

Area Groups Rally To 'Disabled' Year

Several organizations are developing events to mark the United Nations' International Year of the Disabled Person.

While some local groups have slated programs for the first week of February, the official U.S.-Canada kickoff of the year will take place at Niagara Falls Feb. 8 when a human chain three miles long will be formed around the falls. At dusk each person in the chain will light a chemical flare, a fireworks display will ensue and a movie will be shown on the ice covering the gorge walls. Following the display, a free party will be

held at the Niagara Falls Convention Center. Registration is required and participation forms are available by calling (716) 285-9141.

A week earlier, Dr. Harold Wilke, author of "Creating the Caring Congregation," will give a two-day workshop on "Creating Caring with Handicapped Persons," for clergy and laypersons. He will speak Sunday afternoon at Downtown United Presbyterian Church. The day following, Feb. 2, he will present a program at Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

The hours and registration forms for Dr. Wilke's program are available by contacting the Chaplain's Office, Monroe Developmental Center, 620 Westfall Road, 14620; (716) 461-2800.

Church Women United will devote its 21st Annual Legislative Institute, Friday, Feb. 6, to "The Caring Community and the Disabled." The institute will open at 9 a.m. in the Lutheran Church of the Incarnate Word, 597 East Ave.

Featured on the day-long

agenda are "Kids on the Block," a puppet show on children with handicaps; Church response to the problems of the handicapped by Rev. William Gaventa,

chaplain of the Monroe Developmental Center and Joan VanDerWall of the Lutheran Church of the Reformation; community response, by Bruce Rider from

the Association of the Blind, and Patricia Laird of Handicapped Independence HERE; state response by former state legislator Andrew Virgilio.

Head of Religious Ed Receives Two Appointments

Father Lewis Brown, director of the Diocesan Office of Religious Education

and member of the New York State Province of Diocesan Directors of Religious

Education, has been named by that organization as a representative to the Board of the National Conference of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education (NCDD). He also has been appointed to serve on the UNDA Board which is the National Catholic Association for Broadcasters and Allied Communications.

The state association of religious educators, which includes the eight dioceses in New York State, deals in religious education planning, personnel, salary and benefit items, and common issues such as the challenge to the New York State Board of Education about the approved release time for religious education classes for students attending public schools. As representative of the NCDD Father Brown will be involved in these and other issues on a national level.

He is pleased with the appointments, especially to UNDA, because of his interest in the media. He described UNDA as the major support group behind the Catholic use of the electronic media. It was also an advocate behind the U.S. bishops' annual communications collection, and sponsors the Gabriel Awards which are the Catholic equivalent of the TV Emmy Awards.

According to Father Brown, the goal of UNDA is to foster better use of the media by the Church. He said that the National Catechetical Directory has urged religious educators to not only use the media but to help improve "media literacy" by asking "What is the media doing to you? What do you do with programs that are becoming more sexually explicit and violent?"

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Amanda

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mother at a hospital, was finalized. The assistance of the Bierls' congressman, Matthew McHugh, got them an appointment only two weeks after they had all the paperwork they needed, and they quickly had to make arrangements to fly to El Salvador.

They left Sept. 13, with stops in Miami and Guatemala City, where, they noted, the airport was heavily patrolled by soldiers with machine guns. The airport had been bombed four times the previous weekend.

Then they had a short flight to El Salvador, and a 35-mile taxi trip to its capital, San Salvador, where they checked into the Sheraton.

They had expected to go to the orphanage the next morning to see Amanda, but the hotel desk clerk handed them a note telling them she was in a room with "Uncle" Marc, an American living there who assisted in the adoption.

Mrs. Bierl noted her exhaustion at that moment, following 16 hours of traveling, but the realization that "she was waiting in the room for us," made them "just throw things and get up" to the room.

Despite the fact that they had never met Marc, Mrs. Bierl noted, she's afraid they ignored him as they entered the room and looked for Amanda, who was asleep on the bed. Mrs. Bierl recalled that "she wouldn't wake up for us, but we held her anyway," and they stayed up talking with Marc and admiring Amanda.

A half hour after they arrived, they got their first lesson on life in a country torn by violence. They asked Marc if a loud noise they heard was thunder. He told them that it wasn't, that "when the building shakes, it's man-made." The following day he pointed out the building which had been bombed.

