

DIOCESAN NEWS

School has new title, plans other changes

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — No longer will people mistake St. Bernard's Institute — or what was formerly called St. Bernard's Institute — for a technical college, said Sister of St. Joseph Patricia Schoelles.

"The title didn't clearly state our mission. The word 'institute' is vague," remarked Sister Schoelles, who serves as president of St. Bernard's.

The school remains the same, but its name has changed. It's now St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry. Official notification of the title change came in late 2001 from the State University of New York's Board of Regents. The school, which offers graduate degrees and certified programs in designated ministry, has gradually been integrating its new title.

This marks the latest in a long series of name changes: The school began as St. Bernard's Seminary in 1891; was renamed St. Bernard's Seminary and College in 1931; reverted to St. Bernard's Seminary in 1972; and became St. Bernard's Institute in 1981 when its priestly formation program was discontinued and the school moved from Lake Avenue to its current site at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1100 S. Goodman St.

St. Bernard's may soon change locations as well. Sister Schoelles projects that ground breaking on a brand-new facility will take place this summer, with occupancy expected by the following year. Although not the only potential location, a plot of land on French Road in Pittsford —

owned by the Sisters of St. Joseph — has long been a leading possibility for St. Bernard's new home.

Sister Schoelles said that St. Bernard's board of directors must still establish a capital campaign committee to address the estimated building cost of \$2 million to \$3 million. The campaign will begin once the site is secured, she added.

In addition to the new structure, Sister Schoelles noted that St. Bernard's is expanding its presence in the Southern Tier. The school has begun using donated space, for classrooms and overnight lodging, in the former convent at St. Mary Our Mother Parish in Horseheads. St. Bernard's has also secured donated classroom space at the Catholic Charities building in Bath. That facility should be ready for use by the summer.

Also of note will be the next installment in St. Bernard's Russell Ethics Seminar series. On May 3, the school will present "Disclosure: Who Should Know What and When They Should Know It," a discussion of the recent controversy involving Enron Corp. and Arthur Andersen LLP. That event will take place at 7:30 a.m. at the Strathallan Hotel in Rochester.

In addition, Father Richard Gula, a nationally known Catholic ethicist from California, will conduct a course at St. Bernard's and also offer a public lecture on morality and spirituality this July.

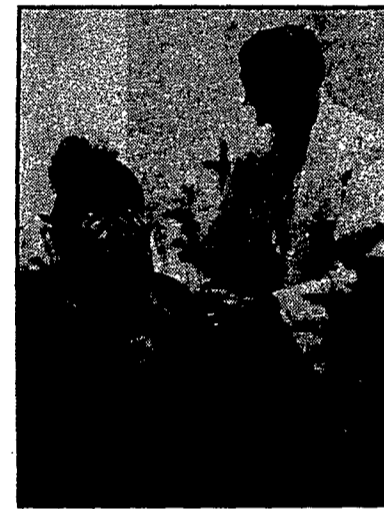
EDITORS' NOTE: For details on offerings at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry, call 585/271-3657 or visit www.st-bernards.edu.



James Stein/Photo Intern

Joined in faith

Ninety-seven diocesan parishes welcomed 561 adults and 221 children into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil this past weekend. Above, Frank Quartaro passes the flame to his 8-year-old son, Nicholas, during the Easter Vigil celebration at Geneva's St. Francis DeSales Parish March 30. At right, Domenic Moore (left) wipes his face after being baptized by Father Roy Kiggins, pastor.



Sister Grace Miller, RSM, given Harriet Tubman award

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Mercy Sister Grace Miller remembered having to choke back tears when she learned she was one of the winners of the Second-Annual Harriet Tubman Humanitarian Achievement Award.

The Corning native never got a chance to cry, however, because moments later her cell phone rang with news of yet another crisis involving a client of the House of Mercy, the outreach program for the homeless and poor she runs on Rochester's Hudson Avenue.

"It was awhile before I could even go back and think of this award," she said. "But that's life here at the House of Mercy."

New York state Assemblyman David Gant of Rochester nominated Miller for the award, which recognized her life of service to "the poor, the powerless and the persecuted." With an entourage of 47 staff members and clients, Sister Miller traveled

to Empire State Plaza in Albany March 9 to receive the award at a dinner in the Kitty Carlisle Hart Theater. Family members attended as well.

"I was shocked," she said of being selected for an award along with nine other women from around the state. "I love Harriet Tubman, and I've always admired her."

