

Charismatic Movement Grows Inside Prison

By MARTIN TOOMBS
Southern Tier Editor

Monterey — The small chapel provides shelter on a cold, snowy night for the 12 persons participating in a charismatic prayer meeting.

The group's singing, led by a guitar, fills the chapel. They discuss problems, pray together, and speak about the need for group members to support each other. The intensity builds until all are standing in the center of the room, hands raised, singing "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love."

Later the mood is broken by a call over a radio:

"All campmen must return to their bunks for the count."

The prayer meeting ends, as the 10 campmen, as the Camp Monterey inmates are called, quickly fold the chairs and hurry to their bunks for the evening count.

Camp Monterey is a minimum security prison, operated by the state Correctional Services Department in western Schuyler County, in the town of Monterey. Most campmen are 18 to 21 years of age; currently the camp population is 95.

"I wouldn't believe it if I wasn't here to see it," the group's leader, Mike Cordisco said, "I give them full credit," he commented, referring to the others present, for having the courage to attend the meetings. "They have to live with the other inmates, and it's not easy," he explained.

Cordisco should know; he, too, is an inmate.

Cordisco organized the group last July, which at first met on the camp's

baseball field in the evenings. Beginning with three campmen, he said, they met whenever they could.

Such gatherings are frowned upon in a prison, and the small group had problems getting started, although once drawing 25 men to a Bible study class. Cordisco approached Father David Mura, associate pastor of St. Mary of the Lake, Watkins Glen, and a chaplain at the camp, for outside participation in the group so they could use the chapel and meet regularly. Father Mura arranged for Jon Wehrung of Montour Falls to meet with the group, beginning in September.

Wehrung became ill, and the position was taken over by Marie and Michael Myers of Watkins Glen, the other two persons attending the meeting. Myers does some Bible instruction, he said, and Mrs. Myers leads the singing with her guitar. Myers emphasized that, while he is the contact for the group, Cordisco is the group's leader, and he and his wife are members, just as they would be of any other group.

Of course there are differences. The meetings begin at 6:30, and have to stop at 7:30 for about five minutes while the campmen return to their bunks for a count. When they return, the meeting continues until 8:55, when another count ends the meeting, and sends the campmen scurrying from the chapel to get to their bunks on time.

The group, which meets twice each week, is the only charismatic prayer group in a prison facility in the diocese.

Myers commented that an

observer wouldn't immediately be aware of the campmen's life as prisoners, noting that they are "directing their energies in making good the same way we would," and that they are like most Christians, "trying, but not always succeeding."

He emphasized that, he doesn't see his position as being a "prison ministry," but as a participant in a certain prayer group.

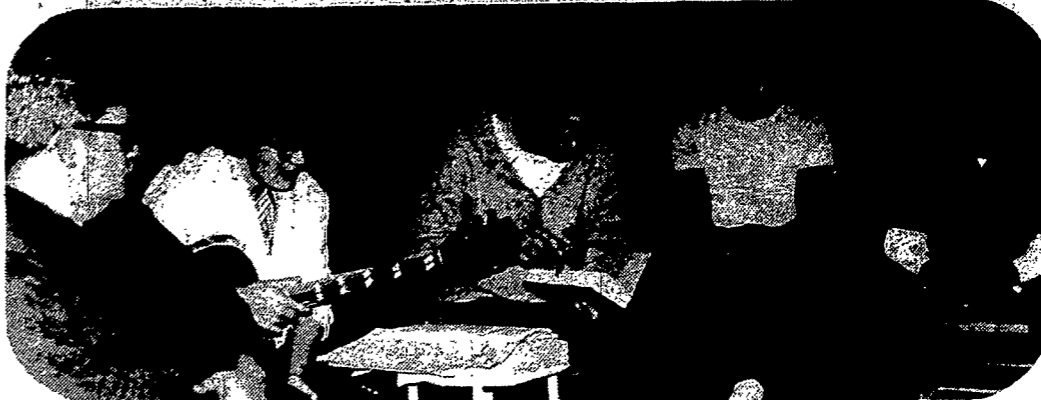
He also noted that participation in the meetings has not been a simple thing for the campmen; they have had to withstand ridicule from other campmen.

