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Conference Recalls Ministry of Women Religious

On the very wet morning of October 28, 1995, Bishop Dominic A. Marconi, chairman of the Commission, welcomed the audience at the annual conference with a reminder of Pope John Paul II's comment a few weeks earlier at Giants Stadium that water is a sign of life. Those who attended the sessions on the last Saturday of October struggled through heavy downpours, but were rewarded with a stimulating examination of the varied ministry of women religious in New Jersey.

Sister Margherita Marchione, M.P.F., gave the keynote address, "The Catholic Experience in New Jersey: Women Religious." Professor Emerita of Italian Studies at Fairleigh Dickinson University, she recalled addressing an audience at Seton Hall on the seventh centenary of the birth of Dante when she focused on the *Inferno*, but promised that today she would concentrate on the *Paradiso*.

"Throughout the centuries," she asserted, "women have been the hope of the Church."

Looking strictly at the New Jersey scene, she recalled the foundation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Elizabeth in the 1850s as a direct response to the needs of the state's Catholics. In 1863 they were joined by the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis with hospitals in Hoboken, Jersey City and Newark. Eighteen seventy two saw the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St. Joseph and Sisters of St. Dominic. In 1875 came the Sisters of Christian Charity and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. By 1881, when the diocese of Trenton was established, they had been joined by the Little Sisters of the Poor, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, the Sisters of St. Francis and the Sisters of St. Benedict.

Thus the early range of ministries from education to health care to social work to contemplative prayer were firmly entrenched in the state. The influx of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe saw the arrival of numerous communities, such as the Felicians, Pallottine, the Daughters of Divine Charity and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.

Noting the post-Vatican II decline in the number of women religious in the state from over 5,600 in 1960 to about 4,000 now, Sister Margherita called each community to re-examine its particular charism in light of the constantly changing world situation, and to meet with confident hope each new challenge as it arises.

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Sister Mary Ellen Gleason, S.C., chairwoman of the Commission’s public programs committee and mistress of ceremonies at the conference, addresses the group.

Sister Lois Curry, O.P., then spoke on “Education on the Cutting Edge: From the First Plenary Council of Baltimore to Vatican II and Beyond.” Within the limited time available, she reviewed the educational work of women religious in New Jersey and called attention to the current need for adult education to shape an American Catholic culture that is both truly American and truly Catholic.

In 1880, nonetheless, Bishop Michael Corrigan of Newark established four Dominican Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Newark. In 1891 the Dominican Sisters settled in Union City, and in 1909 the Poor Clares were met with a cross-burning when they settled in Bordentown. Thereafter Discalced Carmelites established themselves in Morristown (1926), the Hermits of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at Chester (1976) and the Contemplative Sisters of the Good Shepherd at Trenton (1986).

These communities, with daughter houses founded later, Cebulka described as the “heart of the Church,” for we pay as little attention to them as we daily do to the workings of that muscle in our chests. And like the heart, the unremarked prayers of the contemplatives sustain the labors of everyone else. They are as aware, he said, of the problems of society as anyone else, because people with continued on page 3

Sister Catherine Francis, M.S.B.T., director of parish social ministry for the diocese of Paterson, concluded the morning activity with a review of the development of Catholic social work in New Jersey by spotlighting the ministry of four communities — the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent of New York, the Little Sisters of the Poor, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and the Trinitarians. She illustrated both the variety of services undertaken, and the development of social work as a profession over the past century and a half.

During the luncheon break many participants spent a good deal of time examining the exhibit devised by JoAnn Cotz of Seton Hall University Archives, who is also a member of the Commission. Numerous communities responded to the Commission’s request for data illustrating their ministries in New Jersey, and Ms. Cotz integrated these into an informative display which showed some of the history and much of the current activity of the communities.

