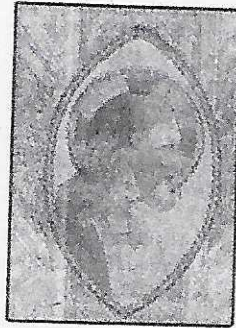


Spiritually bound and d



Tradi

Some Catholics spurned, criticized for preserving their religion's past

By Jennifer Howe
Of the Metropolitan Staff

They say they live for the traditional Catholic Mass, and some say they would die for it.

It has not come to that for these traditionalist Catholics. But they have faced hardship; changes in lifestyle, even the threat of excommunication to practice their faith as their parents did.

In the Kansas City area and elsewhere, they have withdrawn from their parish churches and spent many Sundays on the road, driving 40 or more miles to find priests willing to say the traditional Latin Mass.

One local group bought its own church, St. Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic Church, 31st Street and Flora Avenue, and started a traditionalist Catholic grade school.

They resist the changes in the Mass and the church over the past 25 years that they say have "watered down" their religion, relaxing its moral stance and making it less distinct from Protestant faiths.

They decry the addition of what they call humanistic elements to the Mass — guitar music, exchanges of handshakes during the service and modern decor — which they believe detract from an atmosphere of worship.

They have risked alienation from Catholic family and friends who do not agree

travels weekly from St. Marys to celebrate Masses at St. Vincent de Paul. "We're not looking to turn back the clock to the church of the 1950s, of the 1850s or the 1550s, but we are trying to continue our Catholic faith as it was handed down to us by our grandfathers."

Their struggle to hold fast to what they believe is the one true religion "is a spiritual war," said Betty Burns, a member and coordinator of St. Vincent de Paul. "We're trying to save our

souls."

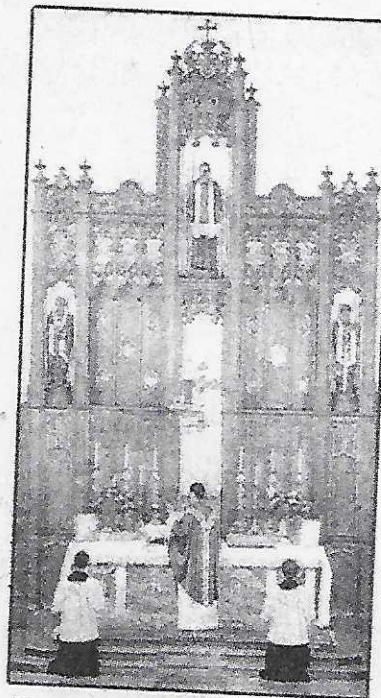
Lefebvre's followers are a varied bunch for whom faith is sometimes the only common ground.

Some are converts to the church; some grew up Catholic. Some went to Catholic schools; some didn't.

They are plumbers and nurses, lawyers and teachers, homemakers and factory workers.

Some remember well the days before Vatican II, when nuns always wore habits and Catholics ate fish every Friday. Others were schoolchildren in the early 1960s. Some had not yet been born.

In St. Marys, where about 1,000 traditionalist Catholics have moved since the society acquired property there in 1978, further diversity shows on license plates in a church parking lot: Connecticut, California, Georgia, Illinois, Idaho, Florida, North and South Dakota. Others have



The Latin Mass attracts 300 people to St. Vincent de Paul.

brother and sister.

Dozens have left good jobs in cities across the country to move to the small Kansas town of St. Marys, 25 miles west of Topeka, where a traditionalist Catholic church, school and a liberal arts college share a former Jesuit seminary.

And in the eyes of other Catholics, they are in danger of forcing themselves out of the very church they say they are fighting to preserve.

They are the followers of the Society of St. Pius X and its founder, French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, an outspoken critic of the Second Vatican Council and the changes it brought to the church. He was excommunicated last year when he consecrated four bishops without the pope's consent.

The archbishop's expulsion from the church put his followers at odds with the Vatican and further alienated them from their local dioceses, which do not financially support or condone their activities.

The society, which owns St. Vincent de Paul and St. Marys Academy and College, is one of a number of traditionalist Catholic groups, said William Dinges of Catholic University in Washington.

