



Chat Room
Kathleen O'Donohue

Don't lose holiday's meaning

Amid the busyness of the holiday season, the true meaning of Christmas is frequently lost as we race from store to store in the pursuit of gifts that all-too-often are neither needed, wanted, nor appreciated by the recipients.

In a society where many of us have so much more than we need, I believe our giving, while an admirable act, may be slightly misplaced, because there are so many others truly in need who receive little or nothing.

While we have warm homes, full stomachs and stylish clothes, it is almost inconceivable that there are people in our very midst who don't eat every day, don't have cars, medical insurance or heat for their homes. There are those who must decide between paying rent, buying groceries or prescription medications.

Others face unsafe neighborhoods for their children and inadequate education. As hard as it is to believe, some poor souls sleep in cardboard boxes, and many mentally ill fight their personal demons alone, wandering the streets.

Each Christmas season at my church, my eyes brim with tears and I am profoundly moved as I survey nearly every square inch of space in the sanctuary filled with beautifully wrapped gifts for those less fortunate. I am blessed to know many generous people who never cease giving to others and don't count the cost.

The charity of religious and benevolent organizations is highly visible this time of year, yet I ponder how different life on earth would be if each of us individually sought opportunities to give to those who really need the help all year round.

To this end, here are a few gift suggestions for items requiring little in terms of forethought, money or gift wrap yet warming the hearts of both giver and recipient long after:

How sublime it can be to give from the heart to those who can't give back - and won't. To give without expectation, no strings attached.

A wonderful gift is often our most precious possession: Our time. Give it with patience.

Practice the words, "I love you," and "I'm sorry," then use liberally as needed. They get easier to say each time they're vocalized. Smiles cost nothing but go a long way.

Flugs are great gifts, and I don't know anyone who's ever rejected a promise of prayer.

Comfort those in sorrow. Visit the lonely. How much more meaningful are these "unseen" gifts than material ones.

Serve someone else, and let your kids do it, too. There are plenty of seniors who could use a visit, a snowy driveway shoveled or a simple gift. Kids should be taught this kind of giving from a very young age.

Frequently give the gift of encouragement. What does it cost to tell someone else they're doing a nice job? We all could use a few more pats on the back. Hope costs nothing to give but is always appreciated.

Join a cause and fight for it. Develop passion and let your children see you are anything but a "whatever" person.

Reconciliation is a great



JIM JACOFILO | OBSERVER

Sister Clare Marie Klein and Meghan Madigan at afternoon chapel at the Felician Convent in Livonia. Sister Clare Marie is a novice and Meghan Madigan is a postulant.

BY DIANE HANSON
CORRESPONDENT

Becoming a nun was the furthest thing from Dana Becker's mind. The 38-year-old New Yorker was a successful Park Avenue lawyer and always thought she would marry and have a family.

"I liked my life the way it was," she said. "There was just one thing that was missing."

Dana found the missing link and, just weeks ago, joined the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist in Ann Arbor.

"This is heaven on earth," she said. For Ann Klein, thoughts turned to the possibility of becoming a nun at a very young age.

Home-schooled and one of 10 children in a devout Catholic family, Ann began nursing studies at Madonna University at the age of 15. Gathering information on the Felician sisters there for a friend who was discerning a vocation, Ann found herself drawn to the order. "I knew that I wanted to enter a community with Eucharistic Adoration, a strong devotion to Mary, and complete allegiance to the church," she said. "Plus, I loved the Felician's Franciscan spirit."

Two years ago, at the age of 17, Ann entered the Felician's Livonia Province and is now novice Sister Clare Marie.

Sister Jackie Laster, a temporary professed, and Rose Nickson, a candidate, are both African-American grandmothers in their 50s who have been divorced and received annulments. With a strong desire to serve the poor, they are the newest members of the Sisters of Mercy, headquartered in Farmington Hills.

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RELIGIOUS RESURGENCE

After a 40-year dearth in vocations, these women are part of a renewed and growing interest in religious life that has become evident locally in recent years.

And nowhere has it become more evident than in a new Dominican order in Ann Arbor, undoubtedly one of the fastest-growing orders in the United States.

The Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist was established in New York in 1997. The four founding sisters came to Ann Arbor that same year at the request of the Lansing bishop to staff and administer the Spiritus Sanctus academies, begun by Domino's Pizza founder Thomas Monaghan. There are now four of the K-through-eighth-grade schools, including one in Plymouth Township.

It wasn't long before the smiling sisters in their flowing white habits began to attract attention and new members. The growing community moved into a new 28-room motherhouse on Warren Road in Ann Arbor, February 1998.

"By spring 1999 it was too small," said Sister Joseph Andrew Bogdanowicz, one of the founding members and vocations director for the community. "We consider it quite miraculous."

