

## FEATURE

## Sisters of Mercy jubilarians devoted for 630 years

This year's 13 jubilarians of the Sisters of Mercy, Regional Community of Rochester, represent 630 years of service. These jubilarians, celebrating 60, 50 and 25 years, will be honored at the Mercy Day celebration at the Mercy Motherhouse, 1437 Blossom Road, Rochester, Sept. 22. The sisters also will remember deceased jubilarians Sisters Mary Mark Coleman, Mary Vianney Newman, Mary Baptist Nolan and Mary Loyola Taylor.

## 60 years

These sisters entered the Sisters of Mercy on Sept. 8, 1940, and professed final vows Aug. 24, 1946.



Sister Mary Bernard Butts, RSM, noted, "Ever since I was a small child at St. Andrew's School, I knew that I wanted to be a Sister of Mercy first, and a teacher next. I watched the great Mercy women there, and I knew that I wanted to be like them.

"The year that I celebrated my silver jubilee as a Sister of Mercy I happened upon the following quotation by Tagore: 'May the Risen Christ keep us young, that is: optimistic, smiling, active, perceptive!' That said it! That is what I wanted my life to show forth.

"I have never regretted a moment of these past 60 years. They have been full of grace, challenge, gift and discovery!"

Sister Mary Bernard has served in education, in Rochester, at: Our Lady of Mount Carmel (1943-44); St. Charles Borromeo (1944-45); St. Thomas the Apostle (1945-54); Holy Cross (1956-57); St. Andrew (1957-62); and St. James (1977-87); and in Elmira at St. Patrick (1954-56). She also served as administrator at St. Mary, Corning (1962-68) and Annunciation School (1968-77).

In the mid-1980s when women were flourishing in creative parish ministries, Sister Bernard served as family coordinator at St. Anthony Parish, Rochester (1988-91). In 1991 she joined the staff of Our Lady of Mercy High School, Brighton.



Sister Mary Robert Ringwood, RSM, is a native of Rochester.

"My life as a Sister of Mercy is a very simple one," she said. "First of all, to the Sisters of Mercy, I owe many thanks. They helped me pray a lot, laugh a lot, care a lot and love a lot. My mission has been the happiest trying to teach my students to respect, love and help one another, for everyone is a child of God. My constant daily prayer is that I may become the hands and feet of Christ while I am still ministering to the poor, the invalid, the sick and the helpless of this world."

A graduate of Our Lady of Good Counsel Elementary School and Our Lady of Mercy High School, Sister Mary Robert has devoted herself to elementary education. She received her AAS from Nazareth Normal School and her B.S. in education from St. Bonaventure University. She taught in the following Rochester schools: St. Andrew (1942-51); St. Thomas (1951-53); St. John, Humboldt (1953-55); St. James (1955-57); and St. Louis (1969-89). She also served as teacher and administrator at St. Michael, Newark (1957-63) and

taught at Holy Family, Auburn (1963-69). From 1990-95, Sister Robert served as a religious educator St. Jerome Parish, Ft. Lauderdale. Since 1995, she has been ministering as a volunteer at St. Maximilian Kolbe Church in Pembroke Pines, Fla.

Sister Mary Berchmans Ross, RSM, said, "It is difficult to express in words the deep meaning of such a precious and intimate gift as a religious vocation. It comes from a generous God. In a quiet and persistent manner, the 'call' beckons a soul to give his/her life to follow Christ in a special way."



One of her greatest inspirations has come from the Ignatian theme, "To know Christ more intimately, to love him more ardently, and to serve him more faithfully." While the same fervor of youth may wane, it develops into a

period of maturity that brings peace, she said.

One of her favorite hymns says, "One thing I ask, one thing I seek, to dwell in the House of the Lord all my days."

Born in Utica, Sister Mary Berchmans graduated from St. Salome School and Nazareth Academy, Rochester. She received a B.S. in secretarial science from Nazareth College and an M.S. in business education from Indiana University, Bloomington. Sister Mary served from 1943-52 on the teaching faculty at Our Lady of Mercy High School. From 1952-66 she was of office manager there. From 1966-71, she was office manager at St. James Mercy Hospital and since 1971 has both provided clerical support as well as service on the teaching faculty of Notre Dame High School, Elmira.

## 50 years

Sisters celebrating 50 years entered Sept. 8, 1950, and professed final vows Aug. 17, 1956.



Sister Kathleen Bayer, RSM, said, "The happiest moment of my life was when God revealed his great love for me. The second happiest was being called to be a Sister of Mercy. As a daughter of Catherine McAuley, I have served

God's people as a teacher of children, as a nurse's aide to the sick, as a chaplain to the hospitalized, and as a pastoral associate. I am grateful to God for his love and grace that have made these 50 years not only possible, but truly happy ones."

The ministry of Sister Kathleen, (formerly Sister Mary Benigna), embraces elementary and religious education, prayer, hospital chaplaincy and pastoral care in a parish setting. She received her training in clinical pastoral education at St. Raphael's Hospital, Connecticut, in 1977 and was awarded her certification with the National Association of Catholic Chaplains the following year. She has taught at the following schools: St. Thomas (1953-58); St. Rita (1958-60); St. Ann, Hornell (1960-61); St. Joseph, Penfield (1961-65); Annunciation (1965-68); Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (1968-71) and St. Salome (1972-76). Sister Kathleen served on the staff of the House of Prayer, Corning, in 1971. From 1978-1981 she ministered on the pastoral care

staff of St. Louis University Hospitals, and from 1981-1983 she joined the pastoral care staff at Rochester General Hospital. Sister Kathleen then became the pastoral associate at Ss. Peter and Paul Parish in Elmira in 1983. The parish clustered with St. Cecilia and St. John the Baptist parishes in 1990 and became Eastside Catholic Parish, where she continues to minister today.