But it is "the largest, best organized" and of most concern to the Vatican, Dinges said, because Lefebvre "is capable of perpetuating schism" with his authority to consecrate bishops and priests. Most of the other traditionalist groups are led by individual priests and are likely to disperse at the priests' death or retirement.

Lefebvre's followers tend to rally around the Latin Mass, which was replaced in 1964, because it is a symbol of tradition, "a repudiation of modernity," said Dinges, who is writing a book about conservative Catholics.

But their differences of opinion with the church run deeper than a simple preference for hearing "Dominus vobiscum" over "The Lord be with you."

"We're not nostalgic," said the Rev. James Doran, the 26-year-old society-trained priest who

attending 100 places of worship in the United States and 150,000 to 200,000 followers worldwide — fewer than 1 percent of all Catholics.

After the excommunication of Lefebvre, about one-tenth of the society's followers turned away, by its own estimate, but they were replaced by people who became followers through the ensuing publicity.

"We are not anti-pope," said the Rev. Ramon Angles, the rector at St. Marys.

They recognize the pope's position as head of the church, he said, "but we don't recognize his authority to change his message."

They insist they are not advocating anything new, just striving to keep pure what the church has held for centuries.

"The Lefebvre movement is the Catholic analogue to Protestant fundamentalism," Dinges said. Followers tend to be politically conservative, but their agenda is primarily religious.

They want priests and nuns to wear cassocks and habits. They do not want women to distribute communion, nor do they want to receive it in their hands. They want their children to learn about the Immaculate Conception, memorize prayers and marry Catholics.

They stand in line to go to confession and want clear-cut teachings on sin. They scorn artificial birth control, divorce, abortion, the notion that all religions worship the same God and "cafeteria Catholics," who, they say, "pick and choose" beliefs with which they are comfortable.

"Years ago we would have been middle-of-the-road Catholics," said Mary Gentges, who moved to St. Marys from Colorado. "The crux of the whole thing is the truth doesn't change."

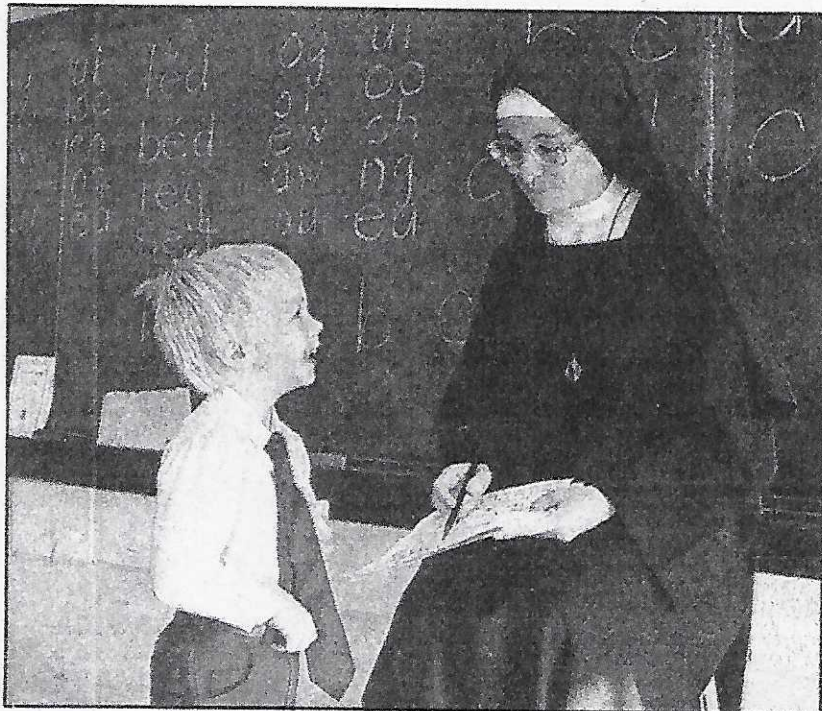
When JoAnn Sulzen, 46, attended the traditional Latin Mass for the first time after Vatican II, "it was like coming home after a long trip," she said.

