

Thanksgiving, Christmas, Now Easter . . .

Chris Still on Way Back

Last December 15, the Courier-Journal ran a story about the tribulations of the Richard Berl family of Irondequoit was facing as a daughter, Christine, 13, wrestled with severe aplastic anemia, a rare blood disease.

The holiday season had taken on a nightmare character for the Berls as Chris had to leave the day after Thanksgiving for a Boston hospital where it was later determined that she would have to have a bone marrow transplant. Her 15-year-old brother Daniel was to be the donor for the operation, considered crucial to her very life.

Now as still another great holy day in the Church calendar approaches, the story of Christine Berl is not yet resolved although the picture has brightened considerably.

Her uncle, James C. Holihan, reports that the operation, which took place Dec. 23, just two days before Christmas, was a success; Chris has begun producing her own blood platelets. But she is a long way from home — the prognosis for complete recovery is 50-50, her uncle said.

She has been allowed to leave the hospital but not by very far. She must stay in an apartment in Boston with her mother, Martha, who



has been there since Nov. 26.

Chris, explained her uncle, had been in an isolation bubble for two months following the operation, and is still vulnerable to contamination. "The idea is to let her stay with her mom so that she can be exposed gradually to more people. It is felt, however, that it will take from two to five years for her to build up her immunity system."

When she eventually comes home to Irondequoit, "her environment will have to be as clean as possible," her uncle said. "They'll have to clean the house daily and since they only have one bathroom, they'll have to it keep practically sterile."

Even then, Chris will still have to travel back to Boston

weekly. The man in charge of her case, Dr. Joel Rappaport, wants to be able to check up on her personally to that degree.

Otherwise, Chris is performing in some ways as some other teens wish they were. She has made the honor roll at Dake Middle School through a tutorial program in Boston.

"And Father Smith (Father Robert Smith, pastor of St. Margaret Mary Church), has been a source of constant inspiration," Holihan said. "He has contacted her weekly and is really something."

The family is thankful to many other diocesans, most of whom they have never met, Holihan said.

"We are extremely thankful for all the prayers from across the diocese," he said. "The Courier-Journal article generated an overwhelming response to our plight. It was incredible."

Part of that article mentioned that the Berls were in troubled straits financially. The expenses are staggering and that is why the fund established to help is still in operation. Its address:

Christine Berl Fund
Central Trust Co. Plaza
c/o Allen and O'Brien Law Offices
1 East Ave.
Rochester, N.Y. 14604

El Salvador

U.S. Catholic Aide Irked at Trial Delay

Washington (NC) — A U.S. Catholic Conference official expressed "extreme distress" at the news that an appeals court in El Salvador had delayed the trial of five ex-members of the country's National Guard accused of the murders of four American churchwomen.

The official, Father J. Bryan Hehir, director of the USCC's Office of International Justice and Peace, told a House subcommittee March 17 that the delays in the trial show the country's lack of progress on human rights even though the Reagan administration has been using human rights progress as a criterion for continued U.S. military aid.

"We don't feel very enthused after the (Salvadoran) decision about the state of human rights," Father Hehir said. He also noted that the effort to bring justice in the case of the churchwomen is a symbol for other murder victims in El Salvador who have no one to press their cases.

Father Hehir appeared before the foreign operations subcommittee of the House

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Appropriations Committee.

Also criticizing the Salvadoran Appeals Court decision was Michael H. Posner, who has been the attorney for the families of the slain churchwomen. He called the decision a "significant step backward."

He questioned the view that the court decision amounted to little more than a technicality and said instead that it showed a "shocking pattern of official indifference, incompetence and ill will" by the Salvadoran government.

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