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Sisters Pat Murphy, RSM, center, and JoAnn Persch, right, pose with an interfaith committee in November 2008 after a successful day of lobbying at the Illinois State Capitol for pastoral care for immigrant detainees. The Sisters were featured in a new documentary titled "Band of Sisters," that has been drawing sell-out crowds.

'Band of Sisters' receives high marks

Sisters of Davenport Diocese say documentary tells it like it is

By Barb Arland-Fye
The Catholic Messenger

DAVENPORT — First-time filmmaker Mary Fishman's documentary, "Band of Sisters," captures the resilience and deep faith of Catholic Sisters whose lives were transformed by Vatican II. While Sisters from the Davenport Diocese were not profiled for the documentary, some who viewed it saw themselves mirrored in the story's message.

Band of Sisters shows Sisters praying outside a deportation center and later meeting with legislators in the Illinois State Capitol. Another Sister visits with a formerly homeless woman who gushes about being able to take a bath in her new apartment. Cameras follow Sisters engaged in ministry at retreat centers, in holistic health at an urban center, protesting outside the former School of the Americas, lecturing at a university, and reflecting on their individual call to religious life and women religious today. Historic photos and film footage interspersed in the 88-minute documentary contrast the uniformity that dominated the Sisters' early years of ministry with the variety of choices that Vatican II made possible.

The Quad-City premiere of Band of Sisters on Jan. 6 at the Figge Art Museum in Davenport was a sell-out, sponsored by the Congregation of the Humility of Mary in Davenport and the Sisters of St. Francis in Clinton. Humility Sisters also showed the documentary Jan. 7 at the Humility of Mary Center.

"One of the main things I want to convey is the sense of community the Sisters have and things that you can do as a community that wouldn't be possible to do without the support of community," Fishman said during an interview after the Humility of Mary Center showing.

Responding to Vatican II

"I really liked the way she emphasized how the Vatican II documents renewed us and moved us in

the direction we went," said Sister Gretchen McKean, CHM. "We were responding to what the pope asked us to do." Vatican II said "go back to your roots; we didn't make that up. I was glad to see that (the documentary) brought that out," added Sister Rachel Beeson, CHM.

The filmmaker understood that the Sisters, in responding to the call of Vatican II, "realized that the mission of the Gospel is working for justice," said Sister Eileen Golby, a member of the General Leadership Team of the Clinton Franciscans. "We accepted that call and tried to answer it in the best way we could. I think each group did it in a different way."

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Fishman

About the filmmaker

Mary Fishman left a career as a Chicago-based architect and urban planner to take care of her ailing mother and then began pursuing a longtime desire to be a filmmaker. She is a product of Catholic education from elementary school through the University of Notre Dame. One of her siblings gave her a book about Catholic Sisters, which provided the impetus for the documentary. She began work on "Band of Sisters" in 2004 after taking film courses at Columbia College and Chicago Filmmakers. The documentary made its premiere at the Gene Siskel Film Center in Chicago Sept. 14-20 and sold out each night, so it was shown again Nov. 16-21.

Band of Sisters features Sisters across nine states. "We had to focus on a few stories to represent the whole," Mary explained. In fact, she met two of the Sisters featured in the documentary at the Peace and Justice Committee meeting of her parish, St. Walter's, in Chicago.

Mary is working on theatrical release of "Band of Sisters" in cities across the United States. If you would like more information about how to see the documentary, visit the website www.bandofsistersmovie.com.

Teaming up for private stem-cell biobank

By Celine Klosterman
The Catholic Messenger

The John Paul II Medical Research Institute (JP2MRI) and Cellular Engineering Technologies (CET) have teamed up to develop a private stem-cell biobank in Coralville.

Scientists at CET are working to create a bank of more than 5,000 patient and disease-specific stem cell lines and other human cell lines. Pharmaceutical companies purchase those cell lines to test drugs on; academic and government institutions also buy the cells for research.

These cell lines are derived from adult sources and do not include embryonic stem cells. Embryonic-stem cell research requires destroying human embryos and is thus immoral, according to Catholic teaching.

"Adult stem cells represent a more reasonable and human method for making correct and sound progress," according to the Pontifical Academy for Life's "Declaration on the Production and the Scientific and Therapeutic Use of Human Embryonic Stem Cells."

