

You've gotta have faith...

Religious leaders share their thoughts on believing

By Lisa Faye Kaplan
Gannett News Service

Faith. You can't see it or touch it, but you know when it's there, like a mother's love.

Faith is the belief that someone, something or some part of ourselves will make it all better or, at least, make it worthwhile.

Ninety-five percent of us have faith in the existence of God or some universal spirit, according to a 1988 Gallup poll.

For some, that faith is an emotional pinch hitter summoned in the bottom of the ninth. But for others, like the folks interviewed here, faith is the warp and weft that holds their lives together.

Sister Denise of the Angels, novice at the cloistered Discalced Carmelite Monastery of Port Tobacco, La Plata, Md.

"Faith is a grace. But you cooperate with grace.

"It's human nature to look for security, so everyone puts faith in something — maybe wealth or friendship. But all of those other things are not lasting.

"I put faith in someone. I believe in Jesus as the creator, his love for me and for the world. If I didn't have faith, life would be so hopeless."

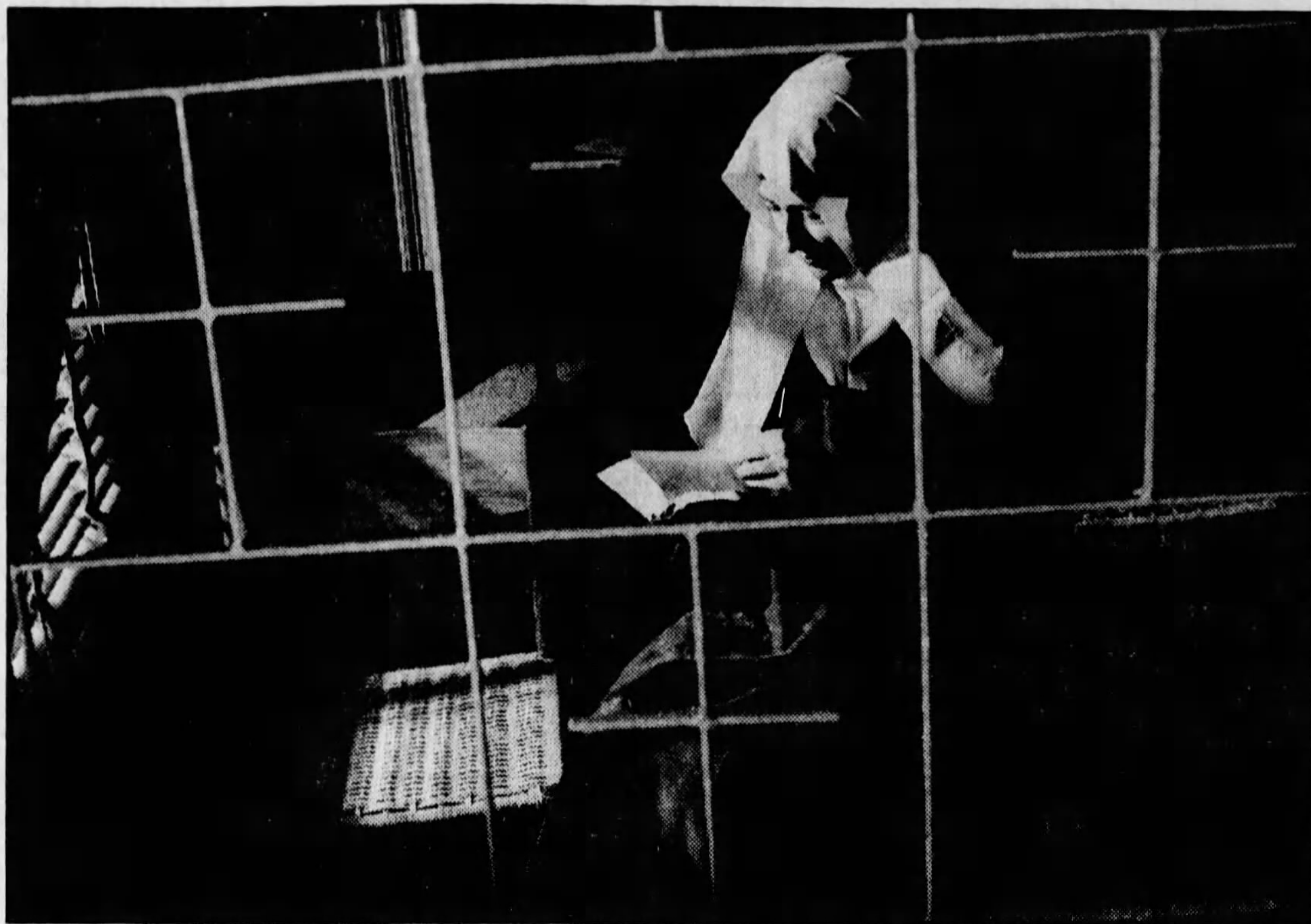
Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, director of the National Jewish Outreach Program based in New York City.

