

Report from Bolivia

'Padres' Explain Transformation of Mission

LaPaz — This is going to be a year of transformation for the parish of San Jose Obrero. Rochester's eight-year-old mission will reach a milestone and our present team will move on to other work.

Latin America, as a continent and a culture, has a history of subjugation and exploitation. The vast majority of its people are tightly constrained by poverty, a sense of shame and inferiority, and by religious traditions that enslave rather than free.

The theology of liberation is not just a catch phrase today but is based on the consciousness that man's relationship with God is essentially linked with the development of his own humanity, freedom and selfhood.

For a man to realize his dignity in the brotherhood of men, and as a brother of Christ, he has to walk tall, free to control his own life and destiny.

The original goals of this mission were not to possess, nor perpetuate, but rather to put ourselves out of work. This was to prove a difficult task because the people of our parish have gained so little self-determination in the other areas of their life. The decisions for their lives are usually made far away from where they live.

To replace ourselves with a Bolivian priest, at this time, is practically impossible.

To replace the present team with more foreign missionaries will only delay the ultimate transformation that we believe is necessary.

Toward the end of 1973 there emerged here in LaPaz the opportunity we had worked toward for years, i.e. the situation and persons that would enable us to make a bold and radical innovation in our parish structure. With the permission and support of the local archbishop we are in the process of forming a new team of Bolivian people, lay and religious, to serve the people in this parish.

We believe that what we sought to accomplish by our being here can be brought about now by our leaving — that the transformation of the parish can be brought about by the personally painful severing of old relationships and the forming of a new relationship. Hopefully this will be a year of increasing selfhood and independence for our people.

As a young nation can not stand totally alone but needs economic aid, San Jose Obrero also needs and deserves the economic support of the Diocese of Rochester. The parish does try desperately to be self-supporting but can't quite make it yet. Your financial help and moral support is badly needed.

Finally the prayers of all of us are needed to open our eyes and hearts to see and do God's will in these matters. His Spirit is alive in our parish community. With prayer we can be in touch with that spirit too and give to San Jose's parish community a sense of unity with us in the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we four from this mission, as St. Paul did, will be moving on. In another letter we will report to you about our plans,

and how the new team is working here. Till then, more than ever, please keep us in your thoughts

and prayers, and let us know what you think of this Holy Year of liberation.

The Rochester Team at San Jose Obrero LaPaz, Bolivia

OUR PARISH COUNCIL

Bernard Lyons

Imagine yourself in a wheelchair. Now, mentally, try getting around your house. Try going to church, and to other meetings.

What's happened? You probably found all sorts of barriers. You lost some of your mobility. You began to feel helpless. Perhaps you even imagined yourself less of a person.

Well, that's what some 250,000 Americans who are confined to wheelchairs feel every day. There are thousands more who are partially confined with canes and walkers. They are able to get around fairly well, but the little mound of stairs at your house or in front of the church building seems like an almost insurmountable mountain to them.

A parish council in rural Kansas reworked a side entrance to their church to help those who have mobility handicaps to get free and unaided entrance to the church.

The architectural barrier seems such a small thing. Maybe that's why it's so often overlooked by most of us not in wheelchairs. I wonder what would happen in a parish if the council members were confined to wheelchairs for a day?

Maybe some thoughts from wheelchair-bound persons will give your parish council some ideas.

Pat Klinger, 34, a foreign language translator from Ohio, is paralyzed below the neck. Last year she went to Europe and Israel with a group of handicapped people.

"I realize I can do almost everything everybody else does. Traveling gives us a tremendous psychological uplift," she says.

Dr. Carolyn Vash, 38, who wanted to become either a dancer or a psychologist before she was struck by polio at 17, is confined to a wheelchair. But, she's the Deputy Chief Director of the California Department of Rehabilitation.

"I was torn up inside, but I sort of took charge from the start. I continued my social life, kept my friends and didn't let anyone feel sorry for me. I just knew on a subconscious level that I would carry on doing what was possible. I was different," she says, "but it didn't mean that I couldn't lead a useful or proper life."

With the aid of an electric wheelchair, she finished high school and 13 years of college to get a doctorate in psychology. She is married, paints, and recently learned how to cook.

Her present goals include knocking down architectural barriers to the handicapped, such as narrow door ways, high elevator buttons and out-of-reach water fountains.

Nancy Becker, 21, is a pre-law student at the University of Illinois in Chicago. Two years ago she was in a diving accident that left her a quadriplegic, unable to use her arms and legs properly.

"You have to avoid the prejudice against people in wheelchairs that you're either pitiful or you're Helen Keller," she says. "I reserve my right to be mediocre!" she says. It's Nancy's way of putting her handicap in perspective, but she isn't mediocre. She intends to run for the U.S. Senate.

LATE VOCATION

San Francisco (RNS) — James L. Swenson, 45, a former accountant for the city and county of San Francisco, was ordained here recently as a priest of the Catholic diocese of Reno, Nev.

JACK WINTER'S POLYESTER KNITS

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