

FEATURE

Learning remains important to 100-year-old

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

ROCHESTER — On her 100th birthday, Feb. 27, Anna Roeger attended Mass at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse, where she later heard the congregation sing "Happy Birthday" to her. She joined them in singing "Holy God We Praise Thy Name," and it brought tears to her eyes.

Afterward, she went to lunch with two daughters, and granddaughters and great-grandchildren. The birthday mega-milestone celebration had begun Feb. 25 at The Heritage at St. Ann's Community, to which she had moved in December.

Mrs. Roeger came with her husband, William, a master electrician, to the United States from Germany in 1927. He died in 1986.

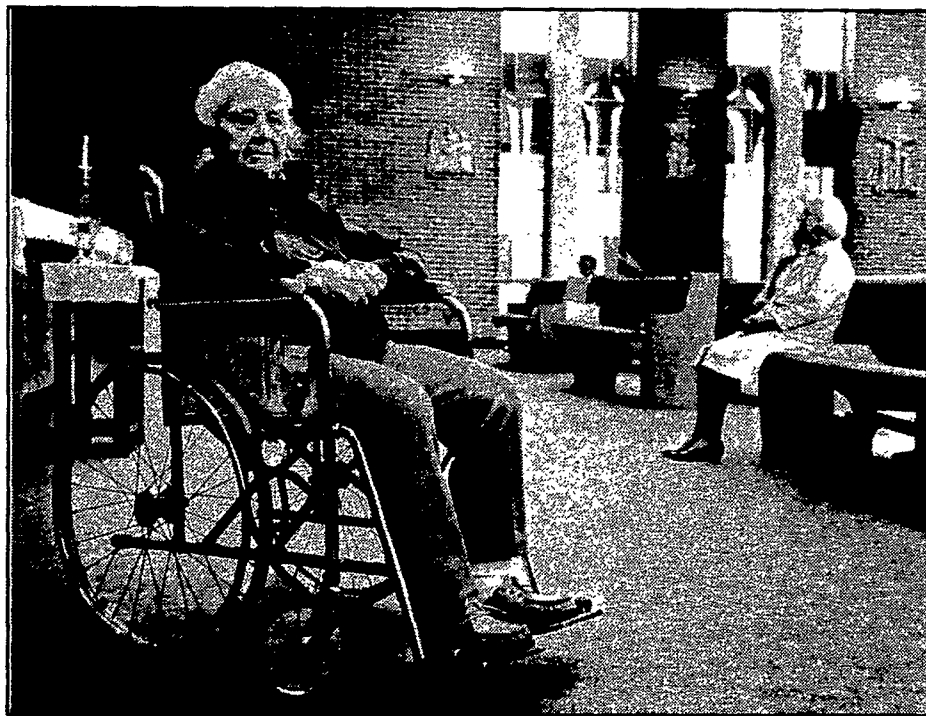
She recalled that she completed only seven years and four months of education in Germany until, during World War I, older children were sent to work in the fields for food for the troops.

"There was nothing we could do. We had nothing to say about that," Mrs. Roeger said. But she never stopped learning, or encouraging her four children to learn.

"She read the newspaper with a dictionary to look up any words she did not know. From the first to the last page every day. Always," said daughter Sister Marlena Roeger, SSJ, who recalled growing up in the family's Remington Street home.

"When we were kids, she encouraged us to read, all of us were avid readers. She read to us in German." In school when the teacher asked whether anyone did not know the story of Cinderella, Sister Roeger said she'd raise her hand, not realizing she knew it in German. So when the teacher asked questions about the story, she said, "I knew the answers."

"My children can all read and write German," Mrs. Roeger noted in her apartment, three days after her 100th birthday. "I'm very satisfied with them, because they turned out all right," she added.



David Wallace/Photo intern

Anna Roeger, a resident of St. Ann's Community in Rochester, celebrated her 100th birthday on Feb. 27.

