



FORMER NUNS ENTERTAIN VISITOR CAROL DUESING IN SLUM APARTMENT  
(L to R) Susan Bland, Miss Duesing, Alice Trese, Lenore Mullarney

## 'NEW STYLE OF RELIGION'

# Ex-Nuns Savor Slums After Life In Convent

By KATHY AHLFELD, Daily News Staff Writer

CINCINNATI — "When people are starving," the ex-nun remarked, "you can't walk in with a catechism."

She was one of four nuns who shelved the catechism in their plywood-and-brick bookcase two months ago and marched into Cincinnati's Mohawk slum neighborhood to live and work.

Around their apartment, rats gnaw at the wallboard. Outside the smell of garbage hangs over rotting food scraps on a dirt pile where Appalachian migrant children like to play.

**THE GIRLS** have stringy hair and often go barefoot. The boys play in jeans that you can almost see through.

"Our landlord has promised some repairs," says slender Alice Trese, graying at 33. "But we felt that living like this would help make keen our sense of poverty."

For Alice and the three others living in a three-room tenement, the convent is only memory.

**THE FOUR WOMEN** were among 50 Glenmary sisters who rebelled last August against the convent life.

Struggling with what they term "a new style of religious life," the four keep their vows of chastity and poverty — but not obedience to church authorities.

Alice Trese and Mary Wine, 27, both of whom have masters degrees in sociology, draw social workers' salaries from the local community chest.

**TO GET TO KNOW** the migrants in the area, Susan Bland, 22, a plain looking brunette, works on a toy factory assembly line with many of her Appalachian neighbors.

The fourth snow-white-haired Lenore Mullarney, 50 — manages the business affairs of the Federation of Communities in

Service — an organization founded and supported by the salaries of the 50 former Glenmarys.

The four maintain they have dedicated their lives to social work among the Appalachian people. The other 46 former sisters have chosen to do the same in migrant centers in Chicago and across West Virginia.

"WE WANT to be involved in the problems of today," said Mary Wine, leader of the group. We felt that our main concern should be with people, not rules, not ritual, not theology."

A tall, big-boned woman, Mary did most of the talking. She punctuated her remarks with quick, uncomfortable-looking puffs on her cigarette.

Somehow it wasn't hard to picture Mary and the other three in religious habits.

Their faces had no make-up.

**THEIR HAIR** was cropped short, their clothes plain and serviceable — shirtwaist dresses, navy blue shirts, white blouses and flat shoes.

What came across again and again was the intensity of their commitment to be involved — not in worldly pleasures but in helping people.

The apartment was clean but sparsely furnished with wicker pieces, an old sofa, and a bookshelf made from plywood and bricks.

Green burlap curtains hid the cracked, broken windows and posters — a few impressionistic drawings of old Appalachian women — cover only part of the walls, where large chunks of plaster have fallen off.

**MONEY FROM** their jobs

goes only for necessities — food, rent, and clothing. The remainder is pledged to the federation fund.

Wounds from the recent break with the church have healed, they add, and the women still consider themselves practicing Catholics. For the women are carrying out the same good works they performed as Glenmarys.

The difference, they say, is that they no longer feel restricted by the laws, customs and trappings of the formal religious life.

"As sisters we felt that our goals had to be limited to religious instruction," Mary Wine said. "We felt that people viewed us only as representatives of a religious organization."

"The habit often only served to alienate people and the restrictions of the religious life hampered our work."

"The Glenmarys were innovators among religious orders," the women explained. Glenmary sisters experimented with contemporary habits and were among the first religious orders to work with secular welfare agencies and federal and state poverty programs.

"Church authorities saw these experiments as being outside the religious realm. We did not. We thought that what we were doing was in keeping with the times," Mary said.

"We had two choices — stay in the order and rebel and try to bring about changes, or get out and continue our work outside."

Do the former sisters feel their work has been a success, so far?

"It's too early to tell," Mary said. But for us, this is the only way Christ and Christianity can be a part of life today," she smiled and lit another cigarette.



EX-NUNS HELP A SLUM NEIGHBOR  
Susan Bland, Mary Wine Brush Child's Hair

## Bishop Labels Split 'Matter of Sadness'

Overshock was the reaction of many Catholics when 50 of the 88 Glenmary Sisters, a missionary order with headquarters in Cincinnati, decided to leave their convent and all the formal trappings of religious life.

Bishop Edward A. McCarthy, auxiliary of Cincinnati and spokesman for Archbishop Karl J. Alter, called the split

a "matter of sadness" for the church.

**HE AGREED** the break resulted from a "fundamental division" within the Glenmary community, but then differed with the ex-nuns on specifics.

The bishop reported that the division focused on varying approaches to the communities apostolic work.

**THE EX-NUNS** indicated, however, that conflict between the Glenmarys and their ecclesiastical superiors was a large factor in their decision to leave.