

# Missioners Home, Reflect On Ministry



By BONITA BALDWIN

"I'll always think of myself as post-Latin America."

"I'll always be part Chilean, never fully North American again."

Last week two former missionaries to South America talked in separate interviews of their field experience and its impact on their present ministries. Father Daniel Tormey, the first speaker, worked in St. Joseph the worker parish, Rochester's former mission in La Paz, Bolivia. Sister Doris Hamilton, the second, spent three years in San Luis Parish in Chile. Both have left their work in lay hands.

The success of the indigenous, lay team in control of the La Paz parish has attracted wide attention, and been noted in the National Catholic Reporter and America magazine, weeklies of national circulation. Its operation, Father Tormey reported, is being used as a model for other ministries.

Father Tormey explained that when the two options of replacing themselves with local priests or continuing a flow of personnel from the U.S. lost their feasibility, the Rochester mission team came to realize that lay control was the way that they should go. They experienced what he described as a very emotional time, similar to that of the separation of parent and child during the growing up process, as they prepared the laity for the separation and the assumption of responsibility.

Father Tormey said his notions of ministry, mission, and the position of the laity had changed greatly as a result of his work with the Bolivians, most of whom were Indians. He is now assistant diocesan director of the Office of Human Development and said he feels that the lessons learned in South America can be applied in Rochester. He sees less need for a sacramental ministry in the inner city and more need for indigenous leadership. In this sense, "I don't believe there is a priest shortage," he said.

Sister Doris now lives at St. Charles convent and is employed by Holy Apostles, Holy Family, and St. Peter and Paul churches to work with the Spanish-speaking in their areas. On her return to Rochester, she said, she found many unsung heroes here, true missionaries laboring at home.

Sister Doris came home because of her health. Much of her work with the youth groups of San Luis and the classes training mothers to prepare their children for first communion has been left with the laity. "But I didn't leave it in lay hands because I felt the work was finished," she insisted. She is pleased with reports from Chile of the progress of the work. She said that the youth seem to be growing as a Christian community.

Sister Doris was familiar with San Andres parish, near San Luis, where the work was left in Chilean hands because the

missionaries felt it was completed. Rochester's Sisters of Mercy had sent sisters to both missions. Those at San Andres, Janet Caufield and Jane Kenrick, have since been assigned to work in San Luis. Both parishes are part of the archdiocese of Santiago.

As at the La Paz mission, the responsibility for San Andres has been left entirely in lay hands. The Columban fathers who served there, however, have moved to start another mission in Chile. All the Rochester priests have returned home.

Father Tormey said he would like to see La Paz happen again, with laity being "freed up" to assume leadership roles. If it happened often enough there could be tremendous consequences, he said. "When people are able to make decisions and control their own lives the implications at the national level

are fantastic." He predicted that they would be able to overthrow the oppression that they live under. The Bolivian Indians have been oppressed by white settlers for at least 400 years, and even before that by other Indians, he said.

Sister Doris returned to the U.S. with a greater understanding of Latin culture, which helps in her work with Rochester's Latins. Her appreciation of that culture and immersion in it while living in Chile have enabled her to look at

North American culture with more objectivity than many. Although she does not admire all details of the American government, she said that she genuinely appreciates the stability of the government after living in a region where governments can topple in seconds. Since her return, she has observed that Americans seem unaware that other people exist. Commercials that reveal the materialistic way Americans look at life and their value of getting up in the world depress her, she confessed.

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