She pointed out photographs of her family and the farm house in Germany where she was born, even the window of the room where she was born. On her couch, close at hand were her knitting patterns and reading material including a new German book written and signed by the author and friend, P. Gabriel Busch, OSB. She was three-quarters of the way through the book on Benedictine spirituality.

Mrs. Roeger had collaborated with him on a number of books. The theologian and historian grew up in the same region of Germany, near the Rhine. He included her memoirs in his work.

It was in Germany that Mrs. Roeger became familiar with the Catholic Kolping Society, founded in Cologne and dedicated to spiritual and educational development of young people. Her brother asked

her to act in a Kolping Society play because the society then was just for young men, and the play called for women.

"The Kolping Society did a lot of good," Mrs. Roeger said, noting she is still a member and keeps up with the newsletters. When the Roegers moved to Rochester they opened their home to young immigrants from Germany referred to them through the Kolping Society. The couple were founding members of the Kolping Society in Rochester.

"They wanted to preserve the German heritage they brought with us but wanted us to be American kids," Sister Roeger said. "This whole web of their friends used to do things with us, like theater."

The couple and their friends put on German plays in the old school hall of St. Michael's Church for the German-Ameri-

can community. All four children received their sacraments at St. Michael's and graduated from St. Michael's School.

Mrs. Roeger more recently has been a parishioner at St. Thomas More Parish in Brighton. On Feb. 25 Father Lee Chase, Sister Ellen Galvin, SSJ, pastoral associate, and Sue Morrison, secretary of St. Thomas, attended a surprise birthday party at the Heritage for Mrs. Roeger, and the parish prayed for her at weekend Masses.

"It was overwhelming," said Mrs. Roeger, who has since moved to St. Ann's Home. "I had no idea. They told me my grandchildren were there."

Mrs. Roeger today continues to knit for family, friends and charities. Sister Roeger recalled returning from 20 years in Brazil two years ago to be closer to home and work with migrants. She is assistant director of Hispanic Migrant Ministry for Orleans and Niagara Counties in the Buffalo Diocese. Her mother said she could only give her daughter half of the mittens she knitted, because she had been giving them to a Sister of Mercy for a different mission.

While Mrs. Roeger never spoke to her daughter about considering a religious profession, Sister Roeger said, "When I told her I wanted to be a sister — I am the youngest — she said that was fine, 'I'm not surprised.' I said you're not?"

"She said, 'No, because I always made the novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help so that one of our children would have a vocation to religious life, and you are the only one left.'" Daughter Kay Abel is married and lives in Lacona, N.Y., and Nokomis, Fla. Son William H., is married and lives in Webster. Another daughter, Ann, who died in October, was single and a nurse.

From the wisdom of her years, Mrs. Roeger easily offers words of advice.

"What else — make the best of everything," she said. "Do your duty, for God, your country and family. Help others as you can. And always open your home for people."

Programs shine light on women in the Bible

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

March is National Women's History Month, so it's fitting that recent efforts in the Rochester Diocese have promoted women in the Bible.

It's a necessary endeavor, according to Gloria Ulterino. She maintains that biblical women, such as Mary of Magdala, aren't acknowledged often or accurately enough.

"We find that people don't know the story, or they know about it incompletely or incorrectly. A lot of what people think they know about (Mary Magdalene) simply isn't true," said Ulterino, who appears at numerous diocesan parishes in her roles of preaching, writing and storytelling.

Although the Gospels note that Jesus cast several demons out of Mary Magdalene, "A lot of people think she's a prostitute or a sinful woman. That's nowhere in the Scripture, that was developed in tradition," Ulterino commented.

Ulterino also believes that the Samaritan woman who encounters Jesus at the well, as depicted in the Book of John, has been misrepresented.

"She is little remembered for being the first person in this Gospel to hear Jesus' revelation that he is the ancient 'I am.' She is the first evangelist of this Gospel, calling others as Jesus had earlier done,

'Come and see,'" Ulterino remarked. "In the past, there has been much more emphasis on her five husbands than her as a model of discipleship."

