

Even as a child, MU president saw Felician life as 'ideal'

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER
hgallagher@oe.homedomain.net

By the time Sister Rose Marie Kujawa was in high school she knew what she wanted to be.

"I was very familiar with the Felician Sisters, they lived across the street and our family assisted them in many ways," she said. "When I was growing up, the sisters didn't even own cars. If they needed to go to a doctor my mother would drive them. I was familiar with the sisters, familiar with the life and felt it was an ideal way to spend one's life."

When Sister Rose Marie is officially inaugurated April 20 as Madonna University's sixth president, that "ideal life" will have taken her to 23 countries and included a life of service as a teacher of mathematics and as a college administrator. She helped take a small Livonia college to university status with an international presence and helped institute a variety of innovative programs.

Sister Rose Marie has been serving as president since July 2001 following the death of Sister Francilene Van de Vyver.

For Sister Rose Marie public service is all part of being a Felician.

"When our order was founded it was to help children and elderly women in 1855," she said. "We exist for service but we are faith group. We talk about being the active and contemplative group. We spend a goodly amount of time in prayer, but our active hours are meant to serve the public. Primarily it takes the form of education and health care."

Sister Rose Marie's relationship with Madonna goes back to her own college days. She received her bachelor's degree in mathematics at Madonna College in 1966 when it had only 300 students. She received a master's degree in mathematics at Wayne State University and her doctorate in higher education/administration from Wayne in 1979.

"My first assignment was at Bishop



Happy to serve: Sister Rose Marie Kujawa is ready to make her mark as Madonna University's sixth president.

Borgess High School for six years in Redford and I absolutely loved it," she said.

In 1972 she was assigned to serve as assistant principal at Livonia's Ladywood High School. In 1976 she was invited to come to Madonna as an administrator and part-time math teacher.

Sharing the 'aha'

Sister Rose Marie said math came easy to her and she took pride in teaching.

"I like the logic of mathematics and when I began teaching it I liked it even more, loved it really," she said. "I liked the interaction with the students, the Aha! experience that kids get when they catch on to a concept."

At Madonna she taught the first computer classes, hooking up by modem to

a central computer in Minneapolis and teaching the now ancient computer languages FORTRAN 4 and Basic.

"That didn't last long, because we needed more administrative help at the time," she said.

In 1979 Sister Rose Marie began 17 years as first academic dean and then academic vice president as the college moved toward university status. During those years the university moved from 25 to 50 undergraduate programs, instituted graduate studies and created six colleges.

Sister Rose Marie served as chairwoman of the "University study" committee that studied other institutions with university status to which Madonna compared favorably. In 1991 regional and state accrediting bodies recognized the new status.

Working with faculty members, Sister Rose Marie instituted a number of innovative programs in the Felician tradition.

"Our thinking was that we are here to offer an education but we are here to offer service, we expect our students to have that mindset to go back in the community, assist other members of the community, to enrich the community," she said. "We are a liberal arts college and we say we educate them for life."

Going international

Many of Madonna's programs developed from suggestions by faculty and area residents. They included such innovations as a degree in sign language, nursing programs and graduate business programs. One such suggestion took Madonna to international status.

Sister Rose Marie received a letter from a principal in Mount Clemens asking whether Madonna would consider creating a graduate education program in Taiwan, where the country's schools needed administrators with advanced degrees.

"At first when I saw the letter I thought it was a request for a diploma mill and I threw it in the waste basket," she said.

Instead, she met with the letter writer and a new phase began for Madonna overseas.

The Madonna board approved the idea and the school began teaching groups of 20 to 24 students in graduate education programs. Madonna faculty were sent to Taipei and later to Shanghai in mainland China. Plans are to institute a similar program in Beijing. Graduates are asked to attend commencement ceremonies in the United States.

Madonna has also made an effort to encourage a diverse student body, drawing students from local African American and Latino communities. The 4,000-student university also has representatives from 28 foreign countries.

Sister Rose Marie has replaced a pop-

ular and beloved predecessor and an old friend, Sister Francilene spent her last years battling cancer.

"I'd known her since high school, we went to the same high school ... and we both entered the Felician sisterhood," Sister Rose Marie said.

Sister Francilene had been one of those who invited Sister Rose Marie to come to Madonna, and for 17 years they shared the same suite of offices.

"She was a leader in her own right, very approachable, good sense of humor. I traveled with her many times. When you know someone you take them for granted. I took it for granted that she would be a good, kind person, after all she was a Felician," Sister Rose Marie said with a wide grin.

Planning the future

Sister Rose Marie began her tenure just as the economy began to sour and she has been spending a lot of time dealing with development and fundraising issues.

She said the college has a good five-year plan but needs to develop a new master plan for the 45-year-old school.

"We are inviting representatives to discuss options for Madonna University, whether we need a new building, whether we want to revamp, what we want to do with sports," she said.

Endowment interest is down and some pledges have been put on hold because of the economy but Sister Rose Marie is optimistic.

"We are built on faith here and always turn to prayer. In some sense it has been a good year, we located new foundations that have found our programs worthy of their consideration," she said.

Madonna University has planned a month's worth of activities to mark the installation of the new president. On April 20, Sister Rose Marie's three married sisters, her married brother and many of her 22 nieces and nephews will be on hand when she receives the blessing of Bishop Moses Anderson as Madonna's new president.

Students who tampered with coffee face hearing on charges

BY PAUL R. PACE
STAFF WRITER
ppace@oe.homedomain.net

Four Dunckel Middle School students face a hearing on charges that they attempted to place a poison or harmful substance in food.

The students allegedly put a pain reliever in teacher's coffee at the school in March.

According to Farmington Hills Police

Chief William Dwyer, a referee from the Oakland County Circuit Court Family Division authorized the petition to charge the students involved in the March 4 incident.

Police said the sixth-grade teacher was alerted by a student in her class that two girls had put something in her drink. The teacher talked to school administrators who subsequently interviewed the girls. One of them was still

in possession of a crushed Advil pain reliever tablet, Dwyer said.

The teacher was tested for consumption of harmful substances but results proved negative, police said.

Two other girls are being charged because they were involved in planning the alleged action, Dwyer said.

The drink was tested by Michigan State Police and results showed it contained the over-the-counter pain reliever.

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A pre-trial hearing on the potential felony charge will be held April 22 at the court's Family Division. The students range in age from 11 to 13.

According to Sue Zurvalce, assistant superintendent of staff and community services at the school district, three of the four girls have voluntarily withdrawn from the district and are attending other schools.

The fourth girl remains suspended and a hearing has not been set for her reinstatement.

"The teacher was very upset by their actions," Dwyer said. "She's a highly respected teacher by the students."

He added, "This has been treated as a very serious matter by the police department and we hope a lesson can be learned that actions such as these can have some serious consequences."

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