

Women herald spiritual ancestors

'The Red Cord' views Scriptural experiences through feminine eyes

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

The women of the Bible may seem silent at times, given that their words appear in fewer instances than those of Scripture's male characters. But the voices of several women of the Bible were heard in the sanctuary of Our Lady of Mercy Church in Greece during an April 2 performance of "The Red Cord," which highlights women in Scripture.

More than 30 people saw a group of Catholic and Methodist women act the roles of such figures as Rahab, a Canaanite who hid Israelite spies in her Jericho home; Susanna, who was falsely accused of adultery and almost executed before the youth Daniel examined her accusers and found their stories wanting; and Claudia, wife of Pilate, who told her husband to have nothing to do with Jesus because a dream had told her of his innocence. The performance featured oratory, singing and dancing.

"The Red Cord" refers to the cord Rahab hung from the window of her home so Joshua's Israelite army would not destroy her and her family — her reward for protecting the spies. The performance was the latest in a series about women of faith put on by Women of the Well, a troupe formed in 1998 by a group from the Diocese of Rochester, according to Gloria Ulterino, former diocesan director of the Office on Women in Church and Society.

"The whole idea, really, is to find creative ways, engaging ways to give voice to women both past and present," Ulterino said of Women of the Well. She noted that the group previously has given performances based on biblical women, but is also planning a production devoted to three nuns and a lay woman martyred in El Salvador in 1980.

Like other Women of the Well productions, "The Red Cord" was inspired by the Jewish rabbinical midrash, or commentary, on Scripture stories, she said.

"The rabbis would listen to what was between the lines," she said. "You get sort of a hint of what's going on, but there's a lot that's left to the imagination."

And that's where "The Red Cord" comes in, she noted, pointing out that the Women of the Well research the background and context of their



Rebecca Gosselin/Catholic Courier

Gloria Ulterino tells the story of Rahab during a March 30 performance of "The Red Cord" at St. John the Evangelist Church in Rochester.

characters before coming up with their retelling of the women's stories. The resulting interpretations combine reflection, singing and even a little humor, as evidenced by Richene Smith's portrayal of Claudia, Pilate's wife.

"If truth were told, I would've made a better governor," Smith's character said during her performance.

The characters of "The Red Cord" were varied in their messages, which ranged from the importance of trusting in God to a concern over what happens to those whom no one defends, a concern voiced by Susanna, played by Deni Mack, pastoral associate at Church of the Assumption in Fairport. Mack's character noted that, as a woman, she was not even allowed to testify at her own trial.

"Why was my voice not heard?" she asked. "Why was my own defense inadequate?"

Fortunately for Susanna, Daniel was moved by God to interrogate her accusers, who were eventually found guilty of assaulting her, but not all voiceless people are so lucky.

"We must remember all of those people — men, women and children — who have no Daniels to speak up for them," Mack's character said.

"The Red Cord" also included one non-Biblical character, the aboli-

tionist Sojourner Truth, played by Princess Fame, a parishioner at St. Rita's Parish in Webster. Born a slave named Isabella Baumfree in Ulster County, New York, Truth was raised by her mother to have a strong faith in God, and she endured many hardships until New York state abolished slavery in 1828. She experienced a spiritual revelation in 1843, and thereafter became an evangelist, abolitionist and suffragist.

Fame said she originally didn't want to play a woman of color who was also a slave, but changed her mind after researching Truth's life.

"After reading about Sojourner and really getting to

know who she was, it was an honor," Fame said of her role. She added that Truth had found in Jesus the ability to become a great leader, even though she was illiterate.

"He gave her the knowledge, the strength, the courage and the dignity to go out there and be a sign to all his children," Fame said.

She added that being a part of "The Red Cord" fulfilled her own dreams of being a woman like the ones she and the other women portray.

"I want to be a servant of God," Fame said. "I want to spread the good news."

Ulterino added that showing how women have shared God's words with others is what inspired the production of "The Red Cord."

"If we're going to get a full picture of who the body of Christ is, we need the full voices of women," she said.

EDITOR'S NOTE: "The Red Cord" will be performed at Lake Avenue Baptist Church, 70 Ambrose St., Rochester, on Sunday, April 27, at 4 p.m. Admission is free and open to the public. For information, call Gloria Ulterino at 585/586-3279.

GENERAL

Announcements

ADOPTIONS The Catholic Courier does not publish adoption advertising. To obtain a list of agencies that serve birth mothers and adoptive parents, call 585-529-9530. Agencies wishing to be included on this list may send information to the Catholic Courier.

MERCHANDISE

Gifts

Tell me your story:

Share the written story of your life, with family and friends in a beautifully produced storybook.

Call **LifeStories** at 585-271-0598 for details

SERVICES

Gutter Cleaning & Repair

GUTTER CLEANING & REPAIR

New Heavy-Duty Aluminum & Galvanized Gutters
Bernard K. Bayer & Son
est. 1952 (716) 381-0812

Moving & Hauling

K-D Moving & Storage, Inc.

Experienced in office, home, hold, moving and deliveries.

Big or Small We do them All!
473-6610/473-4357
25 Arlington St. Rochester, NY 14607
NAD 01/99/07

Healthcare

Save up to

80% on your prescription medications

www.unidrugs.com

OR CALL US AT

1-800-583-0960

Call 24 hours a day

Travel

JOIN OUR GROUP NOVASCOTIA SEPTEMBER 3-13, 2003 call for brochure 585-637-2119 ALL SEASONS TRAVEL.

Masonry

MASONRY REPAIRS ALL TYPES, brick & cement step repairs, basement walls & garage foundation repairs. 40 years experience Al Meyvis Sr 323-1007

Advertise Your GARAGE SALE!

Courier Classified will sell your items!
20 words for \$15