

Nun fights prison repeating with love

By KEN HASWELL
Of the Emerald

A Catholic nun took a good look at the Oregon Department of Corrections, saw that it created more recidivism or a return to criminal behavior than it cured, and decided to fight recidivism in her own way: with love.

Love is the best way to describe Sister Janice Jackson of the Holy Order of Names, founder of Sponsors, Inc., a Eugene-based organization designed to assist ex-prisoners from Oregon's penal institutions to re-enter society.

Jackson says she had two reasons for founding Sponsors.

"I lived in a convent in Salem and I used to drive by the state prison and I used to wonder what was going on behind those walls," she says.

"And, also, when I was teaching junior high school, the kids that I always seemed to like best were the ones that were to me a little left of center. They'd dabble-dabble here and there in trouble. I seemed to always have rapport with them. We had a confidence and trust there," Jackson says.

Jackson says she decided to start Sponsors, Inc. shortly after she arrived in Eugene six years ago. She originally moved to Eugene to finish requirements for her master's degree in counseling at the University. Her practicum requirements included working in community projects such as half-way houses.

While involved with incarcerated people, she says "there was very little community help for people coming out of those institutions, whether it be juvenile or adult prisons."

Jackson decided to organize a community project "to provide the ex-prisoner with more help in making the transition between a rigid institutional life and a normal everyday life of the outside world, and to bring the people of the community in touch with the prisons," she says.

"At the same time, the involvement would be such as to show people what prisons are really like, it would bring people in touch with prisons, it would take them there so that they could really learn first hand what goes on inside, so that they could see how evil and destructive they are to human persons," Jackson states.

"I think that we provide services for people coming out of prison that are not otherwise provided," she says.

"Or if they are, it is so very hard for them to get at the services — there's so much red tape and they are shuffled from here to here to here," she says.

"And I think that we cut out a lot of the steps and thereby cut out a lot of the frustration that people coming out of prison feel when they are trying to deal with the bureaucracies and the employ-



Photo by Keith Humphreys

Janice Jackson: Sponsors Inc. founder

ment office," Jackson adds.

"And there are people in the Eugene area who came in contact with prisoners and became involved with them who never would have been...I think that we raised the level of awareness in the community a great deal through our sponsors and outgoing letters and community projects and generally letting people know that we are here and what we are about," she states.

One of the services Sponsors provides ex-prisoners is to direct them to organizations in the Eugene area such as the CETA Manpower, CARES referral service and FISH to help find jobs housing and food for ex-offenders.

"The state gives us \$100 gate money when we are released," one ex-prisoner, who wished not to be named, says.

"My apartment cost \$270 with cleaning fees and security deposits. I was lucky. I had a little of my own money saved up. Most guys spend \$4.30 of their gate money for a Greyhound bus ticket to Eugene and find themselves standing on the corner of Pearl and Eighth with \$95.70 and no

place to stay or work — just enough to buy a Saturday Night Special."

"I can see the other community organizations limitations," Jackson says. "They are strung up on red tape and deadlines and I think they are doing their best to help, that they want to help."

"Money is, you know, the biggest problem. Sometimes there is money available and other times, it's all dried up," she adds. "I really don't know who to put the blame on for that. Mismanagement of government, I guess."

Jackson decided to become a nun more than 20 years ago. She took her vows in 1959.

"Back then there wasn't very many opportunities available for women. You were either a housewife, a nurse or a nun. Nursing didn't appeal to me, so I decided to be a nun. I wanted to teach and being a nun was one way to do so."

"Oppression of people always depressed me, especially the oppression of women," Jackson says.

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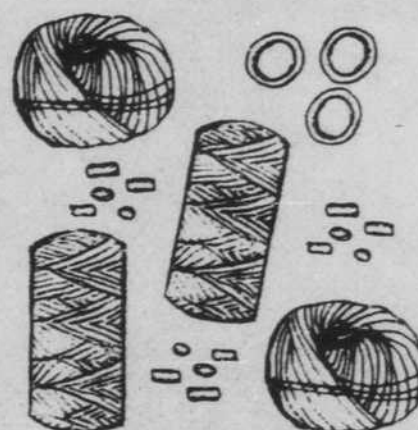
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