

Elmira in Texas Program

Vess Puts Volunteers to Work in Parishes

By MARTIN TOOMBS
Southern Tier Editor

Elmira — After two years teaching sixth graders in a Catholic school in San Antonio, Texas, for a salary of about \$80 a month, Rita Johnson is a strong supporter of the program that got the job for her.

The program is Volunteers for Educational and Social Services (Vess), which places volunteer teachers and social workers in the poor parishes of Texas. Ms. Johnson, daughter of Carl and Alice Johnson, has been teaching in a predominantly Mexican-American parish school since January 1976.

The volunteer program is similar to one being discussed by St. Patrick's Parish, of which the Johnsons happen to be members. (See accompanying article.)

Ms. Johnson, recently home for Christmas, noted that the schools the volunteers staff "would not be open if it were not for VESS." Half the teachers in Christ the King school, where she teaches as volunteers, the other half nuns, she reported. The school's 200 students are mostly Mexican-American, she noted, explaining that "that's predominantly who you're working with" as a VESS volunteer, as they are the poor in Texas.

Ms. Johnson commented that "the sisters I work with are fantastic" and the parish is supportive of the volunteers' work.

Housing for the volunteers, who live in communities, is provided by the parish where they work, she explained, and the parish also provides any necessary transportation. The volunteers' trip to their assignment is paid for, as is their return if they complete their contract. In addition, they receive \$60 each month for food, and a stipend of \$80 a month which increases slightly as a volunteer stays with the program.

She also noted that Archie Dress, program director, has secured deferments of student loan payments for those participating in the program.

VESS also has a priest-spiritual advisor who conducts retreat weekends for all the volunteers.

A Notre Dame High School graduate, Ms. Johnson graduated from St. Joseph's the Provident College, Rutland, Vermont, and sought a teaching job for the fall of 1975. When she could only find substitute teaching work, she applied to VESS and went to San Antonio in January, 1976.

She has stayed, she said, because "I like it so much."

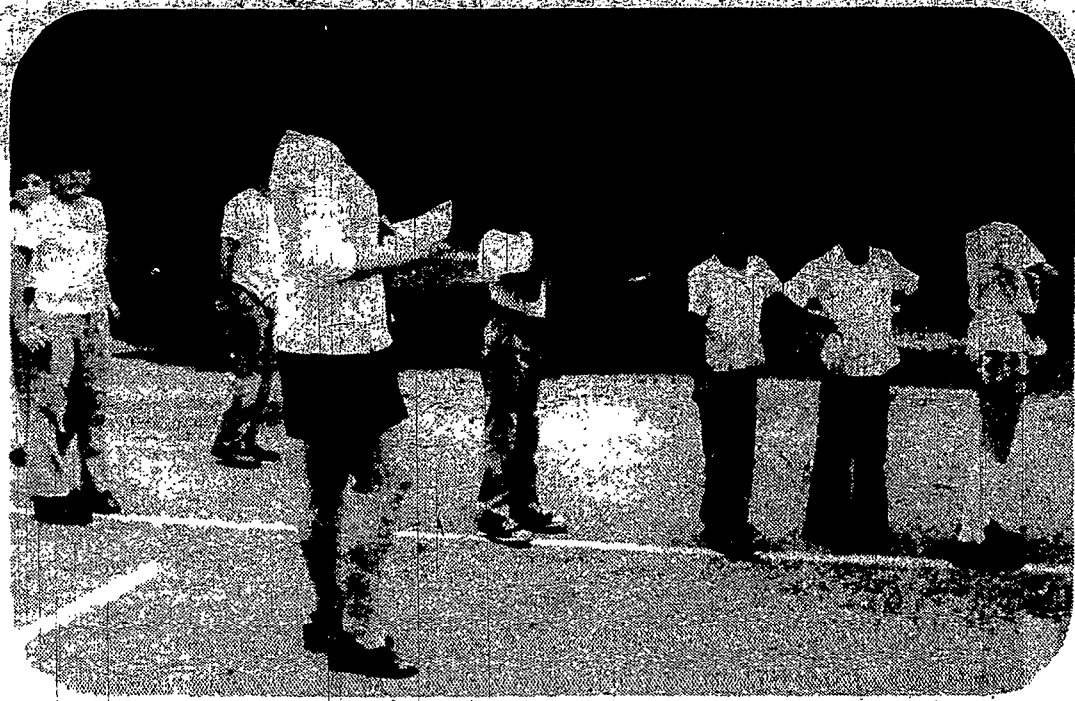
She added that "there's so much to do other than teaching," noting that she has worked in athletic programs for the children, and as a CCD teacher. Volunteers are welcome to become "involved in other aspects of the parish if you are interested," she said.

San Antonio also is a nice place to live, she said, commenting favorably on the people and the weather. She added that she "can't afford" to stay in the program after this year, and is looking for a teaching job in San Antonio as well as the Elmira area.

Persons wishing to join VESS apply to Archie Dress, she explained, who is at St. Edmund's College in Austin, Texas. He supplies resumes to prospective employers, who contact the volunteer and conduct an interview over the telephone. Ms. Johnson noted that VESS is always seeking more volunteers.

Part of that need is due to a high turnover. Ms. Johnson noted that the turnover "is extremely high," and that the reasons why volunteers stay in the program for a short time vary. A central problem is the community living, she said. Last year she lived in a house with six other people, she said, and there were problems. This year she is living with two girls in a federal housing project, she said, and it has worked more smoothly.

"You really have to be willing to sacrifice a lot and let a lot of things go by" for the community living to be successful, she said, adding that "sometimes people



Rita Johnson with some of the students of Christ the King School, San Antonio, Texas, where she teaches as part of the VESS program.

expect too much and are disappointed."