They avoided the violence by staying in the hotel except for trips to the Salvadorean court and the American embassy. It was there that they had their close call. They met with the vice consul in the

morning, who told them to return that afternoon to pick up the visa. While back at the hotel celebrating the successful completion of all the paperwork, they heard shelling, but didn't think anything special about it. But then Marc called and told them it was the American embassy which had been shelled, and it had closed. They had flights scheduled for the next morning, and it looked like they would be unable to get the visa. An immediate attempt to reschedule the flights failed, and the situation looked desperate.

But persistent calls to the American embassy finally made contact with the vice consul who had approved the visa, and she delivered it to the hotel, making it possible for the Bierls to leave on schedule.

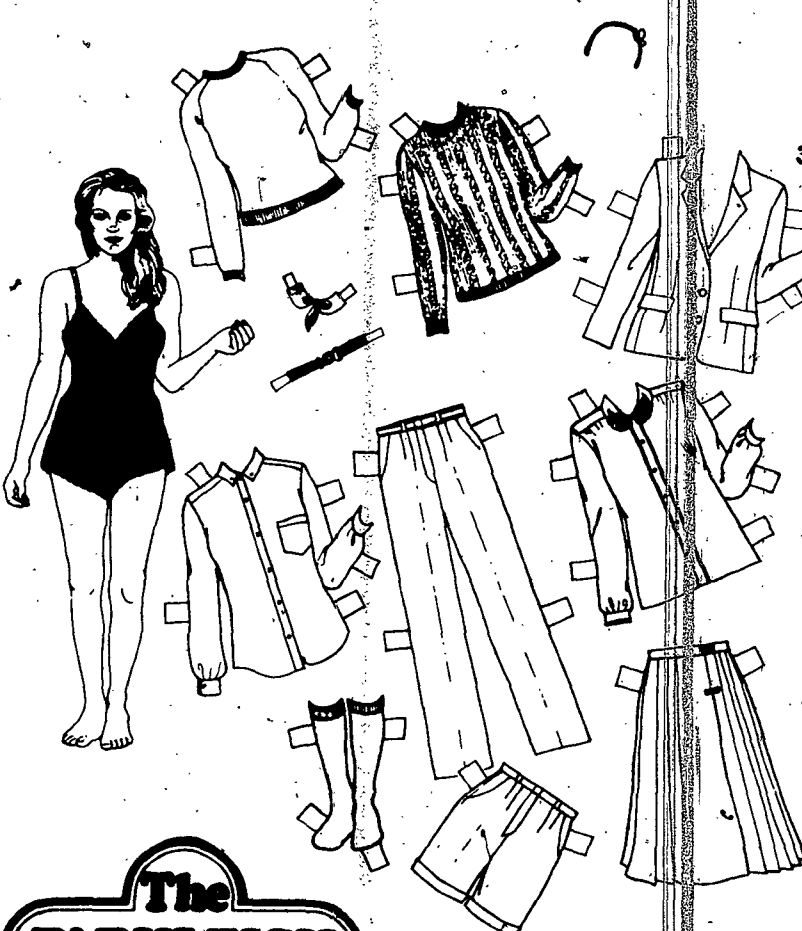
Now about 13 months, Amanda scurries about the Bierl home, obviously a joy to her parents. She manages to frustrate Bierl in his attempts to get her to "talk" for his movie camera, as she stops to listen to the motor running.

The experience has made El Salvador more than just a troubled Latin America Country to them. They noted the country's beauty and the poverty of most of its people. They showed pictures of people living under structures without walls. Evidence of security was everywhere including a chain-link fence around the Sheraton where they stayed. But that wasn't enough for the two American lawyers killed recently, who were shot on the hotel's terrace, near where the Bierls had breakfast one morning.

The Bierls tell about the time-consuming and frustrating paperwork the adoption required, complicated by the lack of experience of local officials with a foreign adoption, and the need to have the notarized and sealed documents translated into Spanish.

Since the Bierls brought Amanda home, the Salvadorean adoption procedure has changed, but the Bierls are keeping up to date on the new arrangements, as, they noted, they now plan to start work on adopting a boy.

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