

Chile Sisters Send Greetings

Dear friends,

Greetings from your Mercy Sisters in Chile! Now that we are well into the 1974 work year, I thought I would write and let you know a bit about our activities here in Santiago.

At present, there are three of us here in San Luis Parish on the outskirts of the capital city: Sisters Marilyn Gerstner, Jane Kenrick and Doris Hamilton. Sister Margaret Mungovan is now enjoying her first return visit to the States, and Sisters Janet Korn and Janet Caulfield are also in the States for studies. So, the three of us are doing our best to keep the parish in motion.

As you may know, our main work is catechetics, both for First Communion and Confirmation, and each of us is in charge of the program in distinct areas of the parish, most of which are at least a 20-minute walk away from our convent. In the area immediately surrounding the convent, which previously was Sister Janet Korn's territory, the work is being carried on completely by lay people, all of whom have been well trained

by Sister Janet over the past few years.

Each of us this year has a group of women who work as catechists in our areas, and our job consists in preparing them well so that they in turn can give a weekly class to the mothers of the children preparing for First Communion. We all found it more difficult this year to recruit new catechists because so many housewives are trying to find jobs to help support their families, due to Chile's economic situation, which can best be described at present as high prices, low salaries, lots of things to buy, and no money with which to buy them. But perhaps because of this "catechist crisis" we doubly appreciate the many women who still have found it possible to help us and who devote many hours a week to this work.

The young people in the parish seem to have come alive over the past two years, and most of the Confirmation program is in their hands. Boys and girls 16 years and over take charge of younger teenagers and prepare them in weekly classes for two years.

Many times the teenagers involved in teaching Confirmation become interested in many other church activities as well (Social Action Committees, folk groups, etc.). There are many really dedicated young people who are helping us spread the Good News.

On the last Sunday in March we held an afternoon workshop for the teenage catechists, to give them a chance to meet each other, to dialogue on teaching techniques, and to pray together for the success of their work this year. On May 12, a similar workshop will be held for the adult catechists.

Another very active group in San Luis is our "Senior Citizens Club," of which Sister Margaret Mungovan is the religious advisor. This group meets each Thursday in the church, and besides being a chance for the older set to socialize, many times it provides an opportunity for Sister Margaret and the lay advisors to meet the needs of the women who attend the meetings. A similar group, under the leadership of laywomen, has

recently sprung up in Sister Marilyn's sector of the parish. Little by little we are beginning to minister to a very important percentage of our parishioners.

We have just finished Holy Week and all of us found that we really "lived" each liturgy with our people. On Holy Thursday evening we emphasized the theme of "Service" by asking the people to bring a donation of food or clothing for those poorer than themselves. The response convinced us even more of the simplicity and generosity of our people; they gave of the little they have to help those who have even less.

On Good Friday, three processions left from various parts of the parish to make the Way of the Cross and, two hours later, converged for a final prayer and blessing. To see 3,000 people gathered in one spot and to know that they are all from this parish was truly impressive. We think we may have given the soldiers a bit of a scare, however: since the September 11 military takeover, there have been no demonstrations to equal ours of Good

Friday! However, the soldiers on duty in the streets just stood back and let us pass: no one can stand in the way of Jesus carrying His cross!

We'll close for now, promising to keep you informed this year of how and what we are doing. We appreciate so much the support of your prayers and your interest in us, as well as your financial help, which goes to so many good uses; besides maintaining our house with the money you send us, we buy catechetical supplies, pay enrollment fees for diocesan courses and workshops for our catechists, buy food for the needy, and just about anything else that comes up. We are most grateful to have, through you, this opportunity to serve our Chilean brothers and sisters, and we ask that you pray that we may continue to work generously for the spreading of the Gospel here in Santiago.

We wish you the joy of the Risen Christ during this Easter Season!

Sister Marilyn Gerstner
Sister Jane Kenrick
Sister Doris Hamilton



Catechist and author, Gabriel Moran, [left] reminisces with his former student, Father Charles Collins, during a religious education celebration.

Paucity of Religion Cited by Educator

By PAT PETRASKE

A search for religious rejuvenation or revelation is on the rise within the Catholic Church, according to lecturer and catechist Gabriel Moran, who believes that unless religion is put into education, greater chaos, faces the Church than was witnessed in the 16th century.

