

DIOCESAN NEWS

SSJs continue transition to new motherhouse

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

PITTSFORD — At one end of the Sisters of St. Joseph motherhouse, Sister Marie Bernard Kinsella, 93, was telling jokes.

At the opposite end, sisters and former sisters were having their pictures taken in Sister Janice Morgan's office. They were posing there not because it was their congregation president's office, but because it had been the office of a reportedly strict Sister Evangelist, the order's mistress of canonicals years ago.

Such moments served to lighten the somber reminiscing going on July 21.

On that Saturday afternoon, more than 125 sisters and former sisters came together for a Celebration of Memories at the motherhouse. By December 2002 the motherhouse will be turned over to Nazareth College, and the sisters will be gathering in a brand new building on their remaining property off French Road. They sold about 73 acres to Nazareth, which has begun doubling the size of its campus.

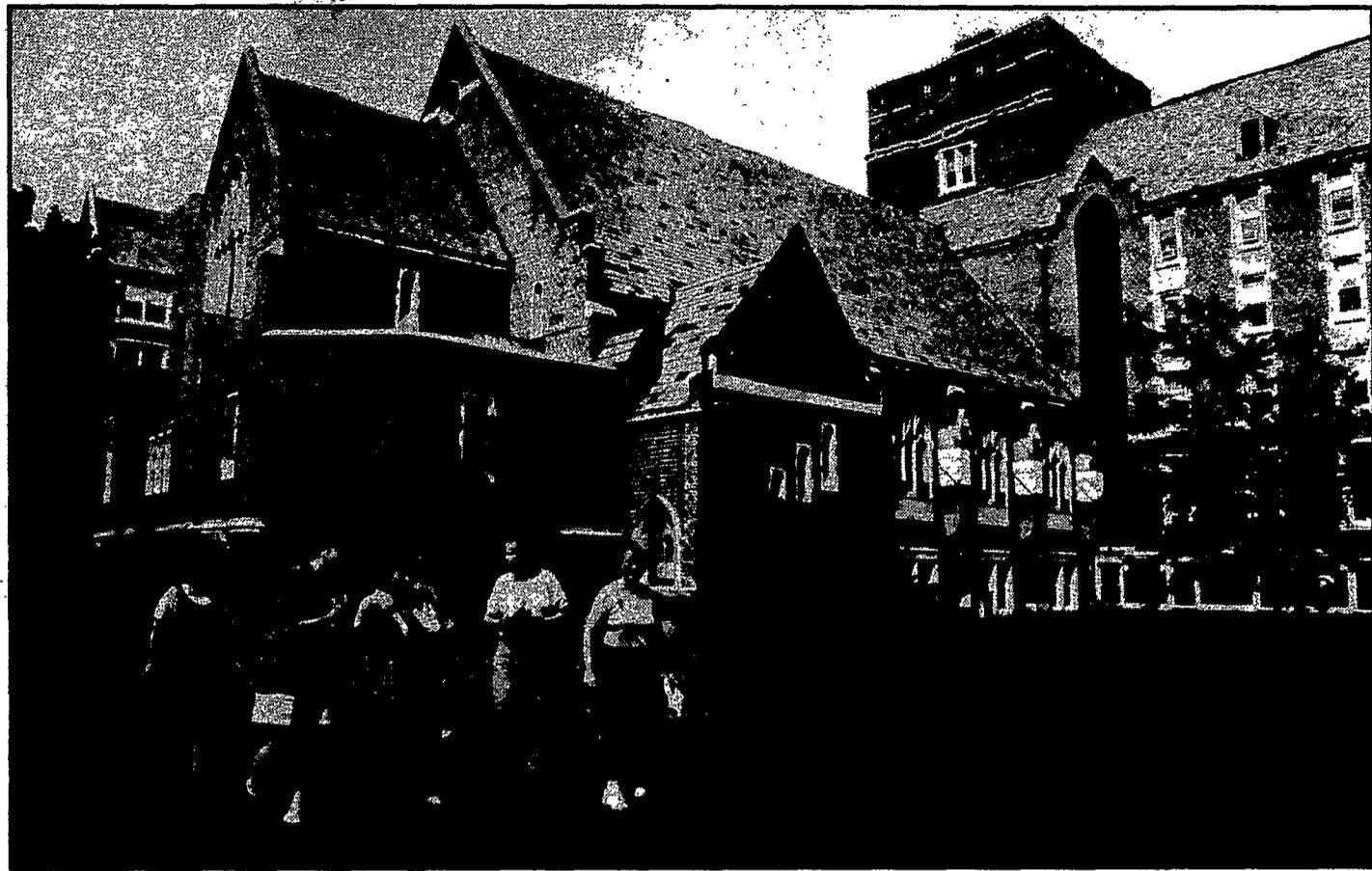
The order's symbolic groundbreaking July 7 was the turning point, Sister Morgan said, and more than 300 sisters, priests, Pittsford representatives and others attended.

