It was Easter of this year. I had enjoyed a festive meal with St. Teresa’s community in New Rochelle, and was heading out to visit my family. I reentered the dining room and said to the single table of nuns still there, “Why am I not surprised to find you here after everyone has left?” They were in high spirits, and tried to draw me into a conversation that had something to do with missions in Borneo, of all places. In a bit of a hurry, I, in jest, threw a dollar bill on the table as my contribution to whatever scheme they were hatching and left, marveling to myself. Here is the marvel. The average age of those nuns is eighty. One of them has recently completed a 400-page manuscript on the history of Ursuline missions to Native Americans in Montana. Another is a practicing artist. The third, who founded a home for single mothers five years ago in the Bronx, has just acquired a larger house for her clients. The fourth is a social activist who went to prison in 1996 in protest of the School of the Americas in Georgia. The fifth spent 34 years of her life in Indonesia (the Borneo connection) and is now a licenced masseuse, who regularly preaches on the missions in local parishes. Three of the others have served overseas, in our provinces in Taiwan, Mexico, Peru, and Greece. What an interesting group of women. What an energetic group of women. (Continued on next page)
In an article titled “Contemporary Religious Life: Death or Transformation?” (Cross-Currents, Winter 1996-97), theologian Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM, presents this paradox: religious congregations like ours are exhibiting all of the sociological characteristics of declining institutions; diminishment of membership and the consequent diminishment of material resources, which in turn decreases the group’s effectiveness in accomplishing its goal. However, like my friends in the dining room, they do not exhibit the typical attitudes and behaviors that accompany decline: cynicism, despair, self-interest, restriction of resources to in-house projects, among others. How account for this paradoxical behavior?

I can’t account here for the transformation of Angela’s Company into a monastic order; except to say that Charles Borromeo and the decrees of the Council of Trent had a great deal to do with it. Similarly, it was the reforms of Vatican II that led us to a rediscovery of the charism of our founder as embodied in her Company. Do not imagine that the changes that we have undergone since the council have been easy. They have been, and are, costly. And herein lies the tale that I want to tell.

While we can mostly laugh about it now, and admitting that we have made some mistakes, it was difficult for some of us who entered before Vatican II to give up the practices and customs of a lifetime. Almost all of us felt it right not to be constrained by the rules of cloister from visiting our families for any reason, including funerals (I, for instance, did not go home for my father’s funeral in 1958). But there were fierce “discussions” among us on almost every change we made: the wearing of the habit; the rule of silence; the undertaking of new ministries; the formation of small communities. We were divested of some of the privileges we had enjoyed as “the good sisters.” Contemporary theologies challenged long-held beliefs.

But most of us went through all of this with the certainty that what we were forging was for the good of the church, the world, our community, and that it would go on forever as it had in the past. We welcomed new members who had not lived the old way of life, who brought new questions with them. At the same time, sisters with whom we had lived and worked for years began to leave the community, a painful loss. And we became aware, little by little, that we were no longer attracting vocations, an awareness...
accompanied by the slowly dawning consciousness and sadness of what that might mean -- for our various ministries, and for the care of elderly and infirm Ursulines. We have had to leave some schools, close others dear to us and to our students and alumnae/i. Sisters who have lived and worked in the same locale all their lives have moved to the Marian Residence, sometimes far from family and friends. Most recently, we have had to give up the Ursuline convent on Elm Street, in Malone, New York, which had been at the center of town life for over a century, a big sacrifice for the sisters and for the people there.

We are engaged now in the process of assessing our resources and future needs, all the while acutely mindful of the future of our ministries, many of which are with the poor and underprivileged. While we still hope, pray, and work to attract vocations, we now serve mostly with lay people, educated, dedicated. We share our spiritual experience with lay associates, at the same time as we are spiritually enriched by them. We count on their help in crucial ways in our fund raising endeavors.

Is all of this a sign of “death or transformation,” as Sandra Schneiders put the question? The answer, for Catholics who believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus, it seems to me, is both. Sustained by faith, Ursulines understand better now than we did in the past that our commitment is not to preserving institutions as such but to passing on the charism of Angela in whatever form it takes. We have in some ways been humbled. But above all, we have remained steadfast in prayer. Knowing, as Angela told us, that she would always be in our midst lending aid to our prayers, we are trying our best to follow her injunctions.

“Fate, movetive, credeti, sforzative, sperate, gridate allui col cor vostro; che senza dubio vedereti cose mirabile. We are. All of the above.

News and Notes

The story continues. Honors bestowed for work with the young, the elderly; with immigrants; in science and literature.

CONGRATULATIONS!