At CET in Coralville, scientists extract, purify and grow cells from human blood or tissue. JP2MRI, based in Iowa City, recruits patients and doctors in private practice to donate such tissue for research.

Alan Moy, founder of the nonprofit institute and co-founder of CET, sees a stem-cell biobank as an opportunity to speed up medical research and drug discovery.

"It takes 10 years and \$1 billion to get a drug to market, and the success rate for any drug in a clinical trial is pretty poor," said Moy, a member of St. Mary Parish in Iowa City. A study covering the years 2004-10 found the overall success rate for drugs moving from early stage Phase I clinical trials to FDA approval is about one in 10, Reuters reported in 2011.

Even drugs that receive approval don't work in all patients, he noted. "We need a new paradigm."

Testing drugs on cells from patients has two benefits, according to Moy. First, it means researchers don't have to spend as much time testing the drugs on lab animals. Second, it offers researchers a better idea of how to design a clinical trial on people, thus reducing the trial's cost and length.

"Everyone benefits — the animal-rights advocates, the government, pharmaceutical companies, patients," he said.

For such reasons, government and academic institutions are pursuing stem-cell biobanks. But those institutions face red tape and bureaucracy that a private biobank in Coralville can avoid, Moy said.

"The institute has launched its Give Cures program that has created a network of doctors in several private clinics and hospitals around the country to recruit patients to procure tissue to create the stem cell lines," said Jay Kamath, CEO of JP2MRI. "The program is currently recruiting patients with genetic diseases, cancer and disorders like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease."

(See DIGNITY on Page 10)



Contributed

Dr. Alan Moy founded the John Paul II Medical Research Institute (JP2MRI) in Iowa City, which performs research using only adult, not embryonic, stem cells.

Allowing driver's licenses for undocumented benefits all, say advocates

By Michelle Martin
Catholic News Service

CHICAGO (CNS) — Undocumented immigrants who can prove they have lived in Illinois for at least a year will soon be eligible for temporary driver's licenses, under a bill passed Jan. 8 by the Illinois state House of Representatives.

The Illinois Senate passed the bill in December, and Gov. Pat Quinn has said he will sign it.

Advocates for the program say that it benefit everyone in the state because all drivers — including some 250,000 undocumented drivers — would be tested on their driving skills and on the rules of the road before being granted a license, and all of them would be eligible to, and required to, obtain insurance.

Undocumented immigrants who get a temporary visitor's driver's licenses would no longer have to live in fear that being pulled over for a minor traffic infraction would lead to deportation, said Robert Gilligan, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Illinois.

"Too many of our immigrant families have been torn apart by the simple act of driving," Gilligan said.

That's because unlicensed, undocumented drivers are detained rather than ticketed when they cannot produce a driver's license if they are pulled over, even for something as minor as having a tail light out.

When Catholic immigration advocates participated in a special lobbying day on the issue in Springfield Nov. 28, Notre Dame Sister Marilyn Medinger was among them, even though she might not have the kind of story that people would expect from an advocate of allowing undocumented immigrants to get legal driving status.

On a Sunday afternoon last October, Sr. Medinger, 74, was driving her seven-year-old Toyota Prius north on Sheridan Road in Chicago at about 4:30 in the afternoon when a car traveling in the southbound lanes crossed the center line and smashed into her car.

"All of the sudden I was looking at headlights and of course he hit me," said Sr. Medinger, whose car was totaled and who is still receiving therapy for a dislocated elbow she suffered in the crash. She spent a night in the hospital and received a statement that costs were \$28,000 before Medicare stepped in and handled



CNS/Karen Callaway, Catholic New World

Elena Segura, director of the Office for Immigrant Affairs and Immigration Education for the Archdiocese of Chicago embraces Celina Hernandez during a Mass of thanksgiving Jan. 12 at St. Gall Church in Chicago. The Mass celebrated final passage by the Illinois House Jan. 8 of a bill to allow undocumented immigrants to get driver's licenses.

it; the other driver, an undocumented immigrant without a license or insurance, also was injured.

"We need people driving safely," Sr. Medinger told the *Catholic New World*, newspaper of the Chicago Archdiocese. "We

need them to be educated in our driving laws and to allow them to purchase insurance."

