



Talking with some of her students is newly appointed principal of Our Lady of Mercy High School Sister Nancy Thompson (left). The students are (from left) Stephanie Morrison of Orchard Lake, Teri Lavey of Orchard Lake and Colleen McMaster of Farmington Hills. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Mercy High's new principal spreads humanistic spirit

From the sound of young women's laughter in the hallways to the cozy informality of the principal's office, it's obvious that things have changed over the years at Mercy High School.

The fastest addition to the Roman Catholic girls' school in Farmington Hills is its new principal, Sr. Nancy Thompson.

Her job is to look after the school's record enrollment of 1,300 students from 35 Michigan cities. Like the school, Sr. Nancy is living through an era of change in the Catholic Church.

For Mercy High's new principal, the changes lead to a more humanistic religion.

From matters of dress to a new freedom in religious life, the changes are putting an end to rigidity and regimentation in the church, according to Sr. Nancy.

But some of the changes which most affect religious life are not readily visible.

"The most drastic changes have been the interior changes," Sr. Nancy said. "The freedom we have now, the interior freedom to make choices has been drastic," she said of convent life.

"I have freedom over choices which affect my own life. There were no personal choices before. They were made for me.

"I PRESENTLY make the choices in conjunction with my religious community," she said as she sat in her sunny, brightly colored office at Mercy High.

With the new freedom extending to choice in dress, Sr. Nancy has noticed that "the girls and students sense a humaneness about us that they didn't experience in the days of regimentation and rigidity."

Another way in which the old regimentation has broken down can be seen in the school's rules.

"We treat the young girls as adults and we get the same response. We don't have many discipline problems," she said.

"I hope we've had some heart-learning as well as intellectual learning," she said.

Sr. Nancy has 19 years of watching students gain both types of knowledge. She taught middle and high school students for most of her years as a member of the Sisters of Mercy.

In middle schools, she taught language arts. When she moved to high school teaching, she took over the religious study classes.

She took a break between teaching and assuming her new duties at Mercy High by acting as a personnel counselor for her convent.

AS A PERSONNEL worker, she encouraged young women interested in becoming nuns to first find a vocational direction and gain some college and work experience before entering the convent.

She entered the convent in 1950, when she was 18-years-old. The oldest of three children who grew up on the northwest side of Detroit, she found family support for her decision to enter the Sisters of Mercy.

"My family was basically pleased," she remembers with a smile.

"I was called to this. I felt I wanted to devote myself to the spiritual life, the service of others and to seek a life of prayer," she said.

"I thought that love has to be experienced in a more universal way than if I had been married with a family."

"I am free to be more universal," she said.

The new sense of freedom extends to her plans for the high school.

She is aware that the outlook of the students has changed.

"The girls are more conscious of women's roles. Perhaps more than at a coed school. They're less distracted here," she said.

MORE THAN 90 per cent of the Mercy graduates head on toward college careers, she said.

To help them toward that goal, the school is trying to offer more individualized learning.

"That doesn't mean one teacher, one student. We want students to learn how they study best and to capitalize on it."

Since statistics show that half of the wages in the United States are earned by persons in some aspect of communications, the school is trying to make its students aware of opportunities in various fields.

But the school is not entirely without its problems.

Although discipline is not a major problem, counselors have handled problems with drugs and discipline, according to the principal.

The school's dean of students helps the young women to learn to solve their problems, and students contract to change their behavior. If the contract isn't fulfilled, then the student's parents are called.

"We have a more humanistic approach to discipline," Sr. Nancy said.

BUT THE MOST prevalent discipline problem in the school is noise and a messy lunchroom. Part of the record is attributed to the teachers at Mercy.

"The staff gives a good deal of attention to the students. And the students do notice. There is a rapport between teachers and students," Sr. Nancy said.

That rapport extends to allowing the students to explore new territory.

A few years ago the school's interior design class wanted to knock over part of a wall from a classroom as part of their yearly project.

Each year, the class is charged with improving the most poorly designed room in the school. Since the rule book failed to prohibit, the class wanted to broaden a doorway.

