

Carmelite sisters relocate

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier



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The Carmelite sisters from the Monastery of Our Lady and St. Joseph on West Jefferson Road have moved to the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse in Pittsford.

POPE DID NOT OFFER COMMENT ON FILM

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope John Paul II never said "It is as it was" after watching Mel Gibson's film on the passion of Jesus, said the pope's longtime personal secretary, Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz.

"The Holy Father told no one his opinion of this film," the archbishop told Catholic News Service Jan. 18.

The alleged papal quote has appeared in hundreds of newspapers around the world as an unequivocal endorsement of Gibson's controversial film even though papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls refused to confirm the pope said it.

PRIEST CANDIDATES TO GET HIV TEST

MONTREAL (CNS) — The head of the Montreal Archdiocese has made HIV testing mandatory for priesthood candidates.

Montreal Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte told reporters Jan. 17 that he made the HIV test a requirement because of the "grave consequences on the lifelong commitment of a candidate to the priesthood," said an archdiocesan statement.

The statement said the medical history of candidates was essential in determining whether to accept a man into the priesthood.

The archdioceses of Edmonton, in Alberta, and Vancouver, in British Columbia, are the only other Canadian dioceses that require such testing.

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Sun., Jan. 25: Nehemiah 8:2-4A, 5-6, 8-10; Psalms 19:8-10, 15; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 or 12:12-14, 27; Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

Mon., Jan. 26: 2 Timothy 1:1-8 or Titus 1:1-5; Psalms 96:1-2A, 2B-3, 7-8A, 10; Mark 3:22-30

Tue., Jan. 27: 2 Samuel 6:12B-15, 17-19; Psalms 24:7-10; Mark 3:31-35

Wed., Jan. 28: 2 Samuel 7:4-17; Psalms 89:4-5, 27-30; Mark 4:1-20

Thu., Jan. 29: 2 Samuel 7:18-19, 24-29; Psalms 132:1-5, 11-14; Mark 4:21-25

Fri., Jan. 30: 2 Samuel 11:1-4A, 5-10A, 13-17; Psalms 51:3-7, 10-11; Mark 4:26-34

Sat., Jan. 31: 2 Samuel 12:1-7A, 10-17; Psalms 51:12-17; Mark 4:35-41

After several decades in their cloister, the Carmelite sisters from the Monastery of Our Lady and St. Joseph have moved to the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse while considering options for their future.

Meanwhile, the Carmelites' property at 1931 W. Jefferson Road is up for sale. The final Mass at the monastery was celebrated Jan. 11.

In October 2003, Sisters Ann, Teresa, Magdalen and Ruth — who had all lived at the monastery since it opened in 1956 — relocated across the town of Pittsford to receive better medical care at the SSJ motherhouse, 150 French Road. Earlier this month they were joined by the three remaining members of their Discalced Carmelite community — the prioress, Mother John, along with Sisters Victoria and Malachy — who have moved into independent-living quarters at the SSJ facility.

According to Mother John, this rare occurrence of a cloistered community moving to a non-cloistered facility was prompted by illness and aging among the seven sisters who resided at the monastery. They range in age from 53 to 92.

In addition, Mother John noted, the sisters were faced with mounting repair bills at the monastery. She said she contacted Sister Janice Morgan, president of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, after realizing it would become more challenging to remain at the monastery in the years to come.

"We knew it would be very difficult to take care of ourselves," Mother John said.

Sister Morgan said her community was more than happy to help out, stating, "Our charism is to reach out to the neighbor and certainly the Carmelites are our dear neighbors."

However, some issues involving church law have needed to be ironed out. Mother John and Sister Morgan said they're working closely with Bishop Matthew H. Clark and Father Daniel Condon, diocesan chancellor, on these matters.

In 1999, Mother John said, the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life issued a document authorizing a local bishop to permit a cloistered community to live outside their cloister for up to three months. Having received the permission of Bishop Matthew H. Clark, the Carmelites invoked the three-month period this month when the last three sisters moved to the SSJ motherhouse; the three-

month period does not apply to sisters who move for medical reasons. Should the Carmelites wish to continue living at the motherhouse, Mother John said a formal request must be made to the Holy See.

Meanwhile, the Carmelite sisters have already been granted permission from the Holy See to transfer ownership of their 57-acre property in the event of a sale. According to April Debes, spokesperson for the Sisters of St. Joseph, negotiations are currently taking place but the monastery has not yet been sold.

The Sisters of St. Joseph have made arrangements at their motherhouse to enable the Carmelite sisters to model as closely as possible their charism of contemplative prayer. For instance, a separate chapel has been created so the sisters can gather several times daily for prayer.

Although it has been a difficult move, Mother John said a psychological burden has been lifted because the sisters are no longer consumed by daily chores at the monastery that were becoming increasingly difficult for them.

"All those stresses have been taken from them," she said. "The sisters feel very comfortable in this setting."

Mother John said many of the 60 Carmelite monasteries across the United States are facing similar issues of aging and declining populations. Two common solutions are for sisters to either relocate to another monastery or for two or more monasteries to merge with each other. Yet she said that all the sis-

ters felt it was best "to stay together as a community" and added that she has received support from other Carmelite communities for their decision.

The Carmelite sisters are now living among approximately 130 other women religious as well as 10 priests. For the time being, Sister Morgan said, the Carmelites are staying at the motherhouse as the SSJs' guests, but would pay to live there if a permanent arrangement were made. Thus far, Mother John said, the SSJs' help "has been a God-send."

Carmelite sisters, devoting themselves to a life of prayer, were not permitted to leave monastery grounds on Jefferson Road except for medical reasons. However, the monastery had been open to the public for daily Mass and private adoration, with the sisters separated from other worshipers by a grate. Congregations would swell each year during the week of the Ladies Professional Golf Association tournament across the street from the monastery at Locust Hill Country Club.

The Carmelite community was established in Rochester in 1930, with the original monastery located on Saratoga Avenue in Rochester. Four years later the order moved to a site on East Avenue, where it remained for 22 years before moving to Jefferson Road.

Regarding the latest move, Mother John remarked, "We have changed location and our setting, but our mission hasn't changed. We have the obligation and privilege to pray for people of the diocese."