Cordisco pointed out that of the 25 who attended the Bible class, many have dropped out because of the disapproval of other campmen. They "want to be tough," he said, an image they can't maintain while attending religious services.

Several of the campmen were open about their experiences, describing their lives before they were sent to prison to illustrate how participation in the group has changed them. Alcohol, drugs, larceny and armed robbery were recurrent themes.

Group members also mentioned cases where they feel that their prayers were answered, first of all in their wish for an outside participant so they could meet in the chapel regularly. Family problems also were helped, they said, and one member reported that the group's support was important in his dealing with anger resulting from a family tragedy.

Cordisco became involved in charismatic prayer



Photos by Martin Toombs

Participating in the charismatic prayer meeting at Camp Monterey are, from left, Michael Myers, Marie Myers, Mike Cordisco, George Torres, and Bill Erb.

groups while on bail, he noted, and wanted to continue when sent to Camp Monterey. "Prison can't rehabilitate you, it can only educate you," Cordisco stated, adding that only Christ can rehabilitate, through inner healing. "I plant the seed," he said, and "let Christ do the rest, harvest it."

Dan Hinkeys reported that he attended prayer meetings before his arrest, but it "went into one ear and out the other, it didn't mean anything to me."

"In a way I'm glad I've come to prison," as "it pulled me out," Hinkey said. "I knew I had to change, but I didn't know how," he explained, "now I know it's through the Lord."

When he is released, he said, he would like to "open a youth house for people like myself" so he can "teach them that Christ can live in them."

George Torres commented that a commitment to Christ "helps with the trials and tribulations in here, and in the outside world." He added that the "brotherly manner" among group members also was important.

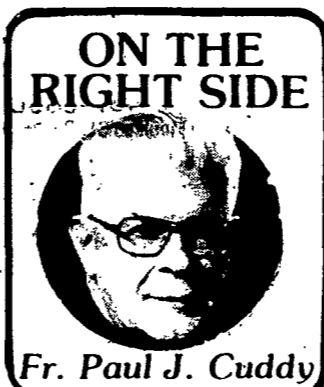
A bout with hepatitis which ended after he began to pray for his recovery was Mike Harrington's first acceptance of prayer, he reported. While on "the outside," he attended a few charismatic meetings, he said, but he "thought they were nuts, I didn't understand it." Before being sent to Camp Monterey, he prayed to get involved in a prayer group, he said, and did once he got there.

The meetings fill other functions as well. Kelvin Felton noted that although he doesn't attend regularly, "you feel lighter" after a meeting. "It relaxes your mind," Sam Riggs called the meetings a "place where

you can rest your mind and be at ease." The meetings "relieve the pressure," he said, and make him "feel spiritually uplifted."

Before his arrest, he "believed in the Lord," but didn't use that belief in his life, Bill Erb said. "I don't want to go back to the life I lived, he explained, "when I get out I want to live the life of Christ." Participation in the group also "makes time go fast," he said, "I look forward to coming here and praising the Lord."

Bruno Haney noted that before coming to Camp Monterey, the jail and prison he was in had no programs such as a prayer group. Participation in the group, he said, "is going to help me a lot. I'm going to find what I've been looking for in my life."



ON THE RIGHT SIDE
Fr. Paul J. Cuddy

To Frank Moore, manager of Veritas, Dublin:

You are a discouraging young man. The \$400 check for the Sheen tapes came safely. Thank you. (The distributors absorbed the postage, presumably as a missionary contribution for the conversion of Ireland.) But not one word from yourself! Do you know the set of conferences by the English Jesuit, Fr. Bernard Basset? He has one on charity which is the best talk I've ever heard. I will send it to you, but with little hope that it will infiltrate your soul. When you go to Mass, at the Confiteor—"For what I have done and for what I have failed to do—smite your breast mightily and remember the glum you bring to me by your silence."

Our diocesan Courier-Journal, which sponsors the tours that happily have brought me to know you, scheduled a tour in November for Central America. But it was cancelled because of little interest. I am puzzled, since those seven small countries that make up Central America are a fascinating mixture of many things. However, we do have a tour to Hawaii slated for the Wednesday after Easter, March 29 to April 9, which sounds great. Wish you could join us.

