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The Hispanic Front

Bishop Clark To Visit Mexico

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will visit Rochester's sister diocese of Tabasco, Mexico, next January.

The bishop will be making the journey to see firsthand the problems faced by the impoverished people there and also to visit the "rancherías" where projects have been funded by this diocese's Operation Breadbox.

Father Charles Mulligan, director of the diocesan Division of Social Ministry, will accompany the bishop.

Through the diocesan International Justice and Peace Commission, the Diocese of Rochester has maintained close ties with Tabasco for four years. Over the past two years, both dioceses have shared a mutually enriching experience of sharing resources through the "sister diocese" relationship.

Bishop Rafael Garcia Gonzalez visited Rochester in January 1980. And last August in a letter to Bishop Clark, he praised the work of

Rochester missionaries to his diocese. He said that they "applied themselves wholeheartedly to the job assigned to them . . . and they were able to give witness to the Gospel and to the universality of the Church, and as a consequence endearing themselves to the poor people they came to help."

"Father Lucas Partida, the parish priest, the whole Indian community and I personally have nothing but praise for the work accomplished by the Sisters and team and remain very grateful to them."

Some of the activities engendered through the sister diocese program have been the sending of the missionary team, the work of a Tabasco priest with the Hispanic community in Rochester, participation in the missionary pulpit exchange program, funding of self-help agricultural projects through Operation Breadbox and technical and advisory support provided to CICODET, the social arm of the Tabasco Diocese.



Photo by Mary Heidkamp

David Young hands out prizes at a party for children taking catechetical instruction during the visit of Rochester missionaries to Tabasco last summer.

Eyewitness Look at Tabasco

Jim Lund, a caseworker at Catholic Family Center, was a member of the Rochester team that visited our sister diocese of Tabasco last summer.

By Jim Lund

"Seventy days," Dona Susanna answered, when one of the Rochester missionaries asked her how long it would be before Tamulte would again have running water, as she helped the missionaries draw water from her well. The water pump that supplies Tamulte had broken down three days earlier, teaching the North American missionaries another lesson about life in the Third World.

Tamulte is the town in the oil-rich Mexican state of Tabasco where 12 people from the Diocese of Rochester spent part of their summer as missionaries. It was the second year of this program that is one part of the "sister diocese" relationship shared by this diocese and the Diocese of Tabasco.

Under the auspices of the Diocesan International Justice and Peace Commission, and the coordination of Lourdes Perez-Albuerno, the first group left Rochester on June 25. Arriving the next day in the southern Mexican town that would be their home for the next seven weeks, Sister Carol Cimino, Sister Clare Brown, Mary Elizabeth Young, Sister Marilyn Pray, and Sister Sue Nowak began immediately to set up the programs that the mission team would coordinate.

For the next seven weeks, these missionaries and the second team that arrived in mid-July worked in conjunction with Father Lucas Partida, the pastor of St. Francis of Assisi parish in Tamulte, and CICODET, the social ministry arm of the Diocese of Tabasco.

The work itself ranged from leading Bible classes for adults and facilitating religious education and recreation for parish youths to initiating a census of the town, and the training of

townspeople in tuberculosis prevention and treatment.

When Padre Lucas was assigned to the parish in Tamulte, he became the first priest in more than 30 years to serve there. In the intervening decades, parish affairs had been managed by a group of unscrupulous "padrones," who enriched themselves through the sale of the sacraments, and other abuses of Church prerogatives.

Because his appointment meant an end to business as usual, he encountered fierce resistance from entrenched segments of the parish. "When the bishop came to Tamulte to announce that I was coming," Padre Lucas said, "his car was stoned, and he had to flee."

It was about a year after he had come to Tamulte under police guard before he began to break through the harassment and intransigency of this powerful faction. "They kept the Church closed so I could not get in," he said. He also recalled, "The padrones would turn off the lights and throw stones into the church during catechism classes."