"When you go to the new church today, the first thing that will hit you is the lack of

See ARCHBISHOP, E-6, Col. 1



Inger Pederson



The outcome of his first written exam brings a laugh out of first grader Damian Murphy in Sister Mary Caecilia's class at St. Marys Academy.



Archbishop Lefebvre's follower

Continued from Page H-1

reverence," said Sulzen, who drives each week from Louisburg, Kan., to St. Vincent de Paul, where an average of 350 people attend the two Sunday Masses.

"You see people talking and laughing in church. If that's God up on the altar, why are you laughing with your neighbor?"

Sulzen, like many other traditionalist Catholics, was never comfortable with the new rite of the Mass and its translation into English. Central to Catholicism is the belief that the bread and wine are actually transformed into the body and blood of Christ during the Mass, she said, and the priest's words must be correct to ensure the transformation. Because Latin is a dead language the meaning of the words never changes.

"A lot of people think that because we go to the traditional church that we're not Catholic," Sulzen said. "I know that I'm still Catholic. I know that I'm practicing the faith I was brought up in. ... God's rules just don't change."

Nick Novelty gave up his job on the partnership track at a top national accounting firm to open his own practice at St. Marys.

The 31-year-old bachelor left Dallas in August seeking "the supernatural," a closeness to God that, he said, he could not find in the modern Catholic church.

"It was a very, very hard decision," he said.

Novelty, who spent a year at the society's seminary before deciding the priesthood was not for him, had worked at the accounting firm five years. He had bought a sailboat, found a girlfriend and enjoyed the city social life.

When a friend at St. Marys told him of an accounting job there, Novelty was tempted. After months of thought, he took the plunge. He guesses the move cut his earning potential by one- to two-thirds.

Some are surprised that people too young to remember much about the church before Vatican II are attracted to the traditionalist movement.

"We're looking for something

that's above us," Novelty said. "We want to be lifted above the natural into the supernatural. ... You can't get that from 'Kumbaya.'"

Mass at the modern church "is very human. It sounds nice, but you can get counseling and friendship and camaraderie at the YMCA, but you can't get that feeling that you are being lifted up to God except in the (traditional) church."

He is optimistic he can have a successful business and the kind of religious life he wants in St. Marys.

"I really want to give it everything I've got," he said. "There's a real sense of mission here ... a sense that I'm part of something very important that's not happening anywhere else."

Sharon and Charles Blake took a financial loss on the farm they had always dreamed of owning and moved with their nine children from Harrisonville to St. Marys in 1978.

After the changes of Vatican II, "we missed the Mass so badly," said Sharon Blake, 48. "We couldn't stand watching it crumble before our eyes."

They hoped to find at St. Marys a kind of Catholic Utopia, where their children could grow in a moral environment.

She went to church daily. The children attended St. Marys Academy. Her husband commuted 106 miles one way to his job as a plumber for TWA at Kansas City International Airport.

After two years, he had grown weary of the drive and had not succeeded in breaking into St. Marys' crowded plumbing market. Their savings were gone, and bankruptcy loomed.

They moved to Lawson, Mo., north of Excelsior Springs.

"I cried a lot," she said. "We had given up so much."

They feel "completely out of place" in the largely Protestant town where other kids tease her children for wearing religious medals, she said, and some adults feel uncomfortable with the statues and pictures of saints that dominate the decor in her house.

They pray the rosary each night as a family and make the nearly two-hour round-trip every Sunday to

Mass at St. Vincent de Paul. The sacrifices they have made give them "an inner peace, a closeness to God," she said.

"There's always a downside, but I don't think we're put here to have a life of gaiety and happiness, to do just as you please. If that were true I don't think Jesus Christ would have had such a sacrificial life. People ... have to deny themselves. If they don't, they won't get to heaven."

The devotion Lefebvre's followers show is not lost on the Rev. Richard Carney, chancellor of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

"You can't deny their tenacity," Carney said. "You can't deny their willingness to be sacrificial. ... I think while you have to see all of that and acknowledge it and even admire it, I'm disappointed about the cause."

Those who continue to follow the excommunicated Lefebvre are at risk for excommunication themselves, he said.