But "it seems this group just wants to be here, walk the halls they were in, talk to people and remember in a very quiet way," she commented July 21.

"The sisters are eager, willing to move to the new place. It was a community decision," said Sister Mary Clouser, transition coordinator. "Still, it is hard to let go of something that is such an integral part of life. This is where most of the sisters received their habit, made their first profession; many made their final professions here, and this is where many came home to be buried. And many came back when they were no longer able to live in community."

Her own recollection, from the year before she entered the congregation in 1963, was a beautiful chapel filled with singing. "You thought you'd died and gone to heaven," she said.

Participants read aloud a litany of remembrance: "The sound of Mary's bells calling us to pray ... Looking up to see St. Joseph ... St. Cecilia, who inspires our singing voices ... St. Teresa of Avila, consumed by the love of God ..." followed by such refrains as "We shall remember" and "Help us to sing a new song." Mary Ann Pietrzykowski, an agregé, or associate of the congregation, wrote the words, which memorialized the windows of the motherhouse chapel and infirmary chapel, and



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Sisters and former Sisters of St. Joseph tour the grounds of the SSJ Motherhouse on East Avenue during the "Celebration of Memories" July 21.

called to mind the order's journey from France to the United States.

"Hurray for memories," proclaimed Msgr. William Shannon at a Mass concluding the day, as he entered the chapel, blessing the sisters and former sisters with welcome sprinkles of water on a hot, sticky day. The motherhouse air conditioning had broken down and wasn't being repaired, due to the sisters' impending move.

The day's liturgies were telecast to the infirmary. There, Sister Dorothy Agnes Tyrrell reflected, surely Mother Sylvester Tyndall was smiling down on the sisters and their moving plans. Mother Sylvester had the job of moving sisters from the Augustine Street motherhouse in 1928 to the new one in Pittsford. She kept records, Sister Tyrrell said, "like the price of nails purchased that day" in a tiny notebook.

Sister Tyrrell herself entered the Augustine Street motherhouse in 1927, but then moved to the new motherhouse the next summer with about 30 other young women.

"There were hardly any trees," she recalled. "We swept sand by the bushel almost for all that fall, almost till the snow

fell. It was just a construction site even after we moved in. I think we walked on a couple of planks on the day we drove in our car to the motherhouse.

"It was a wonderful move. I don't know how the older sisters planned it and moved. Maybe Mother Sylvester talked to them the way our people talk to us now."

She added that Mother Sylvester surely was watching over them today "and helping."

And surely the former mother superior smiled when sisters lined up with their shovels at the July 7 groundbreaking, attempting to pose in like fashion to their predecessors' appearance in a photograph of the 1927 groundbreaking on East Avenue. While the modern sisters were in sneakers and lacked veils, Sister Sylvester's gold-painted shovel was the same one Sister Sylvester had held, having been preserved these many years in the SSJs' archives.

The groundbreaking was merely symbolic because the sisters won't receive a building permit until after a Pittsford town board meeting Aug. 7 and planning board meeting Aug. 13. Without the permit, bulldozers can't begin their work.

dozers can't begin their work.

Sister Julie LeVeque, a member of the transition ritualization committee, noted that while another committee works with moving things, hers works "with moving spirits." Among events yet to be scheduled are gatherings for the public, before the motherhouse is left behind, and an open house at the new one, she said. Meanwhile, "companions" are being offered to the 90 women in the motherhouse, to help them sort through their belongings and decide which to take with them to rooms that will be smaller.

