

Help Our Diocesan Missions Sunday

See Center Section

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U.S. Bishops: Some Action, More to Come

BY FATHER DOUGLAS C. HOFFMAN

Chicago — More than 270 Catholic bishops from 161 dioceses gathered for three days here last week in the Spring meeting to deal with a variety of concerns. The agenda was so full that it was not completed, but significant decisions were made and important directions set that are positive signs for the Church in the United States.

Press and radio, both religious and secular, were on hand in larger numbers than ever before to report on and analyze the statements made and positions approved or rejected.

A telegram to Pope Paul VI sending greetings and pledging loyalty was read to the assembly. Then came the presentation of the agenda. Over the course of the three days the bishops took these actions:

1. Call to Action.

Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin set the tone in his opening address as president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) when he observed that "there is every good reason to reflect at this moment on the theme of unity — creative unity in the service of the Church. In these days we must consider a number of complex and often controversial questions. We shall engage in candid discussion and debate. We shall disagree at times. This is always the case. But some may be tempted to focus on the fact of our diversity and pay too little attention to the fact of our unity."

A. Approved a chart prepared by the Task Force on the Call to Action telling where every resolution (182) from the Detroit conference was assigned, with an indication of the kind of response the NCCB sought (action, study/report, encouragement to dioceses and parishes to act, develop in the light of positions already formulated by Rome).

B. Approved a 16-page "preliminary response" to the Call to Action resolutions. Three sections were contained in the paper that was the seventh draft.

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'Truly Response Of Whole Body'

Father Douglas C. Hoffman is diocesan director of Pastoral Ministry and directed the diocesan Call to Action program. The Courier-Journal asked him to give his impressions of the bishops' meeting in Chicago.

BY FATHER DOUGLAS C. HOFFMAN

As I sit here among news releases, abundant documentation, many notes and many more memories, I ask myself these questions. What did a Pastoral Center, parish-oriented 34-year-old priest ordained since Vatican II, with no press experience see at a three-day conference of the Catholic Bishops of the United States in May, 1977? What did I want to find? What did I not want to ignore?