Long an advocate for immigration reform, she offers pastoral care to immigrants being detained in McHenry County. She knows that many, if not most,

undocumented immigrants drive without the benefit of a license because it's the only way they can get to work or school.

Several dozen members of Sisters and Brothers of Immigrants and Priests for Justice for Immigrants also made the trip, and reported a positive response from legislators.

The Illinois Catholic bishops came out in support of the idea Nov. 13, and it also had won support from a group calling itself the Highway Safety Coalition, which includes representatives of a number of law enforcement agencies; Gov. Quinn; and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

Temporary driver's licenses now are available to visitors to Illinois who have proper documents but not permanent residency or Social Security numbers. They are good for three years and are valid for driving purposes only, not for identification for other purposes.

Undocumented immigrants would be able to get them with an IRS-issued individual taxpayer identification number, which undocumented immigrants can use to pay federal taxes; a passport from another country; or a consular identification card.

Historic footage brings back memories for Sisters

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Sister Roberta Brich, CHM, co-director of formation for the Sisters of Humility, thought Band of Sisters gave “an accurate picture of what Sisters are doing, especially today with the broader notion of how we’re working with those most in need in our world.” She also appreciated the sense of joyfulness conveyed in the documentary because it reflects what happens in her own community. “We can laugh at ourselves, that’s a real blessing.”



Sr. Roberta

Sr. Gretchen was especially moved by the documentary’s depiction of two Chicago Sisters who persevered in providing prayer and spiritual support to deportees in a detention center. “That tugs at our hearts because we’re involved in (immigration issues). We know people whose lives have been impacted,” she said.

Vowed membership has its place

Historic footage from a religious community’s vocation film brought back memories for Sisters in the audience. Even though

she’s glad to be out of the habit, “the whole mystique of the habit, getting the habit” was very special, Sr. Gretchen observed.

Some Sisters from the Davenport Diocese related to the scene in which a former Sister recalled the emotional decision to leave her religious community. Sr. Eileen said that at the time she wondered whether she could find greater fulfillment as a woman by being a wife and mother. Friends who left the community went on to do wonderful things. Sr. Eileen stayed. “God led me; God didn’t want me out.”

“When we made our vows, we made a life commitment ... we didn’t change that commitment; we just do it in a different way,” Sr. Rachel said. She chose to continue as a teacher and principal after Vatican II “because I felt the parishes needed the leadership of the school system to help them through this era.”

Vatican II’s call for lay people to be more involved in the Church meant that lay people began taking on catechetical roles that used to be the domain of Catholic Sisters. “It’s wonderful. We’ve grown up and we’re letting lay people grow up, too,” said Sr. Gretchen, who served 40 years as a biology profes-



Barb Arland-Fye

Filmmaker Mary Fishman of Chicago takes questions at the Humility of Mary Center in Davenport following the showing of her new documentary titled “Band of Sisters,” the story of women religious who responded to the call of Vatican II.

sor at the former Marycrest College in Davenport.

Sr. Roberta, also a longtime educator, believes teaching and nursing continue to be important ministries and might have been missing from the documentary. “I believe that the whole aspect of teaching is reflected in all that we do.”

If she were to add a scene, it would focus on religious community as family. “I’m just thinking of the support I feel from the community and from individual members,” Sr. Roberta said. “We have committed to the Sisters of Humility as our first fami-

ly. It’s important we understand that, and that our families understand that.”

What the future holds

Sisters interviewed for this story thought Band of Sisters fairly and accurately addressed the Vatican investigation of the Leadership Council of Women Religious and the apostolic visit of U.S. Sisters congregations. The filmmaker “pointed out the tremendous support for us — all around the world,” Sr. Eileen said. “The letters that came in seem to prove that Sisters are at the grassroots and the people know they’re there to work for

them ... and to me, that’s what it’s all about.”

The documentary also addresses the question on everyone’s mind: What is the future of women religious in communities whose membership is well into its sixties, seventies and beyond?

“It’s not going to disappear; it’s just going to change,” Sr. Gretchen said. Perhaps religious life will consist of small groups of women focused on a common cause. Or perhaps associates (individuals who don’t take vows) will grow into something bigger and deeper, Sisters Gretchen

and Rachel said.