In the first days he slept in a corridor in the back of the church, and had to eat his meals in Villahermosa, the capital city of Tabasco which is a one-hour bus ride from Tamulte. During the first year, he also endured at least one attempt on his life when his food was poisoned.

Faced with this enmity, Padre Lucas set about the task of evangelizing Roman Catholics whose faith had drifted far from orthodoxy in the decades since a priest last served in Tamulte. The religion he encountered was polytheistic with gods of the harvest and sun, and with the saints elevated to the rank of deities. St. Francis of Assisi, the parish's patron saint, had become the dominant deity. "The people would push the tabernacle to the side," Padre Lucas recalled, "and put an image of their own gods in its place."

The people of Tamulte are hard-working Chontal Indians, descendants of the once proud Mayan civilization. One of

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Diocese Mulls Policy on Alcoholism

The Priests Council last week unanimously approved a statement of proposed diocesan policy toward priests suffering from alcoholism and chemical dependency, Father Robert O'Neill, president said.

The statement has been under discussion among clergy for some time, according to Father James Schwartz, head of the diocesan Ministry to Priests Program, who presented it to the council.

The statement says, "The Diocese of Rochester officially recognizes alcoholism, and other forms of chemical dependency, as a treatable human disease. In doing so, the diocese agrees with medical and mental health authorities in viewing alcoholism and other forms of drug abuse as a major health concern of our society."

The statement also encourages the diocese to establish "a permanent health board of professional ad-

visers" to help the individual priest with a drinking problem or the bishop in dealing with a priest who has a drinking problem.

Father Schwartz said last week that setting up such a board would be a "reaching out in caring to our suffering brothers." He estimated that ten percent of priests who drink may have alcohol problems.

The proposed policy says, "The problem is not determined in terms of volume or frequency of consumption, but rather in its effect on behavior and function."

Father Schwartz said that the issue first arose in the diocese at a presentation by the Ministry to Priests team earlier this year. That presentation, he said, was devised by Anthony Marini, a Xerox executive who is also a candidate for the diocesan permanent diaconate.

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Diocese Focuses On Problem of Teen Pregnancies

Faced with an increasing teenage pregnancy rate and the fact that Monroe County is third in the state for teen pregnancies, the Diocese of Rochester, in the person of its director of social ministry, Father Charles Mulligan, has drawn together a broad-based coalition of civic and religious agencies. That coalition is now studying the problem and will draft a proposal for funding ways to alleviate it.

According to figures researched by Catherine Wobus of the Catholic Family Center, there were 1,112 live births last year in the county to women 10 to 19 years old. In the same age group there were 953 abortions and 741 out-of-wedlock births.

Her figures state that teens account for one out of every six pregnancies, one out of every nine births and one of every three abortions.

For the past three years a group called the Adolescent Pregnancy Action Group (APAG) convened by the Monroe County Department of Health, and including Planned Parenthood, has been devising recommendations for preventing first pregnancies, preventing repeat pregnancies, and preventing the adverse consequences of such pregnancies among teens. APAG intended to submit its plans to a local foundation for funding.

In September of this year, however, Father Mulligan wrote a letter to Gabriel Russo, commissioner of Human Services, stating that the diocese was "outraged" at APAG's proposals as then stated because:

"The approach interferes with the rights of parents in guiding their children in sexual behavior, values clarification and contraceptive use. The project should emphasize abstinence as the primary pregnancy prevention approach. We believe the tie-in between physicals for athletic programs, applications for work permits and sexual counseling is most artificial and a clear invasion of privacy for adolescents."

On that last point, Father Mulligan said last week, the diocese was especially concerned over a proposal to establish in two city high schools programs of inquiring into the sexual activity of any teenager seeking a work permit or physical certification for athletic activities. A sexually active youngster, Father Mulligan said, would then be enrolled in a counseling program administered by Planned Parenthood.

Because any such program would need to be presented in a public forum before it could be finally established, Father

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