

'Jail Ministry' Topic for Clergy

By PAT PETRASKE

His words hit hard. Combining quiet poetic eloquence and thunderous statistics that bounced off the walls of the Monroe County Jail, Father Myer Tobey spoke on "The Mission of the Church to the Imprisoned" at the clergy conference April 7.

The energetic Jesuit priest, director of the Dismas Rehabilitation House in Baltimore, Md. and former chaplain of the Baltimore County Jail, was the principal speaker at what was termed a "very unique situation." The blue uniforms of the prison guards who stood by quietly contrasted with the black and white clerical garb. Many of the diocesan priests, who joked about being "a captive audience for a change" expressed a "chilling" feeling when viewing the maze of metal bars that lead to the jail auditorium.

Father Tobey was on a panel of men involved in prison life, including William Lombard, sheriff of Monroe County; Father John Mulligan and Robert Bonn of Rochester Interfaith Ministry; Albert Benedetto, director of rehabilitation at the jail, and Father James Moynihan, chaplain of the jail and chancellor of the diocese. The latter in his welcoming remarks expressed the purpose of the conference as a chance "to help one another and to make us aware of the programs in the jail ministry."

Quoting from a report produced by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Father Tobey exclaimed, "The abuses cannot be justified. The disturbing statistics demonstrate that correctional institutions have little deterrent effect." He believes that prisons are a failure and that the solution to the problem is not to improve the prisons but "to let them dwindle away."

Father Tobey calls the prisons "dumping grounds for injustices."

"The people can only stand so much," he declared. "On the street the pressures get too heavy and they come to prison and then after awhile they return to the street... and on and on... a vicious human circle; and one ghetto is not much different from the other. Over each (prisoner) it is written: 'You belong here; you can't make it outside.'"

A profile on prisoners reveals that they spring from areas where the infant mortality rate is high, where 64 per cent of the children live with only one or neither parent. Each year, about 16,400 people pass through the jails in the 12-county Rochester diocese. In Monroe County 69 per cent have been charged with misdemeanors or minor violations, according to Benedetto.

Most of the prisoners, he added, are 20 years old, repeat offenders, single, with a variety of problems. Ninety per cent of the prisoners in Monroe County never graduated from high school.

The average date of construction of the jails is 1917. "You can sense what the facilities are like," Father Mulligan said. The most devastating statistic, however, reveals that approximately 61 per cent of the prison population "presumed innocent because they have not yet gone to trial."

Father Tobey questioned the role of a prison: "Is it for rehabilitation or a place for incarceration? You can't rehabilitate a man while he is locked up."

Dismas Rehabilitation House, a privately controlled, non-



Diocesan priests listen intently to a description of prison conditions and possible options available in jail ministry offered at the clergy conference.

sectarian half way house was conceived by Father Tobey on the premise that "most men will not return to prison if there exists in the community an after-care program through which they can re-enter society." The rate of success at Dismas House has been estimated at 65 to 70 per cent.

Prisoners with six months left on their sentences are released to the house and enter a program of counseling and operative conditioning. The men either work or attend school and work on a point system for rewards. For example, getting up on time, staying clean from drugs and performing assigned chores can result in a weekend pass.

Initial reaction to Baltimore's first half way house ranged from approval of the concept but "not in our neighborhood" to outright horror of "living next door to dope fiends." None of the people's fears materialized and some of the prisoners are coaching the neighborhood basketball team.

Father Tobey praised the Rochester Interfaith Ministry for its advocacy role and challenged his audience to become involved with the jails.

His words were echoed by Father Winfried Kellner, associate pastor at St. Andrew, and Father Neil Miller, co-pastor at St. Augustine, who work at the Monroe County Jail. "Many people hesitate getting involved because they fear inadequacies," Father Miller said, and added that

there were training programs available.

Sheriff Lombard also commended the work of the jail ministers but stressed that the ultimate responsibility for the operation of the jail rests in the hands of the administrators.

Concluding the conference was Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, who declared "that as long as I remain Bishop, I will work to raise the level of consciousness" of the people in the diocese.

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OUR PARISH COUNCIL

Father William J. Freburger, the executive secretary of the Baltimore Liturgical Commission, tells the following story:

On Oct. 4, 1962, the Italian film director, Pier Paolo Pasolini, a Communist, was on a research visit in Assisi. That morning after breakfast, he tried to leave his hotel to begin his work, but he found his way blocked by a crowd that filled the square in front of the building. The press of people made it impossible even to open the front door.

"In exasperation, Pasolini turned to the receptionist and asked the cause of the demonstration. The two-word answer, 'Papa Giovanni!' reminded him of vaguely scanned headlines. This day was the feast of St. Francis of Assisi and the occasion was a historical visit to the town by John XXIII, one week before the opening of Vatican II.

"The filmmaker was not interested in such things, and he impatiently returned to his room to wait for the dispersal of the crowd. As he paced the room, he absent-mindedly picked up the book that lay on the night table and opened it. Ironically, it was a Gideon New Testament, and he found himself reading the first

page, the beginning of Matthew's Gospel.

"Suddenly, his cinematic instincts were aroused; it struck him that the text of Matthew read like the shooting script of a film. He sat down and raced excitedly through all 28 chapters. By the time he had finished, he had resolved to make a movie based entirely on the words of the first Gospel. And he did: Pasolini's 'The Gospel According to Matthew' was released in 1964. The director dedicated it to the man who had ruined his day in Assisi, Pope John XXIII."

The story illustrates how dramatic the gospels are, though we can sometimes lose sight of this in unprepared and listless readings of the Gospel at Masses.

A great deal of the drama depends upon the interpretative skill and reading ability of the individual lector or celebrant.

Father Freburger, thinking about the story of Pasolini's movie and recalling the proclamation of the Passion narratives during Holy Week by several readers, has prepared 34 Liturgies of the Word in dialogue form for three readers. These are published as "This is The Word Of The Lord" (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, paper, \$2.25).

The parish council and the worship commission of every parish ought to get several copies of Father Freburger's "This is The Word Of The Lord." Their own reading of the book will give them a deeper appreciation of the Gospels. And they will certainly deepen the worship experience of the parishioners if they implement any or all of the 34 Liturgies of the Word provided.

WOMEN'S CLUB

Elmira — The St. Patrick's Church Women's Club will hold a card party on Wednesday, April 17 at 8 p.m. in the parish hall.

Proceeds from the affair will help finance scholarships for Notre Dame High School students.

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