Hot lunch program is launched

Farmington School District's elementary school hot lunch program, mandated by the state to start Oct. 1, began on a day-to-day basis Oct. 30. Delay in the local program is due to the awaited installation of a central freezer at Larkshire School, from which the 14 other elementary schools will be served.

Installation was promised by Franco Food Equipment, Inc. of Detroit by the target date," said William Prisk, assistant superintendent of finance and services for the district.

"We have not yet been informed that the equipment is here and ready to be placed in the Larkshire building even though we have inquired several times."

"Until installation is accomplished, we can only accommodate a two to three day supply of frozen lunches. Thereafter, we will be able to store two to three weeks supply at one time."

The state mandated hot lunches for all schools to begin in the 1978 school year to accord with federal guidelines.

Farmington's secondary schools already prepare hot meals in individual school kitchens — a program that was dropped in the elementary schools several years ago.

Farmington's Board of Education elected the Type A pre-packaged lunch in a taste sampling of federally approved school lunches last July. Meals are provided through Morton Company and are delivered from its Charlottesville, Va., plant.

INITIAL MENUS indicate that the children are happy with lunches they received last week. Meals both adhere to standards requested by parents surveyed last spring in balance and nutrition and include foods that "kids like."

Served in the first week were entrees of hero sandwiches, spaghetti and meat balls, fried chicken and breaded fish sticks, accompanied by a vegetable, milk and occasional desserts of fruit or fruit-slices. Because all pre-packaged lunches include utensils, clean-up is minimal.

To transport the meals every morning to each school, the district has purchased a frozen food truck. Purchase of other equipment at schools was only done on a replacement basis, Prisk noted, as schools already have small freezers in which to store a day's supply and convection ovens for reconstituting lunches.

"We have hired kitchen managers for each school for a three-hour period," Prisk continued. "They receive the foods, heat it at the proper time and return ovens due to absences of children who presently are making known their desire to buy the hot lunch in a daily room check. Overages are returned to the central freezer to be stored until that menu recycles again."

"We will eventually operate on a 30-day cycle with no menu repeated in a 10-day period and only occasional meal duplication in the 30-day cycle," Prisk said.

Parents have the option of electing the 60 cent meal for their children or

children may still brown bag-it. The district had anticipated serving 2,500 hot meals the first week and was surprised when more than half of the 5,000 total elementary school population bought hot lunches. An average of 1,000 meals were served the first week.

PRISK ADMITS that the program is presenting some logistical problems and that much is yet to be learned from the day-by-day experience. But, he says that the "food is good," having eaten lunch with the elementary children every day last week.

To provide the service, the district incurred a cost of about \$30,000 which is reimbursable by the state. Lunches cost more than the 60 cents parents pay but 15 cents of the meal served daily qualifies for federal subsidies.

A breakfast program also has been mandated by the state but its implementation has been postponed to a later date, Prisk said.

THE INSIDE * ANGLE

YOU DON'T HAVE to be an old china hand to appreciate the show sponsored by the Birmingham Chapter of the Michigan Federation of China Painters on Nov. 17-18 at the First United Methodist Church, 3312 Grand River, Farmington. Demonstrations of the craft will be presented at the show.

ESTATE PLANNING will be the subject of a Farmington Community Library presentation at 7 p.m. Nov. 8. Besides answering questions concerning estates, an attorney will be present to help each person prepare a simple will. The library at 23500 Liberty has questionnaires which will help you participate in the program. For reservations, call 474-7770.

COUNT DRACULA and the Red Cross sound as if they could be carrying on as fierce a competitive battle as the big three auto makers. They're both out for blood. But the Count and the Red Cross have joined forces to collect all those red corpuscles. From 2-4 p.m. Tuesday, the vampire and the blood center will conduct a drive for volunteers at the Red Cross Oak Park Blood Center, 25900 Greenfield, Oak Park. Inside angles suggest that donors look a little closer at old Drac. It's really Jose Greco behind the fangs. Greco is appearing in "The Passion of Dracula" (what else?) from Nov. 8-18 at the Birmingham Theatre.

