

COMMUNITY LIFE

Cloistered nuns make a habit of denial

Past the visitor's room, everything is frugal and simple. There are no radios. The only newspaper is a small clip from the Wall Street Journal.

Of course, there are no restaurants. No movies. Television is limited to religious airings, such as the Pope's visit to New York City earlier this year.

Even the food at meals is sparse, sometimes porridge, a baked potato or leftovers. They don't visit with one another and while they eat, scripture passages and interpretations are read. A picnic on the grounds is considered an exciting

outing. A bleak and dreary existence? Not according to the nuns who talked to the Observer during two recent visits.

"The life is a paradox," said Sister Mary Thomas who wears a beeper on her belt near a large brown rosary. Ironically, the touch of modern technology helps eliminate an intercom system and maintain the quiet.

"All those negatives," she continued, "The materialities are not what makes you happy in the long run. It's being at peace with yourself and God. The things that we give up are

not the essentials. People can't believe we can be so happy in this life, which is not to say we don't have trials, but because we are growing in the Lord, the joy comes in the midst of the sacrifice."

They're dressed in full white and black habits. Their smiles are peaceful and constant as they tell about their lives in the monastery and their reasons for choosing the Dominican cloistered order. Sister Mary Paul had a playful smile and a relaxed manner as she explained how she never imagined she would become a nun. She entered the monastery in 1983.

"A lot of people say: 'Why are you locking yourself up?' I felt a possible career, husband and family," she said. "There really is a calling. It's that fundamental faith, belief and transcended values that make it possible."

"When I was in high school I didn't hear a lot of encouragement to become a nun. I'm an oddity among my friends. I was a typical product of my generation. I was at the university. I enjoyed parties and nightlife."

And she loved pretty clothes. But

See HUNS, 16A



DORIS AUSTERBERG

Whooo is an OWL?

An 'OWL' is anyone who is interested in the welfare of mid-life and older women. I first learned about the OWL organization over 16 years ago in The Green Pointe News, shortly after becoming a young widow with five children.

I was so impressed with the organization's goals of equality and security for women whose once bright, secure future suddenly becomes bleak and scary, that I joined the east side chapter.

Not long afterward, when I moved to Farmington Hills to be nearer my mother, a newly married daughter, and two younger daughters attending Michigan State University, I sought out the Farmington chapter of OWL, where I've been a member ever since.

Although 'OWL' is a clever abbreviation for Older Women's League, there is a misconception that it is an organization for older women only. Nothing could be further from the truth.

OWL is both intergender (there are many male members) and intergenerational. It is this intergenerational awareness that is crucial to achievement of OWL's goals, for OWL needs the interest and energies of young women to secure a future of dignity and well-being for them as they reach midlife and beyond.

Presently, a woman's marital status is a predictor of retirement income, and generally, older married women are the most economically secure. However, for far too many American women, retirement signals the beginning of deprivation after a lifetime of hard work.

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SILVANO LEMIERRE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Life of prayer: Cloistered Dominican nuns at the Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament sing during Mass. A wall of glass separates them from the public seated on the other side of the altar.

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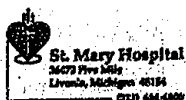
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