

Church is 'Sleeping Giant' in Evangelism

By Martin Toombs

Ithaca — "Evangelism stirs up funny juices in Catholics," according to Father Alvin Illig.

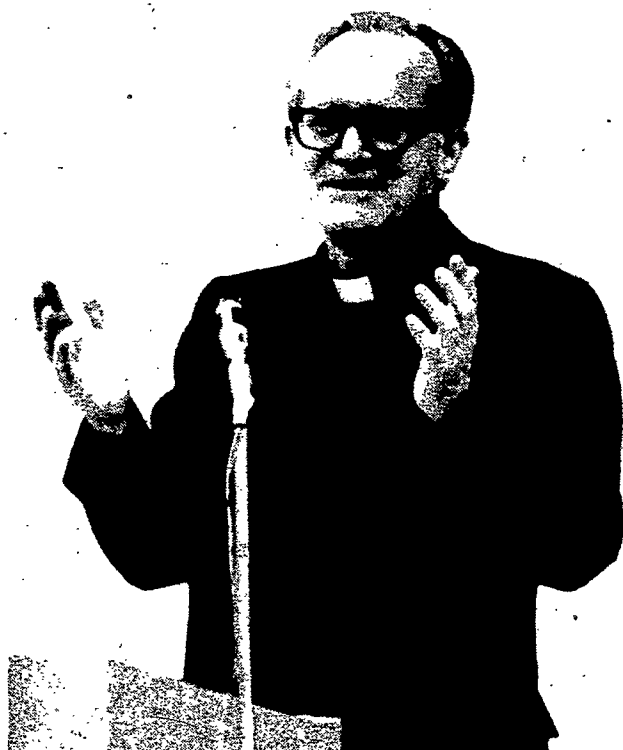
"We Catholics don't do that."

But evangelism, the director of the National Bishops' Office for Evangelism, said Sunday, Dec. 6, in Ithaca, "in its simplest form, means sharing Christ with others."

Father Illig was in Ithaca to participate in the annual triduum at Immaculate Conception Parish to prepare for its feast day. Sunday night's event drew representatives from parishes across the Southern Tier.

In addition to Father Illig's talk, those attending also participated in one of seven workshops on various programs which they could begin in their own parishes.

Father Illig used the story from the New Testament



Father Alvin Illig gestures during recent talk on evangelization.

about the group of men who cut a hole in the roof of a house where Jesus was staying to illustrate his points.

The men who brought the crippled man to see Jesus were evangelizing, he said, and they didn't let the crowds around Him keep them from their goal. Their solution: to lower the crippled man through the roof. "You've got to admit that's rather creative," Father Illig said.

"Those four were the original parish council," he joked, but they weren't stopped by the problem of "We can't do it," because "We've never done it before."

"You and I don't make converts," Father Illig said, that occurs as the result of interaction between Jesus and the individual, with the help of the Holy Spirit. The job for Catholics, he said, is to "share Christ with others." In order to do that He must first "live in you," he said, but "people who turn out for evangelization conferences generally love Christ and are looking for ways to share Him."

Rejection should not be feared, he said: "more people

rejected Christ during his public ministry than accepted Him."

With 50 million active Catholics, and 19,000 Catholic parishes in the country, "the Catholic Church is a sleeping giant when it comes to evangelization," he said.

Among those who join a church, he reported, 82 percent say their choice of a church was due to the invitation of a friend or relative. The Catholic evangelization movement, he said, is "to reach out to the unchurched, the inactive (members of any Church) and to our own inactive people."

The Catholic Church's position is not as bad as some feel, Father Illig said, reporting that a survey done in 1947 found that 20 percent of the country's people considered themselves Catholic. The figure is now 29 percent, he said.

"We have our warts and we have our wrinkles," he said,

but the Holy Spirit continues to enrich the Church.

Father Illig applauded the success of the television evangelists, and said he wishes the Catholic Church were as effective in that field. But the phenomenon is a "television pulpit," and not a "television church." People are unable to go to the television evangelists for marriages, baptisms and funerals, he said; for that they need a local church. The 19,000 Catholic parishes are ready and able to be that local church community, he said.

He reminded his listeners that "Jesus Christ established the Church for sinners, not saints," and "not one of us has let Him down yet." But problems are not an excuse to avoid spreading Christ's word.

If the Apostles had been perfect, which they weren't, he pointed out, comparison with their example would have caused people to give up. He concluded by noting "we are called to do our best, work hard, and leave the rest in God's hands."

NE Region to Host Folk Music Confab

A day long program of conferences on liturgy and folk music has been slated for 9 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 9, at St. Rita's Church, West Webster.

The day is sponsored by the youth and the liturgy com-

mittees of the Northeast Regional Conference, and the churches of the region.

Included on the agenda are discussions of liturgy and music, shared song time, a Mass and a shared supper.

Participants are asked to bring bag lunches.

Further information and pre-registration are obtained by calling Judy Leone, 872-0359, or Judy Hendrickson, 325-9000.

Stocking Stuffers Offered

Elmira — "Give the gift of life in someone's stocking this year."

That's the invitation being extended by the Community Relations Office at St. Joseph's Hospital.

The hospital is making available, at no charge, a wallet card describing how to do the Heimlich Maneuver, known as the "Hug of Life," which aids people who are choking on food.

More than 50,000 of the cards have been distributed by the hospital; requests from all over the country have been filled.

The cards may be obtained Monday through Friday at the Community Relations Office, or by mail, by sending a self-addressed envelope with 40 cents postage to the Community Relations Office, St. Joseph's Hospital, Elmira, N.Y. 14902.

