

Nun's influence reached into every corner of some members' lives

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often "sent" her guardian angel to the nun.

"As a naive child I would," she said. "As a naive adult, I did."

Some ex-members admit they consulted with Sister Louis on virtually every aspect of their lives. They said that some members would consult the nun before doing the most mundane of everyday chores, like deciding what color to paint their houses.

"She gave medical, marital and business advice on matters on which she really didn't have knowledge," the woman said. "There were some people who would do anything she told them to do."

Ex-members also say that Sister Louis played a pivotal role in the center's leadership. In a 1979 tape-recorded speech, Paul Legere made a rare yet significant reference to the nun after telling the center's members to prepare for their important role in the Apocalypse.

"Sister says that maybe we might have to go underground," he said. "That doesn't mean digging holes in the ground. That's just to give you an idea of what the persecution is going to be like."

"She also says she's not sure, but he (God) might give us a bishop who is loyal," he continued. "But she did assure us of a pastor who would work as a protector for Christ."

Paul Legere was replaced as the center's leader by Shattuck when the homosexual "divine intimacy" became common knowledge among the membership in 1983. Shattuck had known Sister Louis for several years before joining the organization in 1979, and is believed to have joined the center on her advice.

After Norwich Bishop Daniel P. Reilly was told about "divine intimacy" by a former participant, he decided to give the Apostolic Formation Center another chance — this time under Shattuck's leadership. He told Shattuck to end the center's preoccupation with the Second Coming of Christ and advised him not to continue using Sister Louis as the organization's spiritual director.

Shattuck has said he has not seen or spoken with Sister Louis in at least two years. But ex-members charge that Shattuck was still consulting Sister Louis on important matters as recently as this spring.

But Reilly discontinued the diocese's cooperation and in effect banned the center in June after he learned from a priest who had been

stationed at the center that Shattuck had continued at least some of Legere's practices — including claims of mystical visions and consultations with Sister Louis.

Shattuck currently is seeking to relocate his Our Lady of Grace Formation Center to a diocese in some other state.

But former members charge that the reorganization and move won't put an end to the influence of Sister Louis.

"Everything leads back to her, everything points back to her," a former member said. "Sister is the prime mover."

Sister Louis has refused to return telephone calls from the Journal Inquirer. And her superior at Our Lady of Grace, Sister Mary Ann, refused to meet with a reporter who went to the monastery recently or to

talk about Sister Louis.

But the superior said last month that the formation center's link with the monastery has become a "problem."

"It's been quite disturbing to the community," she said. "We're not supposed to be involved in any apostolate, even for spiritual direction."

When asked recently why Sister Louis was able to receive dozens of visitors and telephone calls a week, her superior said, "That's her personal choice."

Although the Monastery of Our Lady of Grace geographically is in the Hartford Archdiocese, its 48 sisters answer only to superiors in Rome. Archbishop John F. Whealon can advise the sisters on ecclesiastical matters, but has not governing power.

The archbishop, who has known of Sister Louis's connection with the

Apostolic Formation Center for several years, said recently that the nun "has a talent for spiritual direction." He said he didn't know whether Sister Louis was an authentic mystic, but added that he would consider it a "blessing" if she were.

Whealon refused further comment, deferring comment on the matter to his counterpart in Norwich. But Reilly also has refused to comment publicly, except to issue a statement saying that Shattuck's organization would not be allowed to reopen in the diocese.

Former members say it was church officials' attitude of tacit approval and refusal to comment that made people so susceptible to the suspect claims of Sister Louis and Legere.

The center's founder and spiritual director would make claims to mysticism and revelation that diocesan-appointed priests would endorse, they say, while Reilly would send them encouraging letters.

As a result, several former members have left the Catholic religion, while others refuse to go to Mass in the Norwich diocese.

"Because the church seemed to approve it, we thought it was legitimate," one ex-member said.

"The laity has been betrayed by the hierarchy of the church," he said, "in particular by Bishop Reilly and the Diocese of Norwich."

As for Sister Louis's role, he added, "She was the godmother of the formation center."