To Sr. Jean Baptiste Nicholson, who has been principal of The Ursuline School in New Rochelle and is chair of the Board of Trustees at the College of New Rochelle, received an honorary degree from CNR on May 27 for her achievements in the field of education. (We think that being principal for 30 years might be cause for canonization as well.)

And to Sr. Mary Beth Read, principal of the Academy of Mount St. Ursula; on March 24 Mary Beth was honored with five other women at the Botanical Gardens for her service to the Bronx community. A source of greater joy for all at MSU was sophomore Crystal Venning’s first place in the All-Boroughs Shakespeare Competition in which 3000 students participated. Crystal’s prize is a full scholarship for study this summer at The American School in England.

In recognition of her many years of service as Executive Director of the New Rochelle Office for the Aging, the new Computer Learning Center at the Hugh A. Doyle Senior Center has been named in honor of Sr. Miriam Thérèse Peppin. Fulfilling her dream of providing better computer training for seniors, Miriam Thérèse raised more than $225,000 to construct and equip the facility. Ursulines joke that it might be large enough to house the many city, county, state, and federal proclamations that “MT” has received over the years.

(Continued on p.6)
April 24, 2004
Golden Jubilarians Celebrate at CNR

JUBILARIANS
Dee Yanshak,
Marie-Celine Miranda,
Mildred Haipt,
Carole Marie Keaney,
Mary Jane Robertshaw -
50 years and still going!

At our first profession in 1954, a golden jubilee in 2004, the 21st century, seemed to belong to science fiction. Yet the anniversary came to pass, on January 16th, when each of us celebrated in her own community, in her own way. But we had decided on a joint celebration, too, a public expression of Ursuline life, to be held at the College of New Rochelle in the course of its own centennial year.

However, as April 24th approached, I wondered sometimes, why are we doing this? Is it worth all the time and trouble, the planning, the money?

About a week before the event, the answer came to me in a moment of understanding: this jubilee is not just for us. Marking fifty years as Ursulines may be the occasion of a celebration, but it is not the center. The center is the life we all share, our life in Christ. This is our jubilee, for and of all our Ursuline sisters in the province, all religious, the whole People of God.

And in the event, on a brilliant spring day in Eastertide, with hundreds of people participating in it – people from all the parts of all our lives – I understood, deeply and gratefully, that it was a day of grace. Less a marker of fifty years past, it was a witness to the reality of God present. It was a declaration of hope in the midst of our terror-threatened times: God loves us all, and God is faithful. Let us rejoice and be glad, together.

Marie-Celine Miranda, osu
Meet the Jubilarians

Mildred Haipt, osu (Sr. Maria Carl)
Mildred taught in Ursuline secondary schools in Bethesda, MD, Wilmington, DE, and New Rochelle, NY, and then moved to the Education Department at CNR where she served for 35 years. Her work in teacher education has taken her to Thailand, Japan, Australia, Malaysia, and Guyana. Mildred is currently the local superior of the Ursuline Community in Wilmington.

Elizabeth Ann Sommer, osu (Sr. Mary Veronica)
Even before final profession, Betty Ann began teaching at Blessed Sacrament School in New Rochelle. Having moved to the Bedford Park community in the Bronx, she served in two nearby parochial schools, Our Lady of Mercy and St. Philip Neri. In 1973, she joined the faculty of the Academy of Mt. St.. Ursula, where she taught history for 25 years. Since retiring, Betty has devoted herself to community service and to developing her gifts as a pianist. Betty Ann, who had promised a grand nephew that she would be present at his First Communion on April 24, joined this celebration in spirit.

Carole Marie Keaney, osu
For 30 years Carole Marie worked among the various peoples of Indonesia, teaching wherever and whatever was needed-- whether preparation for the sacraments or basic hygienic principles. When she returned to the US in 1988, she pursued a degree in environmental studies, and is currently the Director of the Highbridge (Bronx) Community Garden in Goshen, NY.

Marie-Celine Miranda, osu
Marie-Ce began teaching in the Philosophy Department at CNR in 1957 and over the years has held various administrative positions there as well. In 1967, she volunteered for a year as an English teacher in the Ursuline junior college in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. She has served the province as both treasurer and provincial, and is now assistant to the province’s Business Manager.

Dolores Yanshak, osu (Sr. Consilia)
Dee spent the better part of 34 years in Indonesia where she worked with university students in residence halls in Java, trained village leaders all over the country, and later assisted villagers in social and religious development, especially in the formation of cooperatives. Dee now practices massage therapy and works with The Lord’s Pantry, a program that provides meals for homebound persons with AIDS.

