up at www.ocp.org and www.sistersinsong.org.

This article includes reporting by Catholic News Service.

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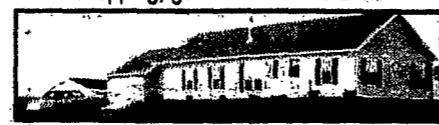


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Any questions regarding this event may be answered by contacting:

Linzi Burns, Legacy's Director

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