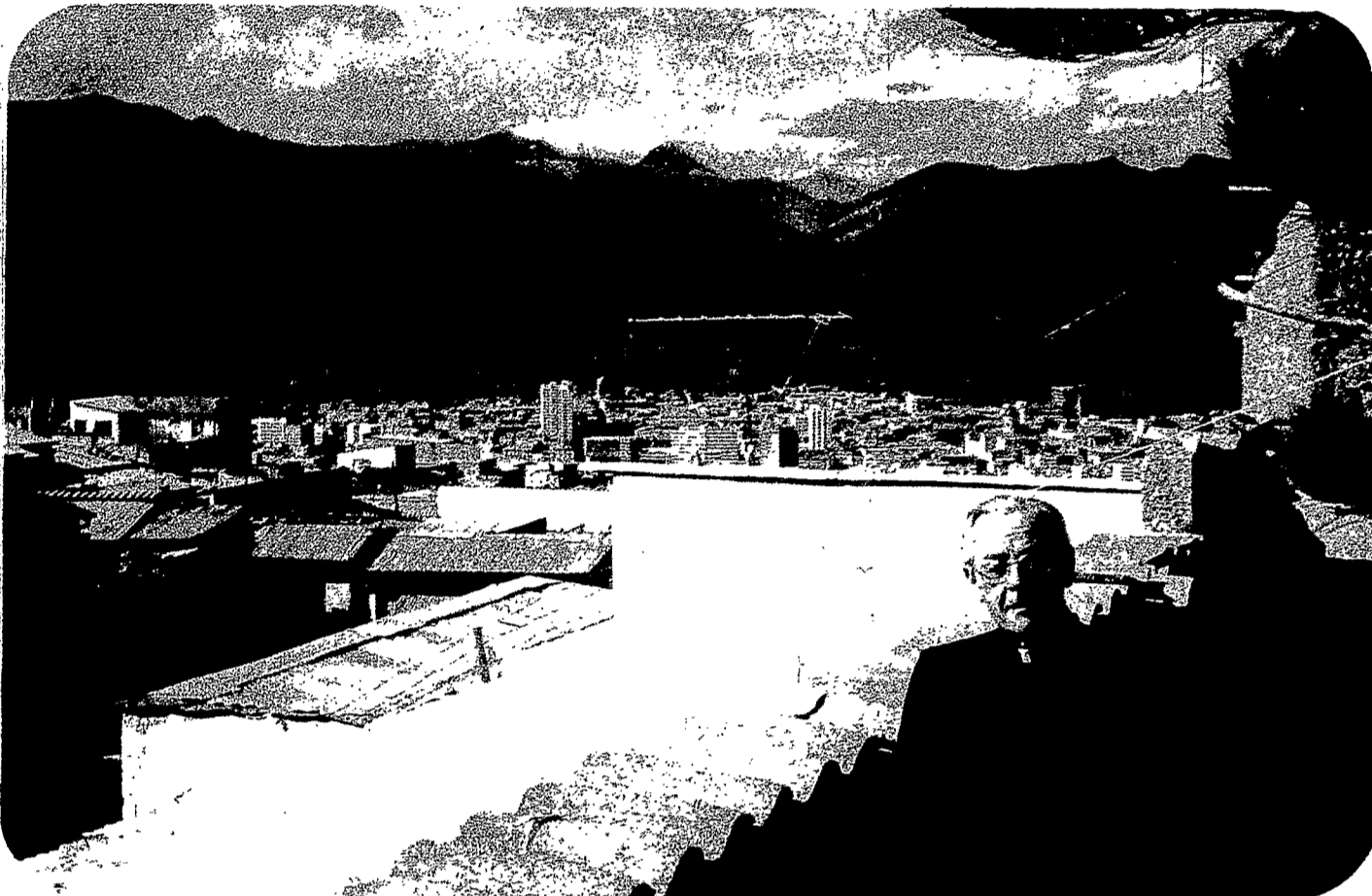
The world seen through the eyes of the media is exciting. I read in Commonweal two weeks before going to Chicago, that the USCC staff has received more requests for press clearance than any previous meeting. That bit of news at first increased my enthusiasm for going which already was high; then, as I began to think about it,

made me fear that something would happen, like in a bad dream, and I wouldn't get clearance. (Is there a priest of the Lord who has no faith in the Lord!)

Carmen Viglucci patiently heard out my fears and wrote a special letter of authorization, as well as giving me other support materials and several encouraging words. My fears were unfounded. The registrar gave me a press badge unhesitatingly and a packet of information, documentation, news releases, etc., I was in!

Monday morning, a full day before the conference began, I found myself seated at one of the typewriters (in a room of 60 of them) in the front row ready to start. George Cornell of the Associated Press had his name on a paper atop the typewriter

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Bishop Joseph L. Hogan at San Jose Obrero parish in LaPaz, Bolivia. Photo by Anthony J. Costello

Brazil ... Hope Makes Headway

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By ANTHONY J. COSTELLO

With the Sisters of St. Joseph in Brazil, April 23-28 — Words simply fail to describe the admirable work being performed by the sister-missioners working in this destitute area of the world.

On the one hand, the people live in such abject poverty that their lives seem practically hopeless. And on the other, the sisters' job is to instill hope — a practically impossible task but they are making headway.

The seven SSJ missioners cover a huge area and they have touched and affected countless lives since the mission began in this area in 1964. Operating under some of the most direful conditions anywhere, the sisters maintain a graceful and happy outlook that is so

contagious that people greet them joyfully wherever they go.

Someone in the group traveling with Bishop Joseph L. Hogan who is visiting missioners supported by the Rochester diocese, remarked to one of the sisters here, "Sister, you have nothing." Came the simple reply, "Wrong, we have everything."

The bishop is making the tour to show directly to our diocesan missioners the support of the home community and indirectly to evidence concern for missioners working across the world, often under threatening and oppressive conditions.