"Faith is a belief in a creator who operates the world on the basis of natural and supernatural rules."

"Belief in God implies doubt. When you say, 'I believe there's something there,' it means there's a possibility that it's not there. It's that struggle with the leap of faith that makes our faith stronger.

"For us who have lived through the generation of the Holocaust, the fact that Jews survived despite these impossible odds, and the restoration of the land of Israel after 2,000 years of exile, is a confirmation of our faith."

Eugene Begay, executive direc-



Sister Denise of the Angels, a cloistered novice, is preparing to take her final vows at the Discalced

Carmelite Monastery in La Plata, Md. "Faith is a grace," she says.

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tor of the National Congress of American Indians, and a spiritual chief of the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibway tribe in Wisconsin.

"We don't have the expression of faith, 'I am a believer.' We don't live by the Ten Commandments or have a concept of eternal condemnation. We have the Ojibway creation story, from which emanates all our spiritual philosophy of life, our ceremonies, our spiritual rites and our clans.

"We don't BELIEVE in a Great Spirit; we know he is there. We do not strive to believe in the creation story; We just do."

Moorhead Kennedy of New York City, former acting head of the economic section of the American Embassy in Tehran who was taken hostage by Iranian students in November 1979 and released in January 1981.

"I believe in God as interpreted by the Christians, a God that has sacrificed himself for us, loves us and will help guide our lives.

"In the first week of our im-

prisonment, the students handed out the New Testament. And I turned to a passage in the letters of St. Paul where he says, 'I'm writing as a prisoner in chains. But Jesus Christ, the son of David, was raised from the dead and his word is not in chains.'

"It meant even though I was tied up, the significance of what was happening was greater than just me. And that my faith was not limited by the chains in which I found myself."

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of the Transcendental Meditation Program, former spiritual adviser to the Beatles.

"I have faith in the eternal constitution of the universe, (the laws) of nature that organize the evolution of everything in the universe..."

"When I saw my spiritual master in the Himalayas, about 40 years ago, then I knew there was something more to life than selfish values... I realized the total reality was there deep within everybody. (That everyone can dis-

cover) natural law in its totality within one's own transcendental level of consciousness. (Nirvana is within; one must go beyond the thought to the unlimited source of thought.)

"That, I thought, is a good gift for everyone."

Iman Mohamad Kabbaj, director of the Islamic Mission of America in Brooklyn, N.Y., the first Islamic mosque established (1939) in the United States.

"Faith is the soul of the person. It will take him to hell or to paradise. I have faith in the creator of this world, God. Look behind you and in front of you. Everything is created by him.

"The father has to teach the son how to make a prayer, and that's how you create faith. If you didn't receive the first teaching at home with a faithful mother and a faithful father, then you are lost.

"Life without faith would be empty, like a bottle that has nothing in it."