"One of the hallmarks of legitimate Roman Catholicism is following the expectations of the Holy Father," Carney said. "There isn't any way that Archbishop Lefebvre, his followers — the priests or the laity — can any longer say, 'We are following the expectations of the Holy Father,' because he (the pope) himself has said that they are not."

Catholics in the diocese have been instructed not to attend St. Vincent de Paul or any other Mass celebrated by the society's priests.

The Vatican, Carney said, is watching the society and hoping for reconciliation. Pope John Paul II recently gave permission for the traditional Latin Mass to be offered again for the first time since 1964. Two churches in the Kansas City area began offering it this year, Carney said.

The diocese also wants reconciliation with Lefebvre's followers, Carney said, but "we don't exactly know what tactic to take with our concern. We seem to be isolated from them by their own choice."

The society acquired St. Vincent de Paul from the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph in 1980 by secretly engaging a Protestant minister to See CONSERVATIVES, E-7, Col. 4

What is going on beneath nuclear site?

Center to study 40

COLOR

to lift them to the supernatural

Continued from Page H-6

make the \$60,000 purchase. That the diocese would sell the church to Protestants but not to traditionalist Catholics is proof of persecution, society followers say.

"We did not want one of our churches to be a center of dispute for our people," Carney said. "Why would we invite a crowd who claims to be Roman Catholic that we know were acting contrary to Vatican II and did not subject themselves to this bishop at all?"

Carney denied that the Mass has shifted away from a focus on God to a focus on people, or that it is less reverent.

"The whole point of Vatican II about the liturgy is that it's a public celebration of the people, who together, with voices and gestures, honor and praise God."

Though Carney said he believes the church "must accommodate change to serve humankind," he said "nothing in basic, fundamental church doctrine has changed."

Only the pastoral approach is different, he said. "I don't find a lot of priests any more who are willing to assign mortal sinfulness to individual acts because individual acts are impacted by a lot of circumstances."

Priests now say, "'Here's what we think is really uplifting and noble and an ideal to be sought after,'" Carney said. "And then I think

we're telling them, 'Be honest, be intelligent, be reflective, be faithful and make your choice.'"

Traditionalists, he said, "see the non-hard-line approach as an approach of weakness, and we see it as an approach of compassion, understanding, forgiveness and hope."

The students of St. Marys Academy who lined up outside the chapel at 7:10 one recent chilly morning did not appear to be aware that they are in the center of church controversy.

They whispered among themselves and laughed as a small dog trotted from warm hand to warm hand. The boys — from the brawniest high school senior to the tiniest kindergartner — wore blue pants, white shirts and ties.

The girls, who wore plaid jumpers, slipped white lace veils onto their heads as they walked into church.

All clutched well-worn black missals brought from home.

They automatically dabbed holy water on their heads, chests and shoulders and dropped to one knee on the stone floor before entering pews, girls on one side of the center aisle, boys on the other.

The spicy smell of incense wafted back to them from the altar as the priest spoke entirely in Latin. They stood, sat and knelt at the proper places throughout the hour-long service.

After Mass, they raced to the

school cafeteria for breakfast.

"Hi, Father," several said, eager to be noticed as Doran walked in. He greeted them by name, pulling one gently away from the wall he was leaning against.

"The wall will stay up by itself," Doran said. The little boy smiled and stood up straight.

At lunchtime, the older boys lined up quietly under Angles' stern gaze. He sent one home to get a tie.

"He's good at putting on a nasty face," Doran joked.

"We tell the kids, 'Discipline is not because you're bad. It's to keep you good.'"

The 330 students kneel in prayer before and after each class. They stand when addressing their teachers, are segregated by sex after fourth grade and have daily religion lessons.

And what will be the status of the Society of St. Pius X when they reach adulthood?

"It is not going to go away," Dinges said, "but I don't think there will be a mass influx into Lefebvre's chapels. It will just be a subculture of the Roman Catholic church."

Angles, however, predicts that someday, with a different pope in power, the entire church will be as it was before Vatican II.

"Things will go back to normal," he said with quiet confidence. "In the meanwhile, many souls are going to hell; many people are disoriented."

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