Sister Mary Frances Cannon placed a gold ring on her left hand Saturday, symbolizing her lifetime commitment to poverty, chastity and obedience as a member of the Sisters of St. Francis. "God, send your spirit upon her, so that she may be a reflection of Jesus," said Sister Patricia Burkard, general minister of the Syracuse-based women's religious community.

Sister Burkard recited similar words as Sister Christine Ann Steigerwald professed first vows, a three-year commitment to the ministry modeled by the 13th-century founders of the Franciscan movement, Saints Francis and Clare.

More than 200 people - including Sister Cannon's children and grandson and Sister Steigerwald's daughter - witnessed the joyous yet solemn ceremony at St. Anthony Convent Chapel, in Syracuse.

At almost the same time, about 500 people witnessed nine men publicly profess perpetual vows as Jesuits at a Mass at Immaculate Conception Church in Fayetteville.

"These men are here genuinely of their own volition," the Rev. Joseph Lingan, master of novices at St. Andrew Hall, said in his homily. "They have not been prodded by fear, but rather, led by love," he said. "As they look ahead to a future not yet their own, they look forward with affectionate anticipation to encountering God's grace in ways they cannot possibly presently imagine."

Eight of the men, including 1986 Le Moyne College graduate James Donovan, plan to become priests. One will be a Jesuit brother.

Saturday's ceremony followed a two-year probationary period, during which the men of the New York, New England and Maryland provinces were based at St. Andrew Hall on the Le Moyne campus.

Next week, eight more men will begin the novitiate at Le Moyne, Lingan said.

During a private prayer service Friday Caryn Crook, 40, a Fulton native, was welcomed into the novitiate of the Sisters of St. Francis.

Sister Ann Kenyon, formation minister for the Sisters of St. Francis, said the community last celebrated a perpetual profession of vows in spring 2004. "It's important for people to know there are still women making this commitment in this day and age," Kenyon said. "It still means something."

The number of religious sisters in the United States has declined from 135,225 in 1975 to 68,634 in 2005, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University.

During the same period, the number of religious priests (such as Jesuits and Franciscans) has dropped from 22,904 to 14,137. The number of religious brothers dropped from 8,625 to 5,451, according to the most recent CARA statistics.
Franciscan sisters / The following women professed vows Saturday:

Sister Mary Frances Cannon, 60, of Spartanburg, S.C. Experience: preschool and elementary teacher and chaplain.

Sister Christine Ann Steigerwald, 56, of Cleveland, Ohio. Experience: nurse.

Sister Caryn Crook, 40, of Fulton. Experience: Peace Corps; biological technician with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Jesuit vows / The following men professed vows Saturday:

Samuel Sawyer, 28, of Charlevoix, Mich. Experience: Boston College graduate; software engineer for satellite communications and missile defense radar.

Sean Toole, 24, of Conshohocken, Pa. Experience: Rutgers University graduate.

Thomas Olson, 26, of Worcester, Mass. College of the Holy Cross graduate; substitute teacher and account executive for a telecommunications firm.

Brent Otto, 26, of Natick, Mass. College of the Holy Cross graduate; high school history teacher.

Christopher Ryan, 24, of Camden, N.J. Experience: Dartmouth University graduate.

Jonathan Stott, 35, of Vernon, Conn. Experience: Doctorate in physics from Case Western Reserve University; research fellow at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Dennis Baker, 26, of Hamilton. Fordham University and Niagara University graduate; worked as a teacher, dockworker, bartender and mailman.

James Donovan, 41, of Brooklyn. Experience: Le Moyne College and Fordham University graduate. Taught and chaired high school science department.

Joseph Marina, 44, of Phillipsburg, N.J. Bachelor's and master's degrees from St. John's University; doctorate from Fordham University; dean of Providence College's School of Continuing Education.