Employees Feted By St. James

Hornell — A record crowd of St. James Mercy Hospital employees and their guests attended the hospital's 17th annual Christmas dinner-dance Dec. 12.

William Connors, associate administrator, was master of ceremonies; Father Eugene Emo, hospital chaplain, gave the invocation. Sister Rene McNiff, administrator, gave the welcome and Christmas greeting.

Santa Claus, in the person of Charles Bertram, awarded door prizes from Santa's bag.

Hospital personnel working that evening were served dinner in the cafeteria.

Monastery Mass

Big Flats — Christmas Mass at Mount Saviour Monastery will be at 9 a.m. on Christmas day, Father Martin Boler, prior, has announced.



Calendar

Thursday, Dec. 31, George Eastman House.

COMMUNITY PLAYERS — Vaudeville Performances, 7 and 10 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 31; 8 p.m., Friday and Saturday, Jan. 1-2; 3 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 3, Rochester Community Players, 820 Clinton Ave. S.

RPO/OPERA THEATRE — "Hansel and Gretel" conducted by Isaiah Jackson, 8:30 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 2; 3 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 3, Eastman Theatre.

TIC/TOC PLAYERS — Present "The Further Adventures of Paddington Bear," 2 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 30; Saturday and Sunday, Jan 2 and 3. The production on Jan. 2 will be signed by an interpreter for the hearing impaired.

LEARN IRISH — At meetings at 7:30 every other Thursday, at McGinnity's on Ridge Road West. For details, call June Hogan Wiederhold at 342-4267.

NFP CLASSES — Sponsored by Natural Family Planning Education of Rochester, 7:30-9 p.m., Monday, Jan. 4, Kearney Building, St. Mary's Hospital.

FREE FILMS — "Louis Pasteur, Man of Science," 1 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 26, 3rd floor auditorium, Central Library, Rundel Memorial Building.

CHILDREN'S FILMS — "Christmas Fantasy," 3 p.m., today, Wednesday, Dec. 23, Lincoln Branch Library; "The Adventures of J. Thaddeus Toad," 3:30 p.m., today, Wednesday, Dec. 17, Pulaski Community Library; "Christmas Gift," 3 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 23, Sully Branch Library.

GROUCHO MARX — Presented by Lewis J. Stadden through jokes, anecdotes, dances and songs, 7 and 10 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 31, main auditorium, Nazareth College Arts Center. \$10 tickets available at box office, 586-2420.

SENIOR MATINEES — "Mildred Pierce" starring Joan Crawford and Zachary Scott, 1:30 p.m.,

Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

Mary: Great Evangelist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 2:1-12. (R1) Is. 60:1-6. (R2) Eph. 3:2-3, 5-6.

Down in Ithaca, on a Sunday night, Dec. 6, Father Bernard Carges was kind enough to invite me to a workshop conducted by Father Alvin A. Illig, CSP, executive director of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops Committees on Evangelization. Immaculate Conception Parish seems so much alive! I can understand why, with parish leaders like Father Carges, Father Lew Brown, Father Anthony Mugavero, and Sister Betty Hughes.

Father Illig is a very easy priest to listen to. He has the art of making gospel incidents leap into life. He has one and only one topic: evangelization! He is right on. For Pope Paul VI in 1975, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (meaning "the Gospels must be proclaimed"), declared that evangelization is a priority mission of the 20th-century Church and of each Church member. It is the essential mission of the Church for all times!

Shortly we will celebrate the feast of the Epiphany, which means showing Christ to the Gentile world. And that is precisely what evangelization means: to manifest Christ to others, to share Him with others.

Now the greatest evangelist in Scripture was not John the Baptist, nor even St. Paul, but a woman: the Mother of the Son of God, Mary. She has set the pattern for evangelization in the world today. It entails two steps.

First, Mary received the Son of God into herself. That is the first step. No one can give what he does not have. To share Christ with others, we must first receive Christ into our minds and hearts and lives, as Mary did. Like Mary, that calls for prayer and reflection on the life of Jesus. St. Luke, in speaking of Mary's reaction to the infant mysteries of the life of Jesus, wrote only this: "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart." That is why Mary has so persistently advocated our praying the rosary. The rosary is only reflection on the mysteries of the life of Jesus in our hearts.

In prayer we talk to God; but in reading Scripture God talks to us. Daily prayer

needs to be balanced by daily Scripture reading. When Mary brought Jesus to Elizabeth, she sang a song of praise — the immortal Magnificat. If you analyze it, you will find it shot through with all kinds of allusions to the Old Testament. Spontaneous song is the outburst of the heart. Mary knew the Scripture, as it were, "by heart." And we?

The second step in evangelization is to share the Christ discovered in prayer and Scripture with others, as Mary did Jesus with the astrologers from the East.

Father Illig mentioned the reaction of most of us after having seen a great movie. We talk about it; rave about it; beg, urge, and plead with our friends to go and see it. It should be the same with our finding Christ. St. Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus. That meeting fired him into booming one of the greatest evangelists of all times. He wanted to share Christ with others, because, as he wrote, "the love of Christ impels us." (2 Cor. 5:14)

How did Mary share Christ with others?

She brought Him to Elizabeth. Then Jesus took over.

She simply showed Him to the Magi. Then God did the rest.

If we let Christ become flesh in our lives, truly we shall bring Him to all we meet and show Him simply in showing ourselves. He will do the rest!

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 Wine with Dinner (light)
 Topped of Your Choice
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 Coffee, Tea or Hot Chocolate
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 HOT & COLD FOODS & DRINKS
 2 A.M.

OPEN BAR ANY DRINK 9-2:30

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