

DIOCESAN NEWS

Sisters of Mercy grieve nun's tragic auto death

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

The Rochester Sisters of Mercy are mourning the death of Sister Mary Maurice Pearson, who died after the car she was driving was struck by a pickup truck in Brighton.

Sister Maurice, 83, was pronounced dead at the scene of the 1:09 p.m. Jan. 17 accident. The driver of the pickup, Jason A. Maine, 19, of Macedon, was ticketed for passing a red light, and no further charges were expected, according to Brighton Police Capt. Bill Principe.

Sister Sheila Stevenson, president of the congregation, as well as three other leadership team sisters were called to the scene, on Browncroft Boulevard at the Route 590 North exit. Father William Spilly administered last rites.

Sister Pearson served as an educator for 51 years. Born Dorothy Mary Pearson in Rochester, she entered the Sisters of Mercy in 1935, received her habit in 1936 and professed her final vows Aug. 27, 1941.

She also served 11 years as business manager at Spirit House, a residential treatment center for women religious, retiring Dec. 15.

"This is what we needed — the presence of an older woman religious still in love with her God and life, who would model the truth that life just gets better the more one loves one's God and life, especially if it contains baseball," reflected Sister Mollie Brown, RSM, at a vigil service Jan. 21. Sister Brown is founder and former director of the nationally-known Spirit House in Irondequoit.

The baseball fan was buried with an autographed picture of former Los Angeles Dodgers Manager Tommy Lasorda, Sister Brown said. It had long been on Sister Maurice's wall. As a young nun, Sister Maurice was said to have started the baseball team at St. John the Evangelist School in Clyde.

"She never preached, she walked her talk," Sister Brown added. "And our sisters learned from her at coffee breaks, feast day parties and baseball seasons what *joie de vivre* was all about, the joy of life."

Sister Maurice had been principal at St. John's, Clyde, and St. Rita's, Webster. She



taught math at Cardinal Mooney High School from 1972 to 1989, when the school closed. She also taught at St. John the Evangelist, Holy Cross, St. Andrew's, and St. Thomas the Apostle, Rochester; St. John the Evangelist, Clyde; and Our Lady of Mercy Elementary, Greece. She also was author of a college-accepted math curriculum for career program students.

In her 60th jubilee year in 1996, she stated for the *Catholic Courier*, "Students at every level present their unique challenges; meeting those challenges provides an excitement of its own. Over 50 years

in the classroom didn't diminish that. If I had to do over again, I would not change a thing."

Sister Sheila Stevenson, president of the Rochester Sisters of Mercy, said Sister Maurice had "a wonderful concept of lifelong ministry."

She also said the community had been praying for Maine. "My own personal feelings and those of our community, especially Sister Eugene (Sister Maurice's sister), are that there are two victims in this accident and it was in fact an accident," she said. "Sister Maurice lived a long and full life, and would want no less for that young man, but to live a long and full life and not to be held back because of this accident. ... We want him to be blessed in his life as he goes forward."

She also noted, "I can't say enough about the Brighton Police Department, the fire department and the medical examiner. They were all so compassionate

and caring at the scene of accident. We are very, very grateful."

She noted that Captain Principe's mother and sisters had all gone to Mercy High School, "so he was very in tune with the Sisters of Mercy. It was a nice linkage to have at that moment."

Father William Donnelly, a former student of Sister Maurice's, celebrated her funeral Mass Jan. 22. Interment was in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Sister Maurice was predeceased by her sister, Sister Mary Joachim, RSM; brother, Thomas Pearson; and niece, Eileen Hill. She is survived by Sister Mary Eugene, RSM; nieces and nephews, Jeanne (Larry) Alexander, Michelle (Joseph) Benjamin and George Pearson; grandnieces and nephews; and the Sisters of Mercy.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse, 1437 Blossom Road, Rochester, NY 14610.



Activists decry school

Art Smith joins other protesters, including numerous Catholic activists, at State and Main streets in Rochester Jan. 17, against the former School of the Americas, a U.S. Army school whose graduates have been linked to human rights abuses. The school recently changed its name to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Religion, labor advocates praise 'living wage' law

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

A campaign supported by Rochester-area labor and religion activists gained its first major victory when the Rochester City Council unanimously passed a "living wage" law Jan. 15.

Activists now say they will press the city's school board and the Monroe County Legislature to pass similar laws.

The new law requires service contractors with the city to pay employees at least \$8.52 per hour with health benefits, or \$9.52 per hour without benefits. The law will apply to businesses and organizations with service contracts with the city of \$50,000 or more, and will affect more than 120 contractors receiving about \$24 million in city funds.

However, businesses that receive such government-funded economic incentives as loans and grants to do business in Rochester may be exempted until a similar law is passed by the county legislature.

Brian F. Curran, the Democratic city council member who sponsored the bill, said the bill will affect less than 10 percent of the city's budget. He added that many service contractors, who handle everything from parking lot maintenance

to graffiti removal for the city, already pay living wages. However, he said, the new law sets a good example for other employers in the city, particularly not-for-profit agencies that have already reviewed or may review their employees' pay scales. It also brings the city more in line with other parts of the country where employers are raising wages to attract workers in a tight labor market, he said.

The idea behind the new law is to ensure that an employee makes at least as much as someone from a family of four making \$17,050 a year, the federal government's poverty line. The idea of a living wage has roots in the Catholic Church's social justice tradition that calls for workers to receive enough pay to live a life free of poverty.

Supporters of the new law included the Rochester Labor-Religion Coalition, an umbrella group of religious and labor organizations. The coalition's co-chairman, Marvin Mich, is director of social policy and research at Catholic Family Center of Rochester, and the coalition is affiliated with the New York State Labor-Religion Coalition, co-chaired by Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany.

Mich noted that Rochester joins about 50 other municipalities around the country that have passed similar legislation.

"My perspective is that it's a good start," he said. "I think it's important to celebrate this accomplishment."

However, he noted that other living wage bills have been unsuccessful in the county legislature.

"Realistically, we know it's going to be hard sell to get the county legislature to pass it," he said.

Yet, Bill Benet, a Democratic member of the Republican-dominated legislature, and a supporter of the living wage measure, thinks that the legislation has a good shot in that body as long as it modeled on the bill that passed city council. He added that advocates of the bill must continue to work on building support for it among the area populace.

"I think it will be an uphill battle, but I think that what will ultimately make it successful is it's just such a right thing to do," Benet said.

Despite the fact that living wage legislation seems slanted toward labor, Mich added that businesses and organizations can also benefit from such laws because decent wages and benefits generally attract decent employees who are more loyal and less likely to quit.

"We think it's good for morale and good for human dignity," he said of the legislation.

Recognizing

* Katherine E. Keough, president of St. John Fisher College, Rochester, has been presented with the 15th annual Athena Award by the Women's Council of the Greater Rochester Metro Chamber of Commerce. The award recognizes a woman for her business accomplishments, contribution to the community and her commitment to the advancement of women. Keough has been Fisher's president since 1996, and has been credited for turning the financially ailing school around and increasing its enrollment.

* Among the 19 other nominees for the Athena Award was Sister Diana Dolce, SSJ, executive director and principal of Hope Hall, an independent, nontraditional school for students with learning difficulties. Sister Dolce founded the school in Gates in 1994.

* Gary Page, who coached Aquinas Institute's girls' soccer team to the Class B state championship last fall, has been named Coach of the Year for Private High Schools by the National Soccer Coaches Association of America and Adidas. The coach received the award in Indianapolis.