


Along The Way

With Bishop Matthew H. Clark



WILL RESUME NEXT WEEK

Tabasco Missioners Issue First Quarter Report

(Following was written by Lourdes Perez-Albuerne based on recent reports made by the diocesan missionary team to the Diocese of Tabasco, Mex.)

It has now been three months since our four missionaries, Mark Kavanaugh, Father Neil Miller, Yolanda Ramos, and Valerie Smith were presented by Bishop Garcia to the community of Oxolotan. Much has happened in those months, some of it measurable and some of it not. But we do have four very generous and busy people trying their best to serve the peasants, not only of Oxolotan, but of eight other rancherías.

The area where they work is beautiful, but with terrain difficult to travel. Oxolotan is a small community of about 900 in the hills between Tabasco and Chiapas.

Beside it runs a river, Rio de La Sierra, which becomes deep and treacherous when it rains; and it does rain in Oxolotan, 295 days a year.

In order to reach six of the eight rancherías (small rural communities of about 200) the missionaries have to cross the river in a cayuco, a hollowed out tree trunk, an effort which requires a lot of skill for those driving and a lot of courage and determination for those riding.

Once the missionaries cross the river they are faced with a lot of walking up and down hills, slipping and sliding in the mud. The nearest ranchería is 20 minutes away on foot, the most remote, an hour and a half.

Faced with this physical set up, the missionaries' still faltering Spanish and their slow process of learning about the reality of the population they serve, it is amazing what has been accomplished in three months.

The missionaries have visited and celebrated Mass in every one of the rancherías; and a routine has been established where they will celebrate liturgy every eight weeks, on a Sunday, in each of the rancherías.

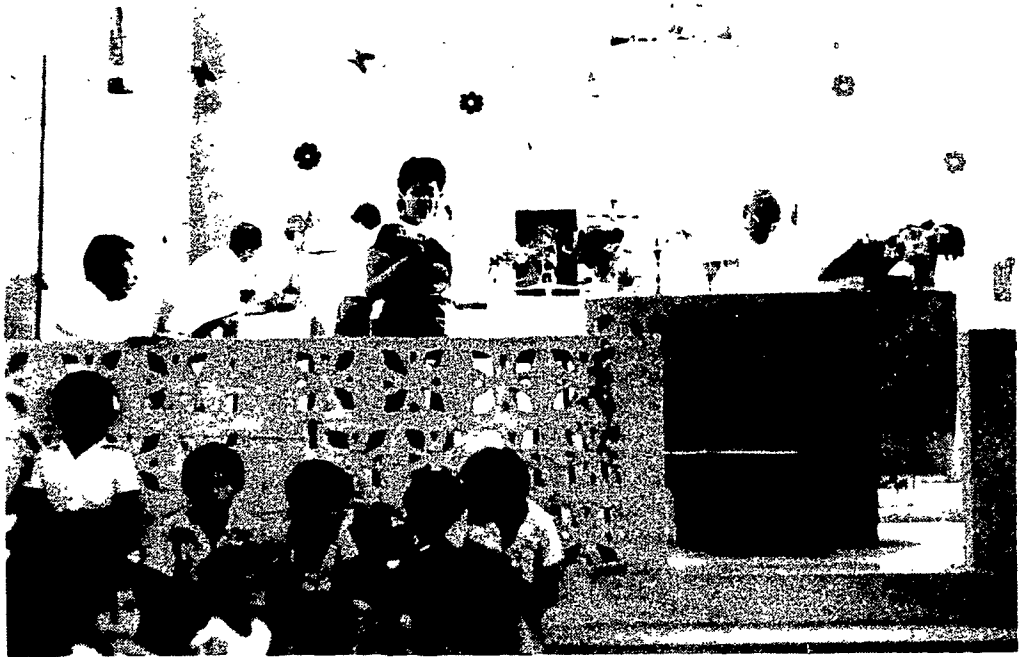
They and the women religious in the parish of Tacotalpa have also begun to work with the catechists of all the rancherías. The catechists meet on the last Saturday of the month at Oxolotan, spend four or five hours learning and discussing a theme, and then bring back to their communities what they have learned.

Understanding and celebrating the Holy Year of Redemption is a priority in the Diocese of Tabasco.

A two-day catechists' workshop was held on the subject and the four Rochester missionaries helped with the event, and have continued to work with those who attended.

Ms. Smith and Kavanaugh have started to work with youths in Oxolotan and Cuitlahar. In Oxolotan, the two prepared the youths to attend a diocesan convocation.

The young people are also making banners for the celebration of Advent and Our Lady of Guadalupe, have pledged themselves to help



Yolanda Ramos and Father Neil Miller lead the children in prayer.

clean and paint the church, and are in the process of starting a youth choir and a prayer group.

In Cuitlahar, Ms. Smith and Kavanaugh meet with youths once a week for prayer and guidance sessions.

Ms. Ramos has worked from the beginning with liturgical celebrations and is now starting to work with the catechist in Oxolotan, preparing sponsors and adults

for Baptism. Father Miller's time is full with counseling and sacramental activities. In addition he too is working with the Oxolotan catechist preparing couples for marriage.

On the people themselves, a common occurrence is the arrival of a group from one of the rancherías bearing food for the missionaries.

Each of the missionaries

expressed the desire to hear from diocesans. Such letters are their source of news from home, their encouragement and their way of knowing diocesans have not forgotten them.

The address of the missionaries is: c/o Rev. Pbro. Albino Hernandez Hernandez, Apartado Postal 15, 86870 Tacotalpa, Tabasco, Mexico.

Pontiff Hits Abuse Of General Absolution

Vatican City (NC) -- The abuse of general absolution is "an attack against the true dignity of the sacrament of penance," said Pope John Paul II in a talk Dec. 1 to a group of Mexican bishops.

The pope said Mexico was an example of a place where the "poorest of people" can

experience the personal love and respect of priests in individual confession.

"The secret and personal sense of sin requires this form of individual confession, which is secret and discreet, adaptable and personalized," the pope said.

The new Code of Canon

Law is clear about the rules regarding the abuse of general absolution, the pope said.

Church rules allow general absolution in special circumstances where individual confession is physically impossible, but penitents are required to confess any grave sins at a subsequent individual confession.

'A Closer Walk With the Lord' Surgeon Quits Hospital Performing Abortions

By Carