

# Nobel Laureate: 'We Are All the Church'

By Tracy Early  
Religion Today

New York (RT) — "I speak from the perspective of the Christian faith."

Adolfo Perez Esquivel, a Catholic layman from Argentina and Nobel Peace Prize winner, answered a question about American policy toward his country by expressing hope no political or economic interest would override concern for the human person.

In other comments, at a press conference here, he praised President Carter for opening a "new road" on human rights, and said "the future of Latin America" depends on whether President-elect Reagan broadens that road or abandons it.

Perez Esquivel, a 48-year-old sculptor and father of three children, was awarded this year's Peace Prize for his work as coordinator since 1974 of the independent ecumenical agency, Service for Peace and Justice.

It is affiliated internationally with the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). And Perez Esquivel's

visit to the U.S. en route to Oslo for the award ceremonies, was sponsored by the FOR of this country in cooperation with the U.S. Catholic Conference and the National Council of Churches (NCC).

At the press conference here, arranged by the NCC at the Inter-church Center, Perez Esquivel stressed the importance of Church support for his work.

But he likewise stressed that the Church is not to be equated simply with its leadership. "We are all the Church," he said.

"In Argentina we have at the official level a quasi-silent Church," he said. "It is not outspoken as in countries like Chile or Bolivia."

"But some bishops and priests," he continued, "are very committed, and Protestant pastors and lay people play an important role."

While withholding direct criticism, Perez Esquivel distanced himself from those Latin American followers of liberation theology who support guerrilla activity.

Using violence, he noted, the oppressed may become the oppressors.

The Gospel calls us to a total commitment," he said. "When I was in prison, I asked a lot of questions. During the torture, I thought of Christ's words, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.'

"At first I thought, 'But they do know what they are doing.' But little by little I began to discover that dimension of Christ's capacity to love. Humbly, we've got to learn how to forgive, not forgetting but working so it won't happen again."

"I understood the work of Martin Luther King Jr. as representing the strength of non-violence, the strength of love."

Asked about crisis situations such as El Salvador, where a questioner reported nobody could not see a non-violent solution, Perez Esquivel acknowledged that he had no simple answers. But he insisted, "I think there are alternatives."

Liberation, he said, is not a point to be reached sometime

in the future, but a daily process in which "we are liberating ourselves."

Many significant activities of non-violent liberation are occurring in Latin America — unreported by the press, he said, citing particularly peasant land struggles in Northeast Brazil.

Typing his work to the tradition of Martin Luther King, Perez Esquivel was relating himself to another religiously-committed winner of the Nobel Peace Prize — the recipient for 1964.

Through the years, the Nobel Peace Prize frequently has gone to statesmen, such as Menachem Begin and Anwar el-Sadat in 1978. But it also has gone several times to people who worked "from the perspective of the Christian faith."

Mother Teresa received the award last year, and in 1976 it went to Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams for their efforts to overcome Catholic-Protestant strife in Northern Ireland.

Lutheran Archbishop Nathan Soderblom of Sweden in 1930 and Methodist layman John R. Mott of the U.S. in 1946 won the prize for their work in the ecumenical movement. Albert Schweitzer was the 1952 winner, and the 1954 recipient was a Belgian Dominican priest working with refugees, Henri Pire.

## At Your Parish Ecumenical Service At St. Vincent's

Corning — St. Vincent DePaul Parish was the host for the annual Thanksgiving eve service of the five parishes on Corning's Northside. The event, conducted each year since 1972, joins the congregations from Grace United Methodist, Emanuel Lutheran, First Congregational, United Church of Christ and St. Vincent's. Meditations were delivered by Rev. Warren Covell of Grace Church and Rev. Charles Ensley of the Congregational Church. Choirs from all participating parishes participated.

## St. John, Clyde

Parishioners at St. John the Evangelist, Clyde, hosted a celebration recently which honored Father William Cosgrove, pastor of the parish. Father Cosgrove marked the Silver Anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

An anniversary Mass was co-celebrated by Father Cosgrove, Father James Congrove, his brother, and Father George Gauthier, associate pastor. A reception followed with some 300 people in attendance.

## St. Andrews

The Youth Committee at St. Andrew's parish, 923 Portland Ave., will sponsor a "Cartoon Day" this Saturday, Dec. 13 from 10 a.m. to 2 noon in the school. Cartoons and refreshments will be provided so that parents might finish their last minute shopping. The program will cost \$1 per child or \$3 per family. It is geared for children between 4 and 10 years old.