“The vocation is separate from the ministry,” Sr. Eileen said. “We have lots of people connected with us as sojourners, associates and friends who help us with justice activities we participate in.” One of the big issues Sisters ought to be concentrating on, she added, is human trafficking and slavery. “There are a lot of people out there being used, very unjustly.”



Sr. Eileen

“People still have a deep desire for a relationship with God,” Sr. Roberta noted. “How do we help them discern? How do we be present to people who are discerning and let them know that there are many paths to God? We’re looking at age not being a barrier. We’ve accepted 50- 60- and 70-year-olds. There is such a thing as temporary commitment.”

Religious communities also are looking at collaborative efforts to help women interested in religious life who first need to clear up college debt. “We need to support these people and do it across congregations,” Sr. Roberta added.

ICC encourages DOT to revisit driver’s license stance

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The legislature will also be discussing limitations on abortion funding and abortion providers in Medicaid. Generally speaking, it is unlikely the Democratic-majority Senate will advance any abortion-regulation related bills.

DEATH PENALTY

The murders of two young girls in northeast Iowa have brought back a discussion of the reinstatement of the death penalty in Iowa. We believe the sentence of life without the possibility of parole is a just and sufficient means of protecting citizens while also respecting human life.

SOCIAL CONCERNS

Last year, President Barack Obama announced a “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals” (DACA) policy to “defer action” for all young people eligible under the proposed Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. Hundreds of thousands of young people are now eligi-

ble to apply for both deferred action on deportation for two years and a work permit. Unfortunately, the Iowa Department of Transportation has issued new guidance that any recipients of the new federal status are not eligible for driver’s licenses in Iowa. The DOT’s action is disappointing. We are supporting efforts to encourage the DOT to revisit their stance.

This month the bishops are also kicking off an electronic postcard campaign in favor of just and compassionate immigration reform. For more details, visit www.justiceforimmigrants.org.

We will support efforts to increase the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). This is a tax credit for people who work and have relatively low wages. Currently the credit maxes out at \$379 a year for a married couple with three children making about \$43,000 a year, or \$32 for a single adult making up to \$13,450. Supporters estimate this would help more than 500,000 people in Iowa.

(Tom Chapman is executive director of the Iowa Catholic Conference.)

Year of Faith Prayer

O good and gracious God, we come before You as we celebrate the Year of Faith in the Diocese of Davenport and with the universal Church.



By faith, the disciples of Jesus formed the first community, celebrated the Eucharist and met the needs of God’s people.

By faith, the martyrs gave their lives bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel.

By faith, countless Christians have promoted justice so as to put into action the Word of the Lord.

By faith, we, too, live knowing that You are present in our lives and walking with us today.

Send your Spirit to deepen our faith and proclaim it with joy in our hearts to our families, neighbors, friends and the whole world.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Dignity belongs to every human life

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JP2MRI was formerly known as the John Paul II Stem Cell Research Institute. Its new name reflects the institute’s support of research using more than just adult stem cells, such as cancer cells. Also, the current name avoids the negative connotations that some critics of embryonic stem cell research associate with the term “stem cells,” Moy said.

Blessed John Paul II, the institute’s namesake, wrote the apostolic letter “Novo Millennio Ineunte” warning that scientists must avoid “discriminating between one life and another and ignoring the dignity which belongs to every human being.”

That ethical command motivates Kim Lehman, director of the ongoing Give Cures campaign for JP2MRI. Before accepting her position with the institute, she asked Moy, “Why are you doing this?” He paused and said, “Kim, when I stand before God, I’ll have to account for how I used my gifts.” I said, “That’s a good reason; that is why I do what I do,” recalled Lehman, then president of Iowa Right to Life.

She noted JP2MRI supporters can still visit www.givecures.org to donate or to download a Give Cures flyer to share. People also may pray in solidarity with the campaign’s prayer team.

Those suffering from diseases can visit www.jp2mri.org to sign up for a registry of patients willing to donate tissue — such as a small piece of skin, fat, blood or discarded cancer tissue — for research.

For more information, call Lehman at (515) 202-2517.

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“In order to accomplish our mission, which is to support communities of faith in our diocese in acting upon Catholic Social Teaching principles, we rely on *The Catholic Messenger* to learn about people in our diocese who are acting upon those principles. *The Catholic Messenger* really is about delivering the Good News!”

— Kent Ferris, director of Social Action and of Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Davenport

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