Mary Jane Robertshaw, osu
From 1957 until 1997, Mary Jane taught in the Art Department at CNR, with specialties in sculpture and fiber arts. In 1989, at the invitation of the Ursulines in Botswana, she helped woodcarvers there organize a cooperative, and in 2001 she hung two exhibits at the Ursuline Generalate in Rome in celebration of the Ursuline Roman Union Centennial. Janie has overseen the production of bronze replicas of her mahogany sculpture of the young Angela Merici and continues with her weaving.
Sr. Mary Virginia
Orna’s latest award, this time as “Distinguished Scientist of Westchester,” was presented by the Westchester Chemical Society on April 29. Mary Virginia, professor of chemistry at CNR, was honored for “her outstanding contributions to chemical education at all levels through her unique integration of art and history into the teaching and doing of chemistry....” Not mentioned among her many interdisciplinary interests and accomplishments were the scores of crossword puzzles Mary Virginia has had published in The New York Times and elsewhere.

Sr. Bernadette Mackay was among the nine men and women who received the first International Community Award on May 28 in Orlando, Florida. Bernie’s devotion “to building the relationship between the Dominican Republic and Central Floridians in 2003 [in which] more than 300 volunteers participated in 19 missions” was cited.


Sr. Peggy Kelleher’s article on “Ministers of Communion” appeared in the April 19-26, 2004 issue of America.

On May 13, Sr. Susan Conte, Director of Counseling at The Ursuline School in New Rochelle, was awarded a Ph.D. in Clinical Social Work by New York University.

AND last but certainly not least, we rejoice with Sr. Jeannie Humphries, who will make her profession of final vows at Notre Dame Church in Malone, NY, on August 28. Jeanie, a graduate of Mount Saint Ursula and CNR, with a master’s in Special Education from the latter, is a Reading Specialist at Flanders Elementary School in Malone.

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Sr. Madeline Welch, attorney at The Community Legal Aid Society of Delaware, organized “The Immigrant Victim of Violence Conference” under the auspices of The Immigrants Council of Delaware. The almost 200 participants at the University of Delaware on April 22 heard from three abused Hispanic women, fearful of deportation and/or of losing their children if they reported the abuse. The principal speaker, Laura Dawkins, Esq., of the US Department of Homeland Security, explained the regulations being drafted by her office to protect immigrants in the implementation of the Violence Against Women Act (passed in 2000).

On April 24 The Westchester Chamber Orchestra, in collaboration with New Rochelle’s Songcatchers, performed pieces by eleven children from its Composers of the Future Program. Sr. Beth Dowd mentors the composers, founded and conducts the Songcatchers, whose wonderful spring concert took place on May 16 at Holy Family Chapel, CNR.

The North American Conference of Associates and Religious (NACAR) was held at Iona College, New Rochelle, on May 28-30. The Conference was attended by a number of Ursulines and Associates from Malone, NY, Westchester County, and Wilmington, DE. Edwina Gateley, founder of the Volunteer Movement, was the lively and inspirational keynote speaker.
**From the Annals - 50 Years Ago**

In 1954 plans were being drawn and funds being raised for the extension of the building at Mount Saint Ursula Academy, Bedford Park in the Bronx. In 2005 the Academy will celebrate its 150th anniversary!

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**FIRE AT BEDFORD PARK CONVENT**

On the afternoon of May 12, 2004, lightning struck the Bedford Park Convent. Fortunately, the sisters were all at dinner on the first floor when the school security guard alerted them to the smoke coming through the roof. Eight fire companies immediately responded and doused the fire. The roof was damaged and there were disruptions in elevator and telephone service, lighting, and access to the Internet in the Speech Center, the school, and the convent. In the area affected, all but one of the nuns, whose room was seriously damaged by smoke and water, have moved back to their quarters. Sr. Sheila Murphy, superior at Bedford Park, says that “the sisters are all doing very well and they are grateful for the many expressions of concern and offers of assistance.... God is with us all.”

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**R.I.P.**

**Sr. Mary Agnes Steadman**, who celebrated 70 years as a professed Ursuline in 1997, died on April 26 at the Marian Residence. Born in White Stone, South Carolina, in 1907, Mary Agnes (then Isla Mary) was educated by the Ursulines in South Carolina, and entered the community in 1924. She spent many years teaching in grade schools in Carolina, Bethesda, Maryland, and the Bronx. On retiring from teaching, she trained as a nurses’ aid, served as a school nurse, a tutor, and as an instructor in needle work for a senior citizens’ group. Retaining her charming southern accent, and alert until almost the very end, Agnes went gracefully to her death.

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A thank you event for donors was held at the Marian Residence on Sunday, May 16. After celebrating the Eucharist, guests and Ursulines enjoyed brunch and one another’s company indoors and out.

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** Announcement**

The Development Office is now accepting contributions by credit card.
Please help to ensure the continuance of our service by remembering the Ursuline Sisters in your will.

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