

PROGRAMS

BY CARRIE MYERS SMITH

Ecclesiastical Exercise



DEBBIE MANDEL teaches nuns at Queen of the Rosary Motherhouse in Amityville, New York, how to focus on good health.

Faith meets fitness for programs that work body and soul.

At Debbie Mandel's fitness classes, you won't find a plethora of skintight Lycra®, bared six-pack abs or booty-lifting jargon. No, the participants in Mandel's program aren't interested in such worldly things. They simply want to "Change Habits." And appropriately so, as these fitness seekers are all nuns at Queen of the Rosary Motherhouse in Amityville, New York.

"I have worked with the sisters to help them turn stress into strength," says Mandel, author of *Turn on Your Inner Light: Fitness for Body, Mind and Soul* (Busy Bee Group 2003). "The program has encouraged the sisters to change their habits—to focus on good health, posture and energy, to help them carry out their important outreach missions."

Mandel's platform for the sisters: Have strength in your faith and faith in your strength. "The sisters set a wonderful example for the lay members and for all

women," says Mandel. "If you take care of your body, which is the repository of your soul, you can live longer, be stronger and perpetuate goodness. I urge everyone to lift weights to [in turn] lift their spirits."

Mandel is not alone in her quest to forge faith with fitness. Many classes, programs and even entire gyms are making the fitness-faith fusion part of their missions. And we all know that many fitness pros have been holding classes in dark, dank church basements for years. They're just finally bringing their programs into the light!