Traveling with the bishop are Father Joseph Reinhart, diocesan director of missions; Father Edward Golden, pastor of St. Francis Xavier Church in Rochester;

Father Michael Conboy, secretary to the bishop, and Anthony J. Costello, general manager of the Courier-Journal.

The visits to the sister-missioners in Uberlandia and Jatai, Brazil, are the final ones on a trip that has seen Selma, Ala., Panama City, LaPaz, Bolivia, and Santiago, Chile.

The mission tour was planned as a prelude to Diocesan Mission Sunday, May 15, when diocesans will have the opportunity to show their support for the missioners at collections in every parish.

The missions in Brazil are at Uberlandia, Itaguacu, Cacu, Sao Simao and Cachoeira Alta.

Sisters Virginia (Loyola) Schmitz, Mary Ann Mayer and Ann Lafferty work at the parish of Bom Jesus in Uberlandia; Sister Christel Burgmaier in Itaguacu and Paranaiguara; Sister Katherine Marie Popowich in Sao Simao, and Sisters Ellen Kuhl and Jean Bellini in Cachoeira Alta and Cacu.

If the varied work of the Sisters of St. Joseph could be categorized it would fall under two general headings — building Christian community and helping others to help themselves. These two themes run through all the work of the missions visited on the tour.

And Brazil, much like the other South American countries visited, is a land of sharp contrasts — between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the downtrodden, modern cities and backward rural areas.

For instance, the day before the group arrived at

Itaguacu, a baby had died of tetanus, a common disease of children in the area. Sister Christel (a nurse graduate of St. Mary's Hospital) said that it is common practice there to treat the new baby's umbilical cord with tobacco, coffee or spider webs. "Usually these are contaminated and the baby becomes diseased," she said.

Such babies when exposed to sunlight become rigid and spastic. The uneducated people do not associate the affliction with germs but rather with spirits. So newborn babies and their mothers are kept in a dark room to ward off evil spirits. The crisis is reached by the seventh day — life or death for the infant.

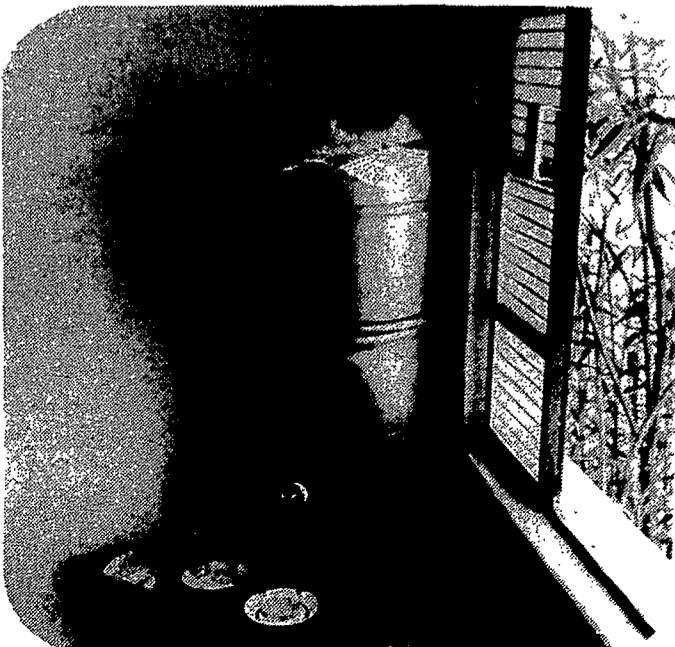
Sister Christel, incidentally, will be going to London to study tropical medicine after which she will return to Brazil.

Though tetanus is common, the most prevalent disease in the area is worms — 90 to 95 per cent of the youngsters suffer from the malady which can be fatal. The disease is so common because the drinking water is contaminated and the children also get the worms from going around barefooted.

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Bishop on TV For Missions

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, recently returned from the diocesan mission areas in Latin America, will be the celebrant of the annual Mission Sunday Mass to be broadcast at 8:30 a.m. on Sunday, May 15, over TV Channel 10.



This is the filter that combats worm infestation of drinking water.