

She foresees movement

Teacher turns priest

By KATIE KERWIN

The Rev. Mattson's decision to enter the Episcopal seminary to train for the priesthood took a little more faith than the same decision required of most of the rest of the seminary class.

Sherry Mattson took the first step toward priesthood before women were being ordained.

"I could see a movement toward it," she said. "I trusted and went."

Her confidence was well-placed. She left her job as a Cranbrook teacher to enter Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Tex. in 1976. The Episcopal church ordained its first women priests on Jan. 1, 1977.

Ordained last month, Ms. Mattson works part-time as a deacon at St. Stephen's in Troy. She will begin as an Oakland University chaplain in August.

"The people here have been great," she said. "They're very helpful and welcoming. There are over 100 women priests in the Episcopal church now, she said. About a dozen are in southeast Michigan and parishioners are somewhat accustomed to the idea, she said.

Rev. Carl Sayers, the pastor here, has been very supportive of the ordination of women for a long time and he has wanted to have a woman here," she said.

"I'M LEARNING the ropes right now," Ms. Mattson said. "In the Sunday services there are certain things for deacons to do, like reading the Gospel and helping in administration of communion."

"And Carl (Sayers) thinks preaching is very important. He wants me to preach on a regular basis, which I've been doing."

Her duties also include "some parish calling, some counseling, preparation for marriage and things like that." She plans to conduct Bible study in the fall.

Her work as an ecumenical chaplain at Oakland University begins next week.

"I'm not sure how that job will shape up yet," she said. "But I had a year of field work at University of Texas in

college chaplaincy, so the chaplaincy here was kind of natural for that." A summer course at the World Council of Churches ecumenical institute in Switzerland will also stand her in good stead at her new job, Rev. Mattson said.

Reaction to her career choice has been mixed, she said. Both support and dismay have come from unexpected quarters.

"It's been good to see the kind of support I've had," she said. "I think Michigan is much more open to women."

Other ordained women she knows have not had it so good. "I have friends in Texas who are having a very hard time."

Two other women graduated from the seminary in Ms. Mattson's class this spring and several others graduated during her three years there.

"Most of the students there hadn't dealt with the issue of women's ordination," she said. "There was some negative reaction." But although the change stirred some controversy in the conservative region, she said no hostility was directed at her personally.

"In three years I was there, several people, from having women in their classes, decided it wasn't such a bad thing after all."

BUT SOLID OPPOSITION from a conference of Episcopal women caught her off guard, Ms. Mattson said. Those women were rabidly against the ordination of women. That surprised her. I wasn't prepared for so much negative feedback from the women at that Christian convention."

The parish to which she belonged for two years in Austin also had difficulty accepting her as a potential priest, she said. She asked three times to be allowed to do field work there, but they always put her off with some excuse, she said.

Most of her friends are seminarians or church members and take her ordination in stride, she said. Young men she meets now for the first time find her ordination "sort of intimidating," she added.

"None of my family is Episcopalian," she said.

an," she said. "They're adjusting to this," she added, laughing.

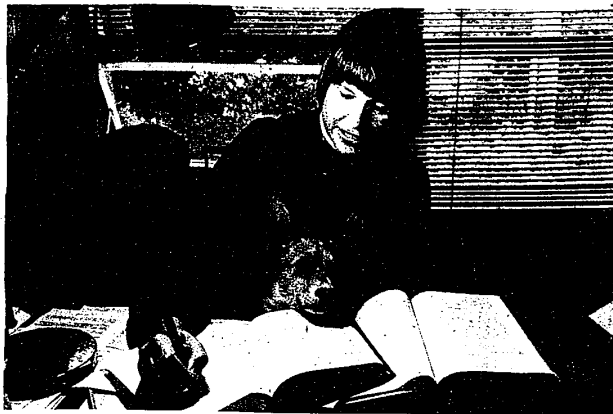
"I joined the church when I was 16. They didn't know quite what to make of it. When I decided to go into the seminary, they really didn't know what to make of it."

"But they were at my ordination and very proud," she continued. "A lot of their friends came, too. I was very happy to see them all there."

Ms. Mattson grew up in Bloomfield Hills. She taught at Brookside, one of the Cranbrook schools for four years after graduating from college.

"When I went to college and when I graduated, it still wasn't possible for a woman to do that, so I put it out of my mind until I thought I could do it," she said.

"But the idea was always in the back of my mind."



Rev. Sherry Mattson and her dog Colomba read over some hymn music together. (Staff photo by Charlie Kidd)

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