Ulterino discussed this passage, found in John 4, for an RCIA group March 14 at Auburn's Sacred Heart Church. Her presentation included a prayer she had composed to "bring out the different dimensions of what it means to be in search of living water," Ulterino said.

Ulterino also belongs to a seven-woman troupe, Women of the Well, whose latest production, "Mama's Mansion," was performed March 7 at St. Rita's Church in Webster. It features music and storytelling about such 20th-century women as the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, who formed to protest brutal killings of their children by Argentine military forces; and Gabrielle Bossis, a French mystic, actress and author.

Other Women of the Well members are Roni Antenucci, pastoral associate, Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Greece; Katie Allen and Mary McGuire, both parishioners at St. John the Evangelist on Humboldt, Rochester, where Ulterino is also a parishioner; Marilyn Catherine, parishioner, Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward, Rochester; Cindy Lazzaro, faith formation coordinator, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Hamlin; and Judith Stellpflug, parishioner, St. Joseph's, Rush.

Upcoming dates for "Mama's Mansion" are April 1, Fairport's Mountain Rise United Church of Christ, 10 a.m.; April 5, St. John the Evangelist (Humboldt), 7:30 p.m.; April 26, St. Mary's Church, Rochester, 1 p.m.; and May 20, St. Patrick's Church, Victor, 6 p.m.

Meanwhile, Sister Joan Cawley, SSJ, presented two workshops on "Women in Scripture" on March 7 and 14 in the Corning-Painted Post Roman Catholic Community, where she serves as pastoral administrator. The lectures were part of a Lenten series given by staff members from the cluster.

Sister Cawley expanded the stories of four women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew 1: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. They are the few women listed among numerous men in that chapter — and in verse 6, Bathsheba is not even mentioned by name: "David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah."

"I think it's important to know that Jesus has a history. But there's little written about it," Sister Cawley commented.

Sister Cawley added that these women are often portrayed as being sinful while positive details are downplayed, reflecting the societal bias of the times the stories were written.

Sister Chris Treichel, OSF, also seeks to give women of the Bible a fair shake. "Many of them aren't named, unfortunately, such as the woman who hemorrhaged (and was healed by Jesus) and the woman caught in adultery (who is condemned by the scribes and Pharisees but not by Jesus)," remarked Sister Treichel, who serves as first-year pastoral associate at Sacred Heart in Auburn.

Sister Treichel co-founded a woman's spirituality program, "Women of Hope," while she was pastoral associate at St. John's on Humboldt Street, Rochester. She said she hopes to start a similar program at her Auburn parish.

Recognizing

★ **Msgr. Gerard C. Krieg**, senior priest at St. Louis Parish, Pittsford, received the "Friends Award" in January from the Salvation Army for his efforts to improve Geneva when he was pastor of St. Stephen's Parish there from 1984-99. A Rochester native, Msgr. Krieg was ordained in 1953.

★ **Sister Marie Bernard Kinsella, SSJ**, received the Phi Delta Kappa Theta Gamma Chapter International Award for Distinguished Service at a Jan. 24 dinner in Rochester. Beginning in 1930, Sister Kinsella worked in teaching and administration for the Diocese of Rochester's school system, later with the religious education program at St. Louis Parish, Pittsford. Sister Kinsella currently engages in prayer ministry for her order, the Sisters of St. Joseph. Phi Delta Kappa, an educational organization, honored the nun for her long-term service and her contributions to education.

★ **Stephen Denninger**, a sixth-grader at Our Mother of Sorrows School, Greece, won the diocesan-wide 2001 Catholic Schools' Week Invitational Spelling Bee, held annually at St. Boniface School, Rochester. Stephen competed Feb. 5 against 25 fifth- and sixth-graders from across the Diocese of Rochester. He won in the 16th round by spelling the word "greedily."