

Local priest has warm plates, heart

By KELLY CLARK
Staff Writer

For a lot of people she would make the perfect mother. She sees sexuality as a gift, thinks it's OK to have a beer, runs 10 miles a week and keeps her plates warm.

And by the way, the Rev. Nancy Reynolds Pagano is a priest in the Episcopal Church.

"I spend a lot of time in church," Pagano said. She spends 10 to 12 hours conducting services each week. In addition, she plans services, oversees youth groups, visits the sick and counsels people in crisis.

"I marry people," she added. "I do funerals and bury people."

Ordained in 1984, she is now a priest at the Chapel of the Cross at 304 E. Franklin St. in Chapel Hill. Pagano studied at Duke University where she received a master of divinity degree and a master of theology degree. She also attended General Theological Seminary in New York.

Pagano said there are 10,000 Episcopal priests. And although she is one of only 600 women among the ranks, it is hardly the only thing that makes her so interesting.

"She is absolutely marvelous as a counselor, and when leading services," said Mary Arthur Stoudemire, a member of the church governing body elected by the congregation. "Her deployment in service is just beyond reproach."

Karen Lenchek, a Chapel of the Cross secretary, said "a few people were a little tentative about a woman priest at first. But most have come to accept her and the good things she has brought."

The reservations some people had toward a woman in the pulpit were based on "hypothetical reasons," said Pagano's husband Joseph, who is a physician and professor in the UNC School of Medicine. "The reservations were based on the concept of a woman priest — not on a personal basis," he said.

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Pagano's slightly red cheeks glow when she talks about her family. She said her husband is a "gourmet."

"When she was in theology school, our boys were still at home," Pagano said. "We all had to help with the cooking."

The Pagano's have two children — "Two young men," Ms. Pagano said. "I can't call them boys anymore." She said the best thing parents can do for their children is provide a good example.

"The boys were cooking breakfast one morning and I came in and said I would set the table," she explained. "When I asked them where the plates were, they said the plates were warming in the oven."

"I never told them I like warm plates — they just knew," Pagano said.

Pagano seems to be good with children. Lenchek said Pagano was in charge of the youth group at the church. "I think children are initially more accepting of a woman," Lenchek said. "They know her as Nancy, rather than just a priest."

And in addition to warm plates, Pagano has a lot of warm ideas. She said much of young people's problems with unwanted pregnancy and abortion deal with self-esteem.

"Many girls feel they need to have sex in order to be somebody," she said. "What you need to do first is love yourself first. Then you can love other people."

Pagano's husband said, "She's clearly found her metier — it's the right thing for her to do. The priesthood is just the right vehicle for her talents."

"I'm very impressed with what she's done, but not surprised."



The Rev. Nancy Pagano is one of 600 female Episcopal priests in America

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Getting back to tap

By ELIZABETH ELLEN
Arts Editor

In the words of company co-founder Mercedes Ellington, a show by Balletap, U.S.A. is not a typical dance program. Instead it is a combination of "a Broadway show, MTV, and a strict dance concert." Chapel Hill dance fans will get the chance to see this unusual entertainment combination tonight in Memorial Hall, as Balletap U.S.A. closes the Union-sponsored Triangle Dance Guild season.

The company is, according to Ellington, the product of performer let-down at the close of a major project. She and Maurice Hines had just finished performing in "Sophisticated Ladies" on Broadway when the two decided to start a company.

"We had all this energy and stamina built up," she said in a phone interview yesterday. "We were looking for something else to do that would be equally challenging." The pair created their own challenge in the form of a dance company.

One of the purposes of the company, said Ellington, is to preserve and promote tap dancing, an endangered American art form. "Americans tend to take Americans for granted in the art world," she said. "We (Americans) instead appreciate foreign tastes, perhaps because this is still a young country. Tap dancing has been treated like a stepchild. We want to say to the nation 'This is yours,' as well as take tap to other countries as something to be proud of."

Ellington said Maurice Hines and his brother Gregory, of "White Nights" fame, are two of very few currently active practitioners of their particular school of tap dancing. Preserving this heritage, handed

down from black film stars of the '30s and '40s, has been a challenge. "It is hard to find young tap dancers," she said. "After young performers spend money on their ballet, jazz, modern, and acting lessons, there is no money left for tap. It is usually last on the list."

Balletap, U.S.A. has a number of ways to remedy this lack of tap dancing interest among the younger generation. Tapping to new music is one appeal as is the combination of tap with other art forms. "We do this so tap won't be like Latin — a dead language," Ellington said.

The company also updates the style by expanding technical range. "People are able to do more and greater feats today, as witnessed by the Olympics," said Ellington. "The body is put through more tests. Dancers are jumping higher, and extensions are getting higher."

Guest performer Obba Babatundé will appear with Balletap, U.S.A. tonight. A veteran Broadway star, he will perform a medley of numbers from shows such as "Dreamgirls," "Grind," and "Golden Boy."

Other works on the program range from an *cappella* warmup number to a spoof of MTV. Numbers are scheduled to immediately follow each other with barely a pause.

Future goals of Balletap, U.S.A. include establishing a school, conducting residencies, and achieving non-profit status, said Ellington. Of course, the company hopes to stir up interest and keep alive a valuable heritage. "We want to continue the preservation process," she said. "We hope to tap some new resources."

Balletap, U.S.A. will perform tonight at 8 p.m. in Memorial Hall. Call 962-1449 for ticket information.

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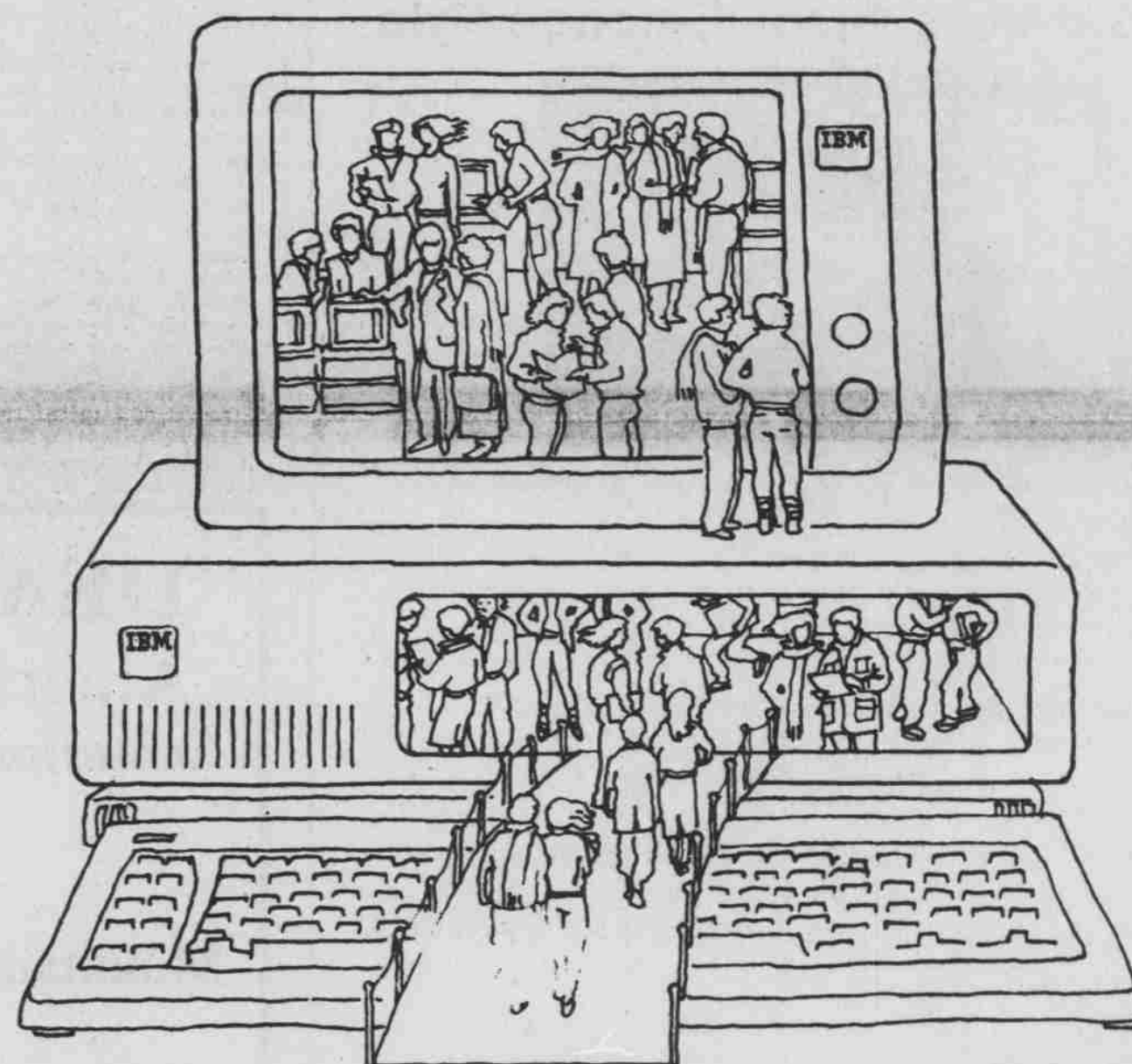
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