

COURIER-JOURNAL

Church's Role in Question

Deported for Striving for Social Justice

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Ithaca — On Nov. 18, Father Edward Gerlach, a Maryknoll missionary in the Philippines, was arrested, tried, and expelled from the country. He was placed on a flight for San Francisco after being held in the airport for five hours. During the entire time, he was not allowed counsel from the American embassy, or to contact his superiors.

Father Gerlach, a native of Binghamton, spoke Dec. 14 at St. Catherine of Siena on the situation in the Philippines. Prior to his talk, he responded to questions in an exclusive interview.

Father Gerlach said that he was willing to talk openly, as he realized that he would never be able to re-enter the Philippines.

Martial law which allows detention without trial or charges began in September 1972 in the Philippines when Father Gerlach said, he was working as a chaplain for a farmers organization. He was arrested immediately and released after being held two weeks. Then

on Oct. 30, 1973, he was arrested again and taken from his diocese in Mindanao to Manila, a 600-mile journey. He was in a stockade for seven weeks and then under house arrest for 13 months. During his trial, well-publicized outside the Philippines, he was defended by a highly respected Filipino, and was found innocent of all charges. Despite the verdict, he was placed on probation for three years.

On Nov. 18, he was arrested and charged with violation of his probation. The specific charges, Father Gerlach said, included such things as "I attended a Mass for laborers on May 1, Labor Day in the Philippines, and attended a Mass for the urban squatters at the time of the Habitat meeting in Canada. Asked if he had violated the conditions set for him, he responded, "No. In three or four instances I was responding to invitations from bishops to attend ecumenical and liturgical services which were used as charges against him."

The trial lasted between seven and ten minutes, Father Gerlach said, and he was not allowed counsel. He was then taken directly

to the airport, where he was held in seclusion before being placed on a plane to San Francisco.

"Americans who are in trouble should at least be able to contact their embassy," he said. But the American government apparently has taken no action over the deportation, he said. "An official at the embassy told us they have a set of priorities. A higher priority is American military men and American businessmen. He told us frankly that missionaries didn't rate very high," he explained.

As to why the Philippine government waited until now to deport him, Father Gerlach suggested that it was possibly due to the fact that the "American government is in limbo" between the election and inauguration, and because "the church was getting a lot more active" in justice issues, and the "whole theology of liberation was a foreign import."

The "whole issue" is "what is the role of the Church?" Father Gerlach said, "is working for social justice allowable for the Church, or for any foreigners?"

His deportation was not an

isolated incident, he noted. During November, "153 people were rounded up in the diocese in Mindanao where I worked," he reported. He also said that two Church-operated radio stations were closed by the military.

The farmer's group he worked with was trying to "be able to own a farm themselves" to support their families. "There is a great deal of fear in rural areas," he said, "fear of being arrested, fear of being reported." Large American companies, such as Dole, United Fruit Co. and Delmonte, were renting the land, Father Gerlach said, and forcing families who had lived there for generations to move and seek another source of income. Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos has said "success of the new order depends on land reform," Father Gerlach said, but actual reform has been negligible.

Asked to evaluate the condition of the average Filipino since the beginning of martial law, Father Gerlach said that it has been "getting worse." He explained that last Spring, the minimum wage for factory workers was raised from about \$1.05 to \$1.15 per day, but during the last year and a half, the

cost of living has doubled.

Mentioning the recent American offer of \$1 billion in rent for the 22 American military bases in the Philippines and for military aid, Father Gerlach noted that American military aid has doubled since the beginning of martial law. "Are we willing to support, by our taxes, a regime that oppresses people? That is a serious moral question. Americans," Father Gerlach said, "are on the side that would repress the nationalism of the people."

As to the future of missionary work in the Philippines, Father Gerlach noted that "it's a very difficult kind of work to get into right now, I'll tell you." Whether such work will have to stop is "going to be the big question," he said. Liberation, he pointed out, "will not come from anyone but themselves; I have a lot of confidence in the Filipino people."

"The reason why I'm here," to speak at St. Catherine's, he said, is "because an awful lot can be done for people in the Third World by people in the First World," and he wants Americans to understand the situation.

Pray for Bishop Kearney

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan asks everyone to pray for Bishop James E. Kearney who is reported to be in very poor health.



Carollers Entertain Shut-ins

Residents of the Baptist Home in Fairport are serenaded by their neighbors from Assumption parish in Sunday afternoon Christmas carolling. The annual "sing" is directed by the pastor, Father Joseph Beatini.



Christmas Fund Is Still Growing

Christmas is almost upon us. Most of the presents have been bought and wrapped. The tree is trimmed and the most serious concern we have is whether, a favorite uncle can make plane reservations in time for the holidays. Some people in our diocese have larger problems.

What does an unemployed father do when his children ask him if there will be any presents this year? Where can an elderly person celebrate Christmas when his or her family is all gone or simply doesn't care?

It is the task of Catholic Charities, and other organizations like it, to try and answer these questions. For the past eight years the Courier-Journal Christmas Fund, together with Catholic Charities, has provided aid to some of these people.

There have been more than \$20,000 collected so far this year. Some members of the diocese have taken a more personal role in the Christmas Fund collection. Members of Nazareth Academy Homeroom 301 selected a family from the Courier-Journal Christmas Fund's Neediest Cases and collected food for them and delivered it to a collection point. The homeroom also plans to collect money for a roast for this family on Dec. 22, the day school closes for Christmas vacation.

cepting donations. Anyone wishing

to do so, can send his or her donation:

Courier-Journal Christmas Fund
50 Chestnut St.
Rochester, N.Y. 14604

The Catholic Charities Office is not able to accommodate gifts of clothing, food or toys. Non-perishable food items and toys may be left at St. Michael's, 609 N. Clinton Ave., and at Immaculate Conception, using the Edinburgh Street side of the school; non-perishable food at Mount Carmel, 60 Woodward St., but call in advance to arrange your delivery. Also, many parishes through the diocese accept non-perishable food items. We advise anyone interested to contact his own parish.

Call to Action For Diocesans

Next week's issue [Dec. 29] of the Courier-Journal will be devoted to the document drawn up by the Detroit Call to Action conference which took place in October. The format will allow for all diocesans to respond to the proposals so that Bishop Joseph L. Hogan will have a consensus when the National Conference of Catholic Bishops meets in May to discuss the recommendations.