Fr. Joseph M. Champlin

Our Church Family

## Forging Faith

David Schmit was carrying a gun and hunting in 1944 as he walked along a country road near the Arno river north of Rome, Italy. The targets of his search, however, were not pheasants or rabbits, but humans, Germans, the enemy.

The journey ended in disaster. David and his platoon walked into a murderous ambush and only he survived. Taken captive, the North Dakota lad soon found himself at a prisoner of war concentration camp in Germany where he remained for ten months until liberated by the Russians.

During that isolation David kept asking, "Why? How is it I am the sole survivor?" Eventually he judged the Lord spared him so he could become a priest and serve others. After the Armistice, this young man returned home and began his studies for the priesthood.

Today he is one of the Fargo diocese's "prairie priests," and shepherds the flock at St. Margaret's parish in Drake, North Dakota. Occasionally he still hunts, but for moose, not people.

Father Witalis Banasiewicz was already a priest when David Schmit's platoon suffered that ambush in Italy and already incarcerated, a prisoner in Germany's notorious Dachau.

Born in Poland, he had been serving as a priest there for over a dozen years when the Nazi army invaded. Eventually all 1500 Catholic priests were arrested, sent by train to the infamous camp under the pretext they were going to Warsaw for a visit with their parents.

Then 35, he survived four horrible years, 1941-45, and staggered out at the end weighing 75 pounds.

All the things we have read, heard or seen about Dachau he experienced.

They ate grass or rotten potato soup.

They never had an opportunity for Mass and were deprived of all religious articles. Father Witalis used his fingers to pray the rosary.

They worked from sun up to sun down with some of the priests even building crematoria.

They suffered beatings from sadistic guards, ex-criminals hired for the job by authorities. The Polish priest was once struck so hard by one of them for giving a sick inmate a blanket that his face became covered with blood.

They faced the possibility of being used as human guinea pigs for medical experiments. Father Witalis, strong and healthy, underwent that fate for six months, as the "scientists" placed mosquitos between his legs to infect him with malaria. Once removed, they repeated the process several

times, using different types of malaria.

They watched many, many die.

Through it all, Father Banasiewicz maintained a strong faith, prayed constantly and offered his sufferings to the Lord.

As Germany's defeat loomed nearer, Himmler sent a written message to the camp leader ordering all 30,000-plus inmates at Dachau to be killed, destroyed by gasoline fire, and the buildings obliterated.

Word of this leaked out and the priests there began a novena to St. Joseph.

Day after day all the residents were brought out of the barracks for their deaths, but each time the Dachau commandant hesitated, reluctant to carry out his orders, and ultimately sent them back.

On the final, ninth day of the novena, a group of American soldiers who had become detached from the main body of their army accidentally stumbled upon Dachau. They opened up fire, radioed for assistance and soon liberated the camp.

The commandant who had kept delaying their mass murder was himself executed by the soldiers, an action Father Witalis deeply regretted. "He saved others; himself, he could not save."

Today, Father Witalis is 72, also one of those Fargo prairie priests, shepherd for St. Boniface parish in Esmond, North Dakota.

"You may for a time have to suffer the distress of many trials; but this is so that your faith, which is more precious than the passing splendor of fire-tried gold, may by its genuineness lead to praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ appears." (1 Peter 1:6-7)

## 40 Hours Planned

A 40 hour devotion is scheduled at St. Thomas the Apostle parish starting at 12:15 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 14. The 40 hour devotion will end on Tuesday at 7:45 p.m. with Mass. On Monday, Dec. 15 a special Eucharistic devotion and sermon is planned.



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The coming of winter offers us the opportunity to enjoy many activities we don't have time for during the summer months when we spend much of our time out-of-doors. You may especially enjoy reading... needlework... or other hobbies. Though the winter months are enjoyable, they can be especially difficult for older people — or for people who have recently experienced the death of a loved one. Winter weather confines people to the indoors and limits their activities. Your friendship and visits during these months can make a great difference in their lives — and in your own. Giving of yourself to help someone who needs you will make your own life more satisfying — and can help a friend regain some of his enjoyment of life. Suggestions on how to comfort someone who has experienced a death in the family can be answered in more detail by any member of our staff. Please call or stop by. Use our lending library, audio visual aids, and audio cassettes on dying, death, bereavement and related subjects. We are available for group discussions.

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