

Lay, religious women form community

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

Jenn Owens planned to become a full-time student at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry in the fall semester of 2004, eventually earning her master's degree in pastoral studies.

She had a problem, however — the school is in Pittsford and she lives more than an hour away in Auburn. Unless she wanted a long commute to and from school each day, Owens would have to try to find an affordable place to live in Rochester.

While talking to Sister of Mercy Kathleen Wayne several months ago, she learned of a housing alternative — McAuley House.

McAuley House is a new community of six Catholic women who live in the rectory building of Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish. A joint effort of the parish and the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester, the community is made up of two Sisters of Mercy and four lay, young-adult women. In return for reduced rent, the women each spend 10 hours a week working with different ministries in the parish community.

"I decided it was a really great experience because I know I want to do ministry and I'm hoping to become a pastoral associate. For me it's awesome because I get cheap rent and I get to be involved in a parish," Owens said.

Sister Wayne, the house's director, said she has dreamed of starting such a community for several years. After talking with Jamie Fazio, Blessed Sacrament's pastoral associate, she realized the parish might help make that dream come true. The proposal received an enthusiastic response from the parish and finance councils and the parish staff, said Father Robert Kennedy, pastor. Once the proposal was approved, the parish and the Sisters of Mercy split the cost of renovating the third and part of the second floors of the rectory building, which is no longer used to house priests.

McAuley House is not meant to be a recruitment tool for the Sisters of



Colleen White/Catholic Courier

Four Catholic young-adult women and two Sisters of Mercy of Rochester have created a new community, McAuley House, which is located in the rectory of Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish. On Nov. 16, three of the community's members — Jenn Owens (from left), Sister Estelle Martin, RSM, and Sister Kathleen Wayne, RSM — gather together to pray.

Mercy, Sister Wayne said. It was founded as a way for the Sisters of Mercy to live in community with lay women and for the group to share their gifts with each other and the community.

Community living, simple life, prayer and service are the four guiding principles of McAuley House, added Sister Wayne, who also serves as vocations director for the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester.

"Because it's a project of the Sisters of Mercy, the values and traditions of the Sisters of Mercy are woven right into the house," Sister Wayne said. "There's something to be said about the value of community life and the simple life. I think that young adults today are kind of desirous of those values."

Owens, who has been living in the McAuley House community since late September, said living simply has so far been rewarding, although it occasionally takes a little extra thought and effort. For example, when her turn came to do the weekly grocery shopping, she had to choose foods and brands carefully in order to stay within the community's

grocery budget of \$125 a week. Living in community with the other women has also been rewarding, she added.

"We're all Christian women. We all believe in the Gospel. We all want to do work in the church and spread the Gospel. We all have the goal of wanting to help the parish out," Owens said. "We share that bond, and as a Catholic and a Christian you respect each other."

All six women gather together Tuesday and Saturday evenings to pray, Owens said. The women regard prayer as a priority and make time for it in schedules that are already jam-packed, since all of the women are either employed or registered with an educational program.

The women also work with a variety of ministries within Blessed Sacrament, including faith formation and music and young-adult ministries. For the most part, members

Young Adult

of the McAuley House community are assigned to different ministries depending on their individual gifts and talents, Sister Wayne said. All of the women, however, work with the Blessed Sacrament Supper Program, serving meals to the neighborhood's low-income residents. This was a new but necessary experience for some of the women, Sister Wayne said.

"Service isn't always going to be something that we're comfortable with. Sometimes we'll have to stretch," she explained.

McAuley House residents spent their first night in their new home Sept. 24, and the following month was spent becoming accustomed to and involved with Blessed Sacrament's various ministries. Their presence in the parish community is already making a difference, Father Kennedy said.

"Every indication is that this is going to be a wonderful gift to our parish and the wider neighborhood community," he said. "They bring a great spirituality to the parish."

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