After lunch, Reverend Peter Cebulka of the Diocese of Metuchen led off with “Wrapped in Silence: The Ministry of Contemplative Sisters in the State of New Jersey.” Several years ago Father Cebulka won the Archbishop Gerety History Prize for his study of the way New Jersey contemplative communities responded to the initiatives of Vatican II. Recently he returned to the 10 houses of contemplatives for this talk. He began by noting the ironic fact that the first female religious community in the original United States was the Discalced Carmelites who landed at Port Tobacco, Maryland in 1790. The demands of the active ministry were such during the early 19th century that few bishops were anxious to receive contemplative communities.

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Part of the audience at the October 28, 1995 conference.

Commission members (left to right) Reverend Augustine Curley, O.S.B., Monsignor Francis Seymour and Sister Irene Marie Richards, O.P. examine some of the materials on display.
Commission Member Honored

At its annual conference, held at the Woodrow Wilson School of Princeton University, on December 2, 1995, the New Jersey Historical Commission awarded its highest honor, the Richard J. Hughes Award, to Bernard Bush, a longtime member of the New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission. The award, named for the late governor and chief justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court, recognizes a career of outstanding accomplishments in the service of New Jersey history.

From 1969 to 1991 Bush was executive director of the New Jersey Historical Commission. During that time he established programs by which the commission earned national recognition — its newsletter and grant-in-aid programs — as well as its policy of supporting and presenting scholarship in a variety of media both old and new. Before his service with the Historical Commission, Bush was library director of the New Jersey Historical Society and chief of the state library’s History Section.

Bush headed a group of librarians who researched and edited New Jersey and the Negro, 1715-1966, a bibliographical tool which remains the only published guide to the historiography of New Jersey African-Americans. Bush also compiled the four-volume work The Laws of the Royal Colony of New Jersey, 1703-1775. He is currently president of the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey and a trustee of the Advocates for New Jersey History.

For the Catholic Historical Records Commission, Bush has been an active member of the publications committee and a splendid analyst of activities proposed as well as proponent of how to accomplish them.
Recent Publications of Interest

*New Jersey History*, the quarterly journal of the New Jersey Historical Society, devoted the Spring-Summer 1995 issue to the topic of Caribbean peoples in New Jersey. Since a large percentage of these immigrants are Catholic, the articles are interesting to all concerned with the history of Catholicism in the state.

Henry Bischoff's "Caribbean Peoples in New Jersey: An Overview" examines the history of migration from the Caribbean to this area, focusing on the years since 1940, when migration assumed large proportions.

Ana-Maria Diaz Stevens has adapted her keynote address to the Commission's 1994 conference at Plainsboro into "Postwar Migrants and Immigrants from the Caribbean: Their Impact Upon New Jersey Catholic History."

Yolanda Prieto, also one of the principal speakers at the 1994 conference, offers "Continuity or Change? Two Generations of Cuban-American Women." This article is based on her interviews with a group of older Cuban women and their daughters in Hudson County.

Isabel Nazario discusses how Caribbean immigrants have expressed traditional motifs of their arts and crafts in a radically different environment in "Moving through Memory: Caribbean Folk Arts in New Jersey."

Also of interest is Gloria Bonilla-Santiago's, *Organizing Puerto Rican Migrant Farm Workers: The Experience of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey*. This work is a sociological study analyzing the structural evolution of labor organizations serving migrant workers. It is published by Peter Lang Publishing Company of New York and Bern.

Archives Acquire Photograph Collection

The Seton Hall University Archives recently acquired the Daniel Zehnder Photo Collection of *The Catholic Advocate*. Packed in 30 containers of various sizes, the collection consists of several thousand 4" by 5" negatives and prints. Zehnder was a photographer for *The Catholic Advocate*, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Newark, from 1952 to 1990. The collection shows the wide variety of activities of the archbishops and the central organs of administration, as well as of the parishes, schools and other organizations and individuals.

Before becoming available to researchers, the collection needs to be organized, catalogued and conserved. The University Archives is seeking a qualified volunteer to begin ordering the materials at the Special Collections Center of Walsh Library. Anyone who is qualified and would like to help should contact JoAnn Cotz, Special Collections, Walsh Library, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey 07079.