With the addition of the seven new postulants in September, the sisters now number 38 and are bursting at their residential seams. Plans are in the works to build a new 100-room motherhouse.

"We need to make the house about

WHAT A LIFE!

Religious sisters are making a comeback



PAUL HIRSCHMANN | OBSERVER

Mother Assumpta shares a laugh with the Dominican Sisters.

three times the size of the one we are in now," said Sister Joseph Andrew. "My e-mail is flooded daily with women inquiring about religious life and we will be at 100 in no time."

The sisters also offer several retreats each year - a 24-hour, no-frills camp-out on a school gym floor with the sisters there to pray with and answer questions.

It was at just such a retreat that Sister Teresa Benedicta, 22, knew she had come home. Becoming a sister was not even on her radar screen while growing up in New Mexico. "I always wanted to get married and I was going to have lots of kids and home school them, just like my mom," she said.

She was 17 and attending a Dominican retreat in Nashville before she saw a nun in a habit for the first time.

"It was also the first time that I had seen sisters who were young and happy," she admitted. "It made such an impression on me. I thought: That's what I want to be."

Nineteen when she entered the convent three years ago, she took her first profession of vows in June.

NEW GROWTH

Sister Mary DeSales Herman, vocations director for the Felician Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Province in Livonia, remembers when vocations were abundant. She had just graduated from high school and was one of 10 who entered on Sept. 8, 1948.

"My desire to become a sister grew from the sisters who taught me," she said. The sisters' joyful warmth and caring inspired many young women,

and classes often numbered 25 to 30, recalled Sister DeSales.

Novice and Postulant Director Sister Mary Anita Marie Louise Taddonio said there were some 800 Sisters in the Livonia Province in the 1960s. Now there are about 215 - 100 sisters at the motherhouse, including about 50 in the infirmary, and another 115 out in the community.

"But we have consistently had new vocations almost every year in our province," she said. "This year there are two new postulants."

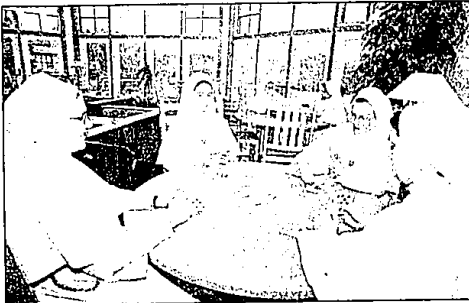
And eight women from various walks of life ranging from the ages of 20 to in their 40s recently came to the Felician motherhouse for a discernment weekend.

PLEASE SEE SISTERS, C5



JIM JACOFILO | OBSERVER

Working on an Advent wreath, from left, Sister Mary Veronica Golbinac and Deborah Ambrose. Sister Mary Veronica is a Felician novice and Deborah Ambrose is a Felician postulant.



PAUL HIRSCHMANN | OBSERVER

Sister Maria Frassati, from left, Sister Mary Margaret, Sister Elizabeth Ann and Sister John Paul play a hand of Liverpool Rummy in the recreation room at the Dominican convent in Ann Arbor.

Harrison High students staffing new credit union

BY SUY BUCK
STAFF WRITER

Kathryn Chrzanoski, an accounting teacher, will head up the Green 'N' Gold Credit Union program at Harrison High School.

The program is patterned after LOC Credit Union's eight-year-old program at East Middle School in Farmington Hills.

"I felt bringing a credit union to our school was worthwhile for our students," Chrzanoski said.

Last summer she served an

externship at LOC in Farmington, where she learned the fundamentals of credit union management.

"This is bringing the world of work to my classroom," Chrzanoski said. "When I presented the ideas to my students, they seemed interested."

It also strengthens school-community collaboration, she said. Deborah Mashinske, director of marketing for LOC, interviewed students for positions like branch manager and assistant branch managers.

"I personally enjoyed interview-

ing all of you students and I am completely amazed by your maturity and your scope of knowledge," Mashinske said at the Dec. 5 grand opening.

She interviewed each of 22 students who were interested in positions with the student "satellite office" for 10 minutes each. She looked for traits like responsibility, honesty and integrity.

"You can just tell, when you talk to students," Mashinske said.

The branch manager is Elina Moreyn. Ekaterina Andrievskaya and Derrell Slaughter are assis-

tant managers.

"We want to provide the students with quality and serve them with politeness and kindness," Moreyn said.

Students will be able to bank at the school during lunch hour. "There will be three shifts of tellers," said Laura Myers, LOC member services supervisor. "Students run the credit union. I show up with the materials and stand back."

The average balance among student accounts at East Middle School is \$300. About 180 of the

Kids and money: Some tips on what to do to help your son or daughter from the credit union. Page C5.

school's 300 students participate; a minimum deposit of \$1 is required to open an account. The East program is run by teacher Marie Smerigan. Teacher Gloria Twendy started the program.

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