

'The Cardinals Committee' and Chicago

By JAIME FONSECA
(NC News Service)

Chicago — A great majority of the 220,000 Spanish-speaking people in the Chicago area are poor, lonely and underprivileged.

But the people — roughly 44,000 families — often find the church a cultural and social bridge overcoming their isolation as immigrants.

Spearheading the effort is the Archdiocesan Latin American Committee, headed by Father Gilbert Carroll and Father John Rizzo. For the hundreds of Latinos who call at its headquarters every week, it is simply "the Cardinal's Committee."

It is a clean, two-story building, consisting with the run-down structures surrounding it. It has a chapel, a spacious waiting room and offices. The doors and walls are covered with notices, slogans on human dignity, directions on how to get various kinds of help, sports trophies and vocational exhibits.

The many faces and shapes in the waiting room reflect a variety of human needs — they included a young man in shirt sleeves; a couple with a five-year old girl; an elderly lady with a teenager; an old man and a woman, probably his daughter; a farm worker, and two young girls. The faces change every hour.

You only have to read the signs on the offices to guess their business. United Farm Workers, Sports, Credit Union, Cursillos (Little Courses in Christianity), Employment Counseling, Social Service, Cuban Association, Hermanos de San Juan, "Juventud Revolucionaria" (Revolutionary Youth).

Most of the Spanish-speaking came from Mexico; they and their descendants make up the largest group, about 120,000. Then came the Puerto Ricans, with about 80,000 and, in a more recent wave, the Cubans with 15,000. Spanish-speaking people are predominant in some 40 of Chicago's 480 parishes.

Puerto Rican leaders are credited with the pioneering efforts that eventually led to the committee's formation. Their San Juan association produced the first leaders in community work.

Jose Valentin, top sports organizer for the Latin community, now coordinates the competitions of more than 100 teams in soft-ball, volleyball, baseball and bowling. Over 2,000 people are involved.

Joe says that sports can be a great tool of apostolate. "You see, Chicago falls big on you with its confusion, problems, tensions; more so for the newcomers, and even more for those migrating from countries of simple outlook; everybody is a Catholic, a farmer, a family man. Our teams give them a link with the Christian community, and eventually a sense of belonging to the 'Big City'."

"Come May, for instance, and we will have a ball at one of the big hotels. The occasion is the awarding of prizes; but the real aim is to show the local government that we, the poor, are organized, and want a share in decision-making."

For seven years, Carlos Rodriguez, who comes from Cuba, has been helping migrants at the Cardinal's Committee center to find jobs or to train for jobs.

"We are able to fill some jobs a week, mostly in factories, a few in hotels. We keep contacts alive with management in the area, and they have cooperated beyond our expectations," Rodriguez says. Many applicants have language difficulties and others lack skills.

Rodriguez is also in charge of coordinating the Manpower Development Training Act for the Latin community that is in touch with the center. Basic English and industrial skills are the main fields. Of hundreds of applicants, almost 500

have been channeled to vocational schools to learn machine operation, soldering and other technical skills.

The office of social service handles dozens of cases each week on housing, legal counseling, consumer aid, welfare and health.

The "man and the city" concern is beginning to catch the religious congregations, says Sister Susan Rosenbach, of the

School Sisters of St. Francis. "In fact, I feel the future of the Religious Sisters is in working with the people and their leaders, including the priests, to solve their temporal as well as spiritual problems. Thus we can reach a fuller goal."

She said some 80 nuns have joined the Inter-Cultural Institute sponsored by the Cardinal's Committee, for a series of ten lectures on the cultural

values and attitudes of the Spanish speaking. Several Sisters, already in charge of Latin American area studies, are teaching Spanish to other members of their communities.

"We are pushing Sister formation for work among the Latins and other poor groups. They can help so much in guiding these people, particularly the women, who have been left behind and must be brought up to more decent standards."

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