

Good Shepherd Sisters devote lives to prayer, helping women

In a fast-paced age of cell phones, digital television and rampant consumerism, seven Contemplative Sisters of the Good Shepherd live quite different lives at their Baltimore convent. While others may spend their time making money, these humble sisters – most of them advanced in years – devote their lives to prayer. They consider it a form of work that has the power to transform the world. “We are always praying,” explained Sister Frances Marie Ellul, C.G.S., the order’s vocation director. “Our life is really a continuation of the Mass of the liturgy,” she said, noting that the sisters daily pray the Divine Office, lauds and evening prayer – in addition to personal meditations and community Mass.

A container filled with written prayer requests from across the state and beyond rests in one of the convent corridors. Every time the sisters pass it, Sister Frances Marie said, “we whisper to God in the secret heart that he might answer their requests.”

Founded 175 years ago by Sister Mary Euphrasia Pelletier in Angers, France, the Contemplative Sisters of the Good Shepherd take vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and zeal for souls.

There are 569 Contemplative Sisters of the Good Shepherd in 58 communities in 28 countries. There is also an active order of sisters called the Sisters of the Good Shepherd associated with the contemplative order.

The Good Shepherd Sisters arrived in Baltimore in 1864. The active order ministers at the Good Shepherd Center in Baltimore, a residential treatment facility for adolescent girls with emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Sister Frances Marie said the contemplative sisters are considered a “powerhouse of prayer.”

“You don’t get peace from the material things,” said Sister Frances Marie. “Joy has to come from the Holy Spirit.”

“We pray for the conversion of souls and especially for those who are served in our

active ministries," she said. The active Good Shepherd Sisters have a special worldwide outreach to prostitutes and battered wives, according to Sister Frances Marie. "We can't do anything without praying," she said. "It draws us to God."

Sister Barbara Beasley, R.G.S., provincial leader of the Good Shepherd Sisters, said her order continues to live out the charism of the founder.

"Such grace has flowed through folded fingers and bent heads, through utterances in community and whispers in the heart," said Sister Barbara. "In many ways, their lives of prayer may appear to be quite hidden, yet their impact on our world is immeasurable."

Sister Barbara said contemplative prayer brings healing to chaotic times.

"Our challenge is to listen to the promptings of the spirit, which comes with risks and growing pains," she said. "Yet when we act on those promptings, it always leads to a deeper life."