Our diocese of Rochester perks along with the usual controversies that arise from the "New Church." I consider it part of my vocation to keep calm those who fear that changes in law, ritual, social involvement mean a denial of

the holy doctrines of the Church. Yet good people have reason to anguish, as is evident from a fine man who wrote: "After years of stability and devotion in our parish, we have a new priest who has everything wide open. Everything you have written in your column about extremes is going on in our parish, including dancing in the aisles. People are quietly slipping away because they don't want to be openly critical of priests."

My best to friend Dan, and to the young maiden we met with you at the Burlington Hotel last May.

To Fr. Joseph F. Hogan, Corning:

I read your letter with a great smile. Come to think of it, I always begin to smile before reading even a word of your letters. That should give some psychological something to ponder over. Your Communion in the hand tale reminds me of my classmate, Fr. Ray Heisel. One night we had supper together during the three weeks period of preparing the people for optional Communion in the hand. He said, "I wonder when the Church switched from hand to tongue a thousand years ago, if each parish had a three weeks instruction on how to stick out the tongue."

Oh, yes. The Fr. Basset cassette conferences is a gift, and a joy to give you for your many kindnesses. But if you can promote interest in them, you will do great good. They sell for \$27.50, plus 40c postage if they have to be mailed. My passion for the tapes is because the message can be repeated and repeated and



repeated.

To a Boston Lady:

It was a joy to talk with you, and to feel your zeal for Our Lord and His Church vibrating over the telephone wires. The Sheen tapes you ordered will go out to you today.

You seem discouraged about the clergy. I do not know the Boston clergy, but I do know my own diocese. We priests are of all kinds, and of many temperaments and gifts and degrees of zeal and judgment. But I am greatly pleased by several of our young priests who have come recently into the Vineyard.

So cheers for the Catholic Church, God's greatest gift. When I heard Jesuit Father Basset say, in a cassette conference, "The Church is the greatest gift of God to the world," my immediate reflex was to object, "But the Blessed Sacrament and the Mass are the greatest Gifts." However, Fr. Basset proceeded, "Because through the Church Christ gives us the Blessed Sacrament, all the sacraments, and His teaching presence in the world today."

God, bless your zeal and enthusiasm.



Photo by Mary Ann Ginnerty

Father Edward Shamon, pastor of St. Aloysius parish, Auburn, celebrated his 35th anniversary Dec. 4 with a concelebrated Mass and reception. Father Albert Shamon, of St. Mary's Waterloo and twin brother of the Auburn pastor, was guest speaker. Shown above Father Shamon inspects a display of news clippings and mementos depicting his 35 years as a priest.

Father Edward Shamon Marks 35th Anniversary

Father Edward A. Shamon, pastor of St. Aloysius parish, Auburn, celebrated his 35th Anniversary as a priest with a special Mass of Thanksgiving at 12:15 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 4 at his home parish.

Con-celebrants with Father Shamon were Father James Lane, former pastor of St. Aloysius, Father Elmer Heindl, regional coordinator for the Cayuga-Seneca region, Father Albert J. Shamon, Father Shamon's twin brother and pastor of St. Mary's, Waterloo, Father Dino, of the faculty of Wadhams Hall — Seminary College, Ogdensburg, Msgr. Joseph Sullivan, pastor of

Holy Family, Auburn, Msgr. William Shaw, Father John Nacca, pastor of St. Francis, Auburn, and Father Robert Casey, pastor of St. Mary's, Skaneateles. Peter De Bellis, a seminarian from St. Aloysius, served as Master of Ceremonies.

Jerry Eckert, director of music at Blessed Trinity School, Auburn, Michael Ramada, St. Aloysius' choirmaster and Carol Cannizzo, a parishioner of St. Aloysius presently studying at the Eastman School of Music, provided the music. The Knights of Columbus formed an honor guard.

A reception for more than

1,000 parishioners and friends followed the Church service in the parish hall.

Mayor Paul W. Lattimore presented Father Shamon with a Proclamation Document and a key to the city.

Communications from Pope Paul VI, President Jimmy Carter, Congressman William Walsh and Congressman Samuel Stratton were also presented. Other special guests included Thomas McNabb, National vice president of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and Robert Welch, president of the John F. Kennedy Div. 1 of the A.O.H.—Auburn.

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