A survey has been circulated among the sisters to determine which statues, including several of St. Joseph, to take, as well.

"We have great trust in St. Joseph, who always has been our guide along the way," Sister Morgan said. St. Joseph, in fact, is watching over the site — a life-size statue of him, that is, that once graced Nazareth College sites where the sisters (who then ran the college) were proposing new buildings. It now rests at the French Road site, where it was decorated with a balloon by an unknown person the day the sisters agreed to sell their land to Nazareth.

Priest killed

Continued from page 1

was in that anomalous situation and still discerning."

"He had a beautiful prayer life, a contemplative prayer life," Msgr. Krieg said. Prior to his ordination, Father Jeffers had spent a year on the grounds of the Trappists' Abbey of the Genesee in Piffard, with a group of priests who were attempting to start a recognized religious institute called the Little Brothers of Nazareth but have since dissipated.

Father Jeffers, born in Meadville, Pa., was confirmed at St. Rita Parish in Webster. He did seminary studies at the American College of Louvain, Belgium.

He was ordained in 1992 and served as priest intern at St. Mary's in Canandaigua (1992-95).

In Canandaigua and Geneva, he also served with the fire departments. Ralph DeBolt, chief of the Geneva Fire Department, said some of his firefighters had become close friends with Father Jeffers and were hit hard by his death. The priest had maintained his membership in the

Nester Hose Company.

"If he was in town, he would answer calls," the chief said. "He was pretty active when he was here. He was assigned to an engine company, handling hose lines."

Father Jeffers was also active in Canandaigua's Fire Department, DeBolt said, "a little more so primarily because we (in Geneva) have an abundance of manpower, and he liked to be in on the action. He was a very good fireman."

"He was never afraid to try something new," said Father Lance Gonyo, who had entered the formation program at Becket Hall with Father Jeffers when both were students at St. John Fisher College. "This included choosing the most difficult or challenging volunteer seminarian ministries offered while at Becket Hall. He decided one day that he wanted to learn how to play the guitar. Soon, before long, he became a regular player in the folk group.

"The traits I admired about Brian included his quiet and thoughtful personality," Father Gonyo said. "He had a wonderful sense of humor and was always a person you could share a conversation with.

"Whenever someone would approach Brian with a need or concern, he would always stop what he was doing and spend whatever time was needed with the person, even at personal cost and sacrifice to himself," he added. "... I will always remember Brian as my fellow companion along the road to Emmaus."

Father Jeffers was predeceased by his father, James. He is survived by his mother, Donna of Webster; a brother, Mark; sisters, Valerie (William) Zajac and Renee Kuvik; a niece, Jessica Zajac, all of Pennsylvania; and relatives and good friends including Cynthia Marchenese.

His funeral Mass is set for 10:30 a.m. Friday, July 27, at St. Rita's, calling hours, for 7-9 p.m. Wednesday and 2-4 p.m. Thursday at Anthony Funeral Chapel, Webster. A prayer service was set for 7:30 p.m. Thursday at St. Rita's, where his body will lie in state from 7-9 p.m.

A memorial Mass will take place at 7 p.m. Tuesday, July 31, at St. Patrick's Church, Aurora. Father Edwin Metzger, who served as Father Jeffers' assisting priest in the six Good Shepherd churches, will be celebrant.

Contains reporting by Mike Laiona.

Recognizing

★ Richard Kalinowski, former theatre arts and English professor at Nazareth College, Rochester, won five Moliere Awards (the French equivalent of Broadway's Tony Awards) in May for his 1995 play "Beat on the Moon." He taught at Nazareth from 1986-88. The awards were a nod to a non-French-speaking playwright, and came on top of a 1995 Osborne Award for "Beat on the Moon" from the American Theatre Critics Association.

★ Kenneth, the art and literary magazine of McCord Jesuit High School, Rochester, in June received a blue ranking from the Empire State Scholastic Press Association in the Literary Magazine Category, and a Superior rating in the Program to Recognize Excellence in Student Literary Magazines by the National Council of Teachers of English. Student editors were 2000 graduates James Kanda and John Messner; faculty advisor was Martin Kilbridge.