

Sister Missioner Reports on Chile

Beth Keller, Mercy High senior, recently talked to a school alumna, Sister Barbara McGrath, who has been a parish-sister in Chile for three years. Her interview reflects what the returned missioner told Mercy students at a Mission Day assembly.

Far, far away where hot water is a rare luxury and education is compulsory only up to the eighth grade, five brothers and sisters crawl into bed—the same bed.

Far, far away twelve-year-olds are dying of tuberculosis, hepatitis and other curable diseases, only because not enough people know how to prevent them.

Far, far away buses are the most common means of travel and a man's average yearly income is \$700.

The sadness of it all is that it's all real, and "far, far away" somehow doesn't seem so far when it's the center of your home, your work, your life.

Rochesterian, Sister Barbara McGrath, R.S.M., has worked with the poor of Chile for three years. She knows poverty in all its forms and through her work has learned to feel complete frustration, satisfaction and the deepest of all human emotions, the common bond of brotherhood.

Recently she spoke to students of Mercy High at their annual Mission Day and talked with me afterward.

After attending Mercy High (where she was president of the Catholic Students' Mission Crusade in her senior year), she entered the Sisters of Mercy in the fall of 1959. Three years ago, she was chosen to go to Chile as one of six missionaries from the Mercy order.

Sister Barbara says that Chile is a country which is Catholic only in name. The majority of her people are baptized yet know little about their faith.

Therefore, although thought of as a missioner, she is not there to convert people but spends the majority of her time helping adults form a more Christian life, mainly through catechetical instructions. She also works with teenagers, to help them help themselves as well as others, and instructs adults in sex education.

South America is noted for its slower living pace, — the one thing that Sister Barbara found difficult to become accustomed to. (When it might take a Rochesterian 10 minutes to renew a driver's license, it takes approximately four hours to do it in South America.)

Asked whether she can see the effects of her work, Sister honestly states that she cannot — "not in a general, overall effect." She realizes that she has reached certain individuals; however, because of the constantly changing population she feels that it's impossible to really tell how many people she's influenced.

Upon returning to American suburbia after living with the Chilean poor for three years, Sister admits without hesitation that it was a hard adjustment. In three years, she has learned a lot about living and came to the realization that she could easily do without many of the "essentials" that she had known all her life in Rochester. "When the basics are all you've got, you learn to live with them," she says.

When there are so many areas at home that greatly need missionary help, why did she feel it necessary to go to South America to help? Sister's answer: "Every person has his



SISTER BARBARA

own little niche in life and mine just isn't in America."

Monetary support she or missionaries like her receive from the United States is essential, for she states simply, "We couldn't live without you." Because the Chileans can barely support themselves, much less anyone else, contributions from the States are used to help the missionaries personally, as well as for the establishment of libraries, clinics and other health centers.

Because of the recent establishment of a Marxist government in Chile — the first freely elected one of its kind in the world, Sister Barbara feels that the new administration might possibly have an effect on her work. Changes will come slowly, she predicted, because the present Congress is Christian-Democrat and won't be replaced for three more years. (Salvador Allende won by only 1 per cent of the vote.)

Sister Barbara McGrath is an

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optimist who sees the good and believes in what she sees. She laughs with a freedom and ease that signifies her humanness and portrays her faith in good-

ness. Behind her? Three years of slow, frustrating yet rewarding experiences which will someday help to make the dream come

true and the puzzle fall into place. Ahead? More of the same. Why? Sister Barbara McGrath enthuses: "Because I love it"



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