"There are those who travel around the world only to come home again," said Moran, explaining that the Church has run full circle from a rejection of priestly authoritarian control to a view of rationalistic enlightenment. What remains, continued Moran, is to look at ordinary religion in an extraordinary way.

Moran spoke at a celebration sponsored by the diocesan department of religious education at the Pastoral Center last Friday. During his discussion of "Where is Religious Education in the New Design of Church," he suggested that religious education programs be offered at every stage from birth to death.

One of the three principles for religious education explained in his ninth and latest book, *The*

Religious Body, states that "all life and education should become religious. We struggle with the limits of our lives and religious education is a negation of these limits."

It is the "little people and the old people" who are on the outer limits of life and who will be most affected by the results of rejuvenation. "I wonder about a society whose only solution is to send their old folks to St. Petersburg," Moran commented. He claims that society's treatment of these groups is a test of its "sensitivity" towards birth and death. What is needed is a religious education program appropriate for each group, he said.

Moran is director of an organization of 16 men and women called The Alternative which offers religious education programs to any agency, particularly those outside the Church, such as prisons, hospitals and schools. The members agree with another of Moran's principles that the concern for knowledge is more important than the acquisition of faith.

A peculiar revolution has hit the 70's, Moran observed. For

example, a suburban family holds weekly witchcraft meetings; an advertising manager together with 100 people chants Buddhist hymns daily; one of the season's most popular movies is "The Exorcist," and a best-selling book is "The New Polytheism." Each of these, however, contains religious elements and has something to offer, the lecturer said.

He is struggling to discover a new language for religious education, he said, one that will not "change the religious language to the secular but will rediscover new meaning" for it. Rather than using faith in its narrow definition as a certain limited set of beliefs, Moran wants religious education to encompass knowledge of the Christian religion in general, and other faiths. "You can even learn from the heretics of the past," he said.

His final principle views Catholicism as a "artistic and cultural occult" and suggested the need to return to the "little sacraments" such as Marian and First Friday devotions.

"They give intimations of eternity and are the glue that holds religion together," he said.

Program Aimed At Preschoolers

Auburn — Religious readiness and positive attitudes towards Christian experience are nurtured at an early age through a preschool program at St. Alphonsus Parish.

For most parish 3 and 4 year olds, this class has been their first supervised play experience, so the emphasis is not on teaching the child, but on guiding him at his own pace. The program stresses how the child can live a life of Christian love.

The sessions complement attitudes parents foster at home.

The teachers for the three preschool classes have found their

experiences personally rewarding and are amazed at the children's response and growth. While created learning events are used, the spontaneous situations arising around questions and crises are capitalized upon by the volunteer teachers. Emphasis for the five-year-old is focused more on the social dimensions and how the child relates to his family and the community around him.

The program spokesman explained the program also provides a special experience for the young child who might otherwise find it difficult to find a place in the adult centered Sunday liturgy.

'Bill of Rights' Is Advocated For Retarded

Washington, D.C. [RNS] — Calling for the enactment of a "bill of rights" for the mentally retarded, a U.S. Catholic Conference official here said that 200,000 retarded persons are neglected by their communities and often "set back further into the depths of retardation."

Sister Virginia Schwager, SP, who directs the USCC's Division of Health Affairs, made her plea in a statement commending the governors of 17 states for designating April as Legal Rights for Retarded Citizens' Month.

She advocated a bill that would incorporate standards for the humane care, treatment and protection of the mentally disabled. She also pointed to a shortage of health and rehabilitation facilities, services and personnel for the care of the retarded throughout the country.

Asserting that fear, emotion and prejudice persist in citizens personally confronted with the retarded, Sister Virginia said "the due process and equal protection provisions of the Constitution — which apply equally to the retarded — are often forgotten in the face of fear and intolerance."

The USCC official applauded President Nixon's April 1 executive order continuing the President's Committee on Mental Retardation and expanding its responsibilities. She observed that the committee provides "a means and an incentive for assuring the retarded full status as citizens under the law . . ."



Orator

Kevin Donovan, district winner in the Optimists International oratorical contest, will be among the seven competitors in the state finals Sunday, May 5, at the Tremholm East, Canandaigua. Kevin, a sophomore at Aquinas, is the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Donovan of St. Helen's parish.

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