In addition to getting teaching experience, she noted, some persons in the program use the time to

decide about a vocation. "One man that I've worked with has gone into the seminary," she reported.

She also noted that if such a program had existed

in New York, she probably would have stayed in the state rather than going to Texas. She added that more VESS volunteers are from New York than any other state.

Use of Volunteers Studied by Parish

Elmira — When Father David Callan and Father Kevin Murphy came to St. Patrick's Parish as co-pastors last June, a volunteer program for college-age persons based on community living and social service was a project they had in mind. Father Murphy noted recently.

The program would give persons an opportunity to provide meaningful service while living in a Christian community, he explained. Those participating would receive stipends for their work and room and board while a member of the community.

The co-pastors, previously chaplains at Cornell University, made a presentation to St. Patrick's Parish Council in November on their idea. Father Murphy emphasized that any such program would have to "have the support of the people of St. Patrick's."

He and Father Callan view the community living as essential to such a program. Father Murphy said. While at Cornell, he explained, he talked with several persons who had completed VISTA or Peace Corps service who said that they missed a Christian community life while volunteering.

Father Murphy also noted that while at Cornell, he spoke with some students who were contemplating a vocation, but were slowed by the long-term commitment. He noted that such a volunteer program could give an introduction to the religious life for such a person.

While noting that nothing has been determined, Father Murphy pointed out the availability of St. Patrick's convent for a residence; male volunteers possibly could live in the rectory, he said. The program would start slowly, with three or four persons and possibly a coordinator, he noted.

Possible fields of work, he said, are youth ministry, the Southern Tier Office of Human Development, the Elmira Reception Center, ministry to senior citizens, as well as parish positions, such as religious education coordinators.

Father Murphy commented that the various facets of the program have fallen together more quickly than he and Father Callan had anticipated. If progress continues, he said, the community could be formed a year from now.

Robinson Headlines Sports Night

Penn Yan — Brooks Robinson, perennial all-star third baseman with the Baltimore Orioles, will be the featured speaker at St. Michael's Sports Night, Thursday, Feb. 9 at 7 p.m. in the church hall.

Tickets for the dinner program, which is a fund raising effort for St. Michael's School, are on sale at the rectory and at Henderson's Drug Store, or from a committee member.

Robinson, who retired this past summer, is known for his sterling play around third base, for which he received the Golden Glove award many times. Joining Robinson on the speakers platform will be Jerry Schmidt, Hobart lacrosse coach and coach of the year in 1977, and Terry Corcoran of Corning, Hobart's All-America lacrosse attackman.

Others who have confirmed their appearances are New York Yankee catcher Fran Healy, veteran National League umpire Tom Gorman, Rochester Lancers coach Dragon Popovic, and Lancers captain James Pollihan.

Among those returning to Penn Yan for the event is Anthony Collins, halfback for East Carolina University, with his coach, Pat Dye. Collins, a college freshman, was an all-state selection while playing for Penn Yan High School's 1976 state championship football team.

CIM Slates Chile Minister

Elmira — Rev. Joel Gajardo will speak on "Church and Political Repression" at the second lecture in the Christian Institute of Man series Monday, Jan. 16 at 8 p.m. in Park Church.

Rev. Gajardo's talk will be the second of a seven-part series titled "The Christian in a Changing World: Toward an Ethic of Personal Responsibility."

A native of Chile, Rev. Gajardo taught theology for seven years at Catholic University in Santiago, Chile. Arrested under the Chilean regime, he spent two weeks in jail before being allowed to leave the country, through the efforts of several religious groups.

A Presbyterian minister, Rev. Gajardo has been a member of the Committee on United States and Latin American Relations since coming to the United States. He also is a member of the Rochester diocesan Justice and Peace Commission; he works for Cornell University in Ithaca.

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Assertiveness Workshop Slated Jan. 14

Corning — The Child Guidance and Adult Counseling Services of Corning is sponsoring an Assertiveness Training Workshop Saturday, Jan. 14, at Watson Homestead, Coopers Plains, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The organizers explain that assertion theory can be used in all types of personal, professional and social



Dear Father Hohman,
Study of the Bible seems to be advocated strongly by other Christian Churches (tapes available, seminary courses, outlines) why not the Catholic Church. How important is the Bible and how do I learn about it?

(Signed) J.T.
Dear J.T.,

The emphasis upon the Bible as the sole source of divine revelation was such a central doctrine in the Protestant Churches that a great deal of emphasis was placed upon that particular study. On the other hand there was a rather illogical reaction of many in the Catholic Church to emphasize tradition to a point where the Bible seemed to be ignored. But it cannot really be said that the

Russo, John Laubach and Margaret McCullers will be the facilitators. The workshop is limited to 40 participants and will include practical application of assertion theory. Further information and registration forms can be obtained by contacting 962-5788 between noon and 6 p.m.

Catholic Church ever ignored the Bible since the Bible is believed by all Christians to be in a very special way the word and revelation of God. As such it has precedence over all other books and all other writings and is revered in a very special way.

In the last two decades the Catholic Church has put a great deal more emphasis upon the study of the Bible and use thereof by the faithful. As far as opportunities for knowing more about the Bible are concerned, most active parishes today have one or more Bible study groups. There are also many helps to the study of the Bible which would be obtainable in a religious book store. Someone on your parish staff could direct you to the kind which would be most useful to you.

Personally the renewed emphasis on the reading and the study of the Bible in these latter years has made prayer and the reading of the Bible much more meaningful to me and a source of great joy as well as knowledge. I hope that more and more Catholics will find the same thing.

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