

# Couple devoted to Divine Mercy

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

FAIRPORT — A series of perhaps not-so-coincidental events led to Sharon and John Norton's devotion to the Divine Mercy.

Sharon Norton recalled that in 1991, during the Sacred Heart Conference in Syracuse, she was selling rosaries that she makes. A video display about Divine Mercy at a nearby booth caught her eye, and later that weekend a friend gave her an image of the Divine Mercy.

Not long after the conference, Sharon and John stumbled upon a Chaplet of Divine Mercy being prayed on the Eternal Word Television Network — and both immediately started praying. Today, the Nortons are leaders and organizers for the Rochester-based Rays of Mercy Apostolate of Divine Mercy.

A key date for the Nortons and other Divine Mercy devotees is coming up shortly: Divine Mercy Sunday, which takes place on the Sunday following Easter, will be celebrated April 18. In many churches worldwide, the day will be marked by special Masses along with confession, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Benediction, and/or a chaplet — a series of prayers that uses the rosary. Divine Mercy Sunday was instituted by Pope John Paul II in 2000, the same year he canonized Sister Mary Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who died in 1938 at age 33.

A cornerstone of devotion to St. Faustina is the aforementioned Divine Mercy image — the widely circulated painting of Christ, pointing to his heart, with the words "Jesus I trust in you" appearing at the bottom. The image depicts Christ as he is purported to have appeared to St. Faustina on Feb. 22, 1931. During



the 1930s St. Faustina had similar visions in which, she later said, Jesus asked for a Divine Mercy feast to be established for the redemption of sinners. In 2002 Pope John Paul announced a plenary indulgence — a remission of the temporal punishment deserved for sins — for those who fully participate in Divine Mercy Sunday.

The Nortons are looking forward to a special 3 p.m. Mass on Divine Mercy Sunday at their parish, Holy Spirit in Penfield. They also noted that Divine Mercy devotion takes place throughout the year — in the form of chaplets and other devotions — at such parishes as St. Jude's in Gates, St. Stanislaus in Rochester and St. John the Evangelist in Greece. In addition, John serves as grand knight for the local Knights of Mercy — an effort to spread Divine Mercy devotion among the Knights of Columbus.

However, the Nortons feel that most parishes do not prioritize Divine Mercy Sunday to a suitable degree.

"The reality is, we certainly haven't done enough," John remarked. Part of the problem, he said, is that "some priests have an unfounded opinion of what they're supposed to do" on Divine Mercy Sunday. But his wife said that nothing elaborate is required: "You don't have to have a special Mass or a chaplet. All the priest has to do is talk about Divine Mercy."

On the other hand, Divine Mercy devotion is a constant for the Nortons, who were confirmed as Catholics in 1989 along with their two daughters. The couple has journeyed to St. Faustina's homeland; attended her 2000 canonization in Rome; and visited the Na-

## CYO Snapshot



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

## Making a move

Tom Way (left), who plays for St. Ambrose Church's Catholic Youth Organization boys basketball team, tries to put up a shot over the outstretched arm of Utopians (St. Thomas More/St. John the Evangelist) player Jim Bauman Feb. 29 during the CYO high school boys Class A final at Bishop Kearney High School. The Utopians defeated St. Ambrose to claim the championship.

tional Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Mass. Many relics from their travels are displayed in their Fairport home.

The Nortons were among the organizers of a Divine Mercy Conference last August that attracted 300 participants to Rochester's Theatre on the Ridge, as well as a Divine Mercy seminar in November that brought 70 people to Greece's St. John the Evangelist Church. Although no similar conferences are planned for this year, the Nortons said they would like to help stage one in the future. The couple was al-

so involved with Marian conferences, which were held annually in Rochester from 1994 to 2002.

"I would say, to a major degree, those who are into Divine Mercy are also Marian," John said.

"You can't be one without the other. We kind of laugh and call it the Marian connection," Sharon added.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For more information about Divine Mercy activities in the Diocese of Rochester, call 585/425-8875. Numerous Web sites also contain detail about Divine Mercy devotion.

### Answers from page B19 (No. 38)

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