



Sister Rosemary Foreman beams as the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia gather around her to sing "We Are With You on the Journey" at the end of her profession ceremony Aug. 2.

'We are with you'

The newest agrégée helps define 21st century religious life

On her first full day as a Sister of St. Joseph of Concordia, Rosemary Foreman acknowledges that her "exterior life is not going to change much."

It's Monday, and she's taken an extra day off work, to give her time to drive back to her apartment in Topeka. On Tuesday morning she'll be back at work in the public information office of the Kansas Corporation Commission. She hasn't decided yet whether she'll wear to the office the black and gold cross she received Sunday morning.

But then she reflects on her "interior life" as Sister Rosemary, who a day earlier joined the Concordia congregation as our second agrégée:

"There's an inner warmth," she begins, trying to find the words. "It's a belonging, an inner strength, a different kind of energy, a greater confidence in what I'm about and what I'm doing... That all feels like part of the mystery of religious life in today's world."

And she understands that she is part of what will define 21st century religious life.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia went back to our roots in 17th century France to discover agrégée membership, and then revived — and, perhaps, redefined — another way for women to enter religious life.

As the congregation envisions agrégées, they are mature individuals, probably well established in their professions. They may have debts they are paying off or other financial obligations; they may have family responsibilities, such as caring for aging parents. Or they may have profes-

sions or professional contracts that would keep them from entering into a long orientation process required by most religious communities.

Rosemary Foreman understands many of those factors. During the time she was feeling called to the Concordia congregation, she faced what she calls the "middle-of-life stuff" that is common: Both her parents became ill and required care before their deaths, and she now finds herself a couple of years away from a state retirement.

She also realized that at age 58, she is older than the "cut-off date" religious communities generally use when talking about vowed members.

That, too, was an issue for Rosabel Flax, the first agrégée to join the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia as part of the reconstituted program.

Sister Rosabel had retired as a high school principal in 2004, and although she says she "felt called," she didn't really intend to pursue a religious life. "I was too old to become a sister," she says now with a laugh.

What she wanted to pursue was a career teaching math.



All the Sisters — including even those in the choir loft — face toward the center of the Sacred Heart Chapel to welcome our newest member after Rosemary Foreman professed her vow as an Agrégée Sister of St. Joseph of Concordia during a special ceremony and Mass Aug. 2.

She did that — but she also gathered more information about the Sisters of St. Joseph. Today, at 59, she is beginning her sixth year as a high school math teacher in Ness City, Kan., and her second full year as an agrégée. She professed her vow of fidelity in June 2008 after two years of study and discussion as a candidate.

She was joined by Sister Rosemary in much of that discussion. The two of them helped define what would be the agrégée form of membership for the Concordia congregation. They both talked with Sister Marcia Allen, who in mid 2008 became president of the congregation, and they even

spoke before the Congregational Senate when final approval for the agrégée program was up for a vote.

"I told them this is 21st century religious life," Sister Rosabel recalls of that Senate session in June 2006.

Sister Rosemary told the members of the Senate about her life, and about getting to know two Sisters of St. Joseph. She also told them about falling away from the Church in her early 20s and being attracted back by the way those two sisters — Anna Marie Broxterman and Jean Rosemarynoski — lived their lives.

"I had the benefit of watching how they lived and how they served 'the dear neighbor,'" she said. "At the time, I was one of those 'neighbors.'"

As she got to know more sisters and visited the Motherhouse in Concordia, Rosemary said she was "just drawn to what I felt here, what I saw here. I was overwhelmed by the historical strength of community that carries forward to today."

Without having had that same experience, Rosemary's family was surprised by her decision to join the Sisters of St. Joseph, she says. They, like her, had the experience of growing up in a Catholic home in the 1950s and '60s, but no real exposure to religious life today.

But having those family members — four sisters, a

Sisters reach into our history to find a definition for today

In reaching back to our roots in 17th century France, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia have discovered — and revitalized — a type of committed spiritual life for women known as "agrégées."

The order, which has grown worldwide over the centuries and now has autonomous congregations in more than 50 countries, began in the French city of LePuy in 1650. Based on research into the congregation's original constitution and rules, written by founder and Jesuit priest Jean-Pierre Medaille, the sisters now recognize that in addition to vowed members of the order, there were also *agrégées*, from a French word meaning *attached to or aggregated with*.

An agrégée — pronounced ah-gre-ZHEY — did not make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. But she lived according to the rules of the Sisters of St. Joseph, and was recognized by the local people and the local churches as a Sister of St. Joseph.

In the past decades, the modern Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia studied our origins and our original spirituality, and have now revived that early practice based on what we learned. The Senate of the Concordia congregation approved agrégée membership in 2006.

The first modern agrégée



SISTER ROSEMARY FOREMAN

professed a vow of fidelity to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia a year ago. Sister Rosabel Flax is a high school math teacher in Ness City, Kan., who spent more than two years talking and praying with the Concordia sisters before making her vow in July 2008.

On Aug. 2, Sister Rosemary Foreman became the second agrégée to join the Concordia congregation.

Three other women are currently agrégée candidates.

Agrégées are defined as those persons who commit themselves to active and inclusive love of God and the dear neighbor as expressed in

the spirit and spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia. In almost every aspect, they are viewed as full members of the congregation, meaning they have a voice and a vote on congregational issues.



SISTER ROSABEL FLAX

Want to know more?

Women interested in learning more about the Sisters of St. Joseph agrégée program are invited to an information day Saturday, Oct. 17.

The day begins at 9:30 a.m. at Manna House of Prayer in Concordia and will conclude no later than 4:30 p.m. Lunch is included and is free.

For information, please contact Sister Bette Moslander at 785-243-4428 or bmoslander@mannahouse.org.