TRAVELING TO ISRAEL? Then listen to Eliram Spektor, district manager of El Al Israel Airlines talk to Edwin G. Shifrin, moderator of Jewish Community Highlights at 9:45 a.m. Nov. 12 on WJKB-TV, Channel 2.

STRIKE UP THE BAND. Harrison High School's Band-O-Rama will be at the high school auditorium at 8 p.m., Nov. 9. The performance marks the final appearance of the marching band and the season's initial appearance of the concert and symphony bands. The program is the music department's show of appreciation for community support of the Tag Day fund drive. Tags may be presented at the door for free admission to the concert. Additional tickets can be obtained at the door for \$1.25 for adults and 75 cents for students. The band will feature some selections from their half-time shows. The final appearance of the band away from home will be on Nov. 12 in the Pontiac Silverdome when they precede the Detroit Lions football game. LA figures the Lions need all the help they can get.

PARENTS AND TEACHERS will get together from 8:30-9:30 p.m. on Nov. 15 at Alameda Elementary School. The Parent-Teacher's Association and the Farmington Education Association will meet to discuss five topics in a mini-seminar format. Parent-teacher conferences, middle school issues, parents homework and study tips will be discussed. The FEA and student testing and evaluation will be on the agenda. Refreshments will be served.

BREAK OUT THE GOOD LUCK PIECES. The Farmington Jaycees are presenting a Millionaire Party at 7:30 p.m. midnight on Nov. 11 in the Farmington Community Center, 24706 Farmington Road. For a \$4 advance donation or \$6 donated at the door, each player will receive \$1 million in play chips. There is a limit of \$500 in value for all winnings per person. Beer, wine and pop are available. Persons must be 18-years-old to play. For information, call Ken at 553-8329. LA would love to go but it has a problem with its good luck piece. Angles couldn't bear to separate the foot from the rabbit so he carries the entire bunny with him in a cage. Look, don't knock it until you've tried it.

THERE WILL BE an Oneg Shabbat at 8:45 p.m. Nov. 17 at the Labor Zionist building, 2655 Middlebelt Road, Farmington Hills. Laible Hoffmiz is the guest speaker. Hoffmiz, formerly of Detroit, lives in Israel and is a longtime advocate of the Labor Zionist movement. He is a former director of the Detroit Labor Zionist Alliance and has written "The Other Side of Israel." There is no charge. Refreshments will be served.

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF CALLIGRAPHERS will conduct its November meeting at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 20 in Room 7 of the Peison Center, 3825 Seven Mile near Farmington Road in Livonia. The workshop will feature bookmaking. Anyone wishing to attend is asked to send \$5 entry fee to Mary Ellen Doyle, 1997 Hunters Ridge, Bloomfield Hills, 48013 by Nov. 13.

HUNTERS BENT ON DISCOVERING NATURE'S OFFERINGS should be aware of the Recreational Trespass Act. One provision of the law prohibits hunting, fishing, operation of a snowmobile, off-road recreational vehicle or other motorized vehicle on someone else's property without their written consent. That consent is necessary whether the land is posted or enclosed. The only time consent isn't necessary is if a hunter enters property for the sole purpose of retrieving his hunting dog. If a hunter loses his dog, he may enter property without prior permission but he can't carry a gun and must leave empty if the owner or tenant asks him to go. If the hunter carries a firearm while retrieving his dog, a court must decide whether the hunter was getting his dog or intended to hunt.

DEADLINES Material for the Inside Angle, 22170 West Nine Mile Southfield, 48024, should be typed and include a name and phone number. Items become the property of the Farmington Observer. Photographs can't be used.



Reflections of a Christmas past... tender-as-the-night sleepthings, romantically reminiscent of the 40's.

Remembering...that bygone old-fashioned era when nothing could be too exhilarating, nor too extravagant. Recreated here by MAIDENFORM, slinky lace trimmed gown, \$19 and matching button-front coat, \$28. Both in burgundy or body blush. P-S-M-L Hudson's New Reflections Sleepwear.

hudson's the Christmas store