The event was sponsored by Harriet Tubman Achievement Awards Jubilee Inc., a statewide consortium of organizations and individuals who are working to have New York's government declare March 10 a holiday in honor of Tubman. Tubman, who died in Auburn on that date in 1910, was a former slave who was most famous for guiding runaway slaves from the South to the North before the Civil War.

Sister Miller herself has been working to free people from the shackles of poverty since the 1960s, when she decided to give up teaching inner-city school children to find ways of addressing the poverty she saw when visiting their homes.

"I'd walk into these cold, dark houses with beds that had no sheets or blankets," she said. "I thought 'How could I demand homework from kids who go home to that, where nothing is encouraging them?'"

After doing stints in various types of urban ministry, in 1985, she opened the House of Mercy at its former location on Central Park with the sponsorship of her congregation, the Sisters of Mercy. She smiled as she remembered how a man came to install her telephone in the new Central Park House of Mercy, but fled when she left the house because he was afraid of being left alone in the neighborhood. She laughed when she recalled that he was only willing to come back to the house if she was there.

She summed up her reasons for choosing to live in reputedly dangerous areas by recalling a police officer who asked her what she was doing in such a neighborhood.

"I said 'Then this is where the church is

supposed to be.'" She added that she loves her clients, and that they look out for her. She also said that she is supported by numerous volunteers, donors and churches, and feels God is with her always.

"This is where I want to be," she said.

In 1994, the house moved to its current location on Hudson Avenue and is now independently incorporated. Each month, it provides thousands of people with food and shelter; educational and medical services; and advocacy with social-service agencies and the courts. Additionally, the house operates a relapse prevention residence called Farbridge House in cooperation with Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, where her brother, Father Neil Miller, is pastor.

The house has also been at the forefront of many public protests against institutions it sees as oppressing the poor. Most recently, on Good Friday, House members joined Catholic Workers, Pax Christi members and Nazareth College students as well as other activists in a Stations of the Cross through the city. The activists prayed at various corporate and government sites they saw as symbols of power that are not always used for the benefit of the poor. The activists also protested the bombing of civilians in Afghanistan by praying outside the Federal Building downtown.

Such activism has not always made Sister Miller popular with local officials, a number of whom she has criticized publicly. But she said that people of means have little idea how hard it is to be poor in this world, and she sees herself as a voice for such people. Many poor people suffer from illiteracy, ignorance and a lack of family support, she said. They have a hard time navigating both the worlds of social services and employment, she added.

"I see how the poor are suffering under a system that crushes them," she said. "At least somebody is here to be with them through their crises — and for some of their victories."

Sister Joan Sobala, SSJ, makes history at state Capitol

Sister Joan Sobala, congregational vice president of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, made history March 19 when she became the first non-ordained woman to read a prayer before the New York state Senate.

At the session, which occurred on the feast of her order's patron, Sister Sobala said, in part: "We pray that our state Senators deliberate with depth, review with respect and decide with determination in all the matters before them today."

Sister Sobala's selection as prayer-leader was recommended by Sen. Richard A. Dollinger, who represents Rochester, Greece and Brighton, and is a parishioner at St. Thomas More Parish in Brighton. The senator met Sister Sobala through the Downtown Community Forum, a discussion series at St. Mary's Parish, Rochester,

which she oversaw from 1985-98 as the parish's pastoral associate. After she said her prayer, the senator told his colleagues from the floor that he wanted to honor Catholic women religious.

"Up until now, an arcane internal policy required that those invited to give the Senate invocation be ordained members of the clergy, which inadvertently discriminated against nuns," Sen. Dollinger said in a press statement. "I am delighted that Sister Joan will be the first nun — and hopefully the first of many more — to have the opportunity to offer special blessings as the daily business of the state Senate gets under way."

Sister Sobala, a religious woman for 42 years, expressed pleasure at having been selected.

"It was certainly an honor and one

which reflects not just on me, but on non-ordained women who minister in the whole state of New York," she said.

Sister Sobala traveled to Albany and returned to Rochester the same day. She said she found her brief look at the senators' life interesting.

"It's quite fascinating to see how they work and use their legislative aides, and to see the various parties work as well," she said. "It's fast-paced, it's demanding."

She added that she was pleased to have said the prayer on the feast of St. Joseph, patron of the universal church, before a political body.

"This is significant that on the feast of St. Joseph, which has that kind of universal embrace, this prayer should be offered," she said.

— Rob Cullivan