Sister Phyllis M. Bernardo, RSM, said, "Being a Sister of Mercy for 50 years, for me, has been life-giving: life enriched with Mercy charisms of unity and charity and the Gospel goals of the Beatitudes; a life in the faith, with

my family, enhanced by the spirit of our institute, and sustained within the extended family of ministry with the black and Catholic community."

She spent 23 years in out-of-state ministry, in Alabama and Mississippi, "supported by the inspiration and dogged faith of Sister Concepta Walsh — my team partner and risk-taker.

"In my teens I was certain, 'The Lord will provide' and throughout the years, I have been guided by the Lord as counselor," she said, alluding to Psalm 16. "You will show me the paths of life."

Sister Phyllis (formerly Sister Mary Malachy) has served in a variety of educational, pastoral, social and prison ministries. She received a B.S. in education from Nazareth College and an M.S. in education with a concentration in behavioral science from SUNY Brockport. She taught at the following Rochester elementary schools: St. Cecilia (1953-55); St. Salome (1955-59); Our Lady of Mercy (1962-65); Holy Cross (1965-70); and St. Thomas the Apostle (1970-76). From 1959-62, she served as secretary at Catherine McAuley Junior College. From the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s Sister Phyllis was a volunteer at Joseph Avenue Center and began fieldwork in the Office of Black Catholic Ministry. In the late 1970s, Phyllis served as both volunteer and tutor at the Monroe County Jail, as well as a pastoral associate at St. Brigid Parish. In 1978 she served at the Edmundite Southern Missions in Alabama in social ministry and at the Selma and Camden prisons as a visitor. Since the early 1980s, she has ministered as a pastoral associate at St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church in Indianola, Miss., and in rural ministry in Humphreys and Sharkey counties. She also has served as a volunteer visitor in a Parchman, Miss. prison.



Sister Jacqueline DeMars, RSM, (Mary Champion) has focused on elementary and secondary education, and administration over this past half-century. A native of Auburn, she received her B.A. in English at Nazareth College and her M.S. in mathematics from the University of Notre Dame.

From 1954 through 1963, Sister Jacqueline taught at St. Thomas the Apostle School and Our Lady of Mount Carmel School where in 1960 she also became principal. Her ministry then moved to secondary education at Cardinal Mooney High School (1963-1968). She served as treasurer of the Rochester regional community of Sisters of Mercy from 1970-1974, and financial adviser from 1974, while also teaching at Our Lady of Mercy High School. She has also served at the high school as scheduler, director of academics and financial manager, while continuing to teach mathematics.



Sister Gertrude Erb, RSM, said, "Little did I realize God's plan for me when I was received into the Sisters of Mercy. As I reflect on my life as a Sister of Mercy, I can truly say that God's words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah have come true: 'I know well the plans that I have in mind for you, says the Lord ... plans to give you a future full of hope.' (Jer.29:11) So it has been, and it is with much peace and joy that I celebrate the past 50 years of challenge, opportunity and surprise. For these years I am grateful to God and to all who have been companions on the journey with me."

The ministry of Sister Gertrude, (formerly Sister Mary Gerard), has embraced multiple fields in elementary and secondary education and pastoral ministry. Sister Gertrude received her B.A. in history from Nazareth College and her M.A. in the teaching of mathematics from Villanova University. She has also pursued additional theological studies at Boston College and St. Bernard's Institute.

She has taught at the following elementary schools: Holy Cross, Rochester (1953-55, 1960-62); St. Salome, Rochester (1955-56); and Holy Family, Auburn (1956-60). She taught mathematics and theology at both Cardinal Mooney High School (1962-71, 1979-84) and Notre Dame High School (1971-79); and served in both schools as the chairperson of the Mathematics Department. She has also served as pastoral associate in the following parishes: St. Agnes, Avon (1984-86); Our Lady of Good Counsel (1986-92); and the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward (1992-95).

Sister Gertrude served also on the Sisters of Mercy Regional Community Team with Independent Living for Seniors (1997) before assuming her present ministry as pastoral associate of St. Ambrose Parish.



Sister Mary Gratia L'Esperance, RSM, said, "It's a Wonderful Life! sums up my experiences as a Sister of Mercy, far surpassing any expectations I might have had. These have included opportunities for sharing as a part of a loving, supportive and challenging community, receiving inspiration from so many who were part of a variety of educational ministries and benefiting from travel and study. I deeply appreciate the support we give one another for reflection, discussion and growth in following Jesus through prayer and awareness of the call to mercy and justice amid so much need."

A graduate of Blessed Sacrament School and Our Lady of Mercy High School, Sister Mary Gratia received her B.A. in French from Rivier College, Nashua, N.H.; her M.A. in French from Middlebury (Vt.) College; and her M.Div. from St. Bernard's Seminary, where she studied from 1969-72. The consistent thread of education is woven in many textures through the fabric of her life. Her elementary school teaching experiences include: Holy Cross, Rochester (1955-56); St. Patrick, Elmira (1956-60); Our Lady of Lourdes, Elmira (1960-61); and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Rochester (1980-82). She joined the faculties of the following high schools: Holy Family Auburn (1954-55); and Our Lady of Mercy High School (1952-54); and served on the faculty of Catherine McAuley College (1961-69) and St. Bernard's Seminary (1975-80).

Sister Gratia has served the Diocese of Rochester in several educational capacities: as coordinator of adult education (1972-75) and as theological consultant (1980-83). She is also the editor of the revised religion curriculum from elementary

**SR. GERTRUDE  
ERB, RSM**

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