

IHMs in Action



For the last 16 years, Anne Mamienski, IHM, has taken time out from her full-time ministry to pick leaves.

Each fall, Sister Anne, who currently ministers as pastoral associate at St. Thecla Parish in Clinton Township, Mich., harvests leaves from the ginkgo trees on the IHM Motherhouse campus. The leaves have been prized for centuries for their medicinal properties. With the exception of a step ladder, Sister Anne and a small, dedicated crew don't rely on any modern equipment to help them with the harvest.

"The leaves are carefully hand-picked and gathered in leaf bags," Sister Anne explains. "We twist the individual leaf off, rather than pull it off to minimize the chance of damage to the tree or to the leaf itself."

Medicinal ginkgo opens capillaries in the brain so more oxygen gets in. When used in conjunction with Vitamin E, it may slow the onset or progression of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Sister Anne learned about the ginkgo tree while studying for her master's degree in holistic health. She knew there were several ginkgo trees on the Motherhouse property and contacted a local herbalist, who taught her how to harvest the leaves and agreed to purchase the harvest.



Sister Anne brings the herbalist a sample of the leaves just as they begin to turn yellow, usually around mid-September. Based on the chemical components of the sample, he is able to tell her when they will be at their peak for medicinal purposes.

"We have about a four-day window to pick the leaves," Sister Anne says. "If we harvest too soon or too late, they're useless. We can't wait until they fall to the ground."

This past fall, Sister Anne, Margaret Ann Henige, IHM, Carola Keffler, IHM, and Norine Wholihan, IHM, harvested 125 pounds of leaves over three days. On average, the crew collects between 100-175 pounds of leaves annually. Depending on weight, the harvest earns between \$1,000-\$2,000 for the congregation.

"We've never made less than \$1,000," Sister Anne notes.

The herbalist takes the leaves to a processing plant where they are ground, soaked in an alcohol and water mixture for six months, then pressed to eliminate excess moisture.

"Anyone interested in purchasing medicinal ginkgo should work with a certified herbalist so you know exactly what you're getting," Sister Anne cautions. "The products in grocery stores, and even many health food stores, may not be the potency you expect or need and may also have additives and preservatives, so become an informed consumer."

The next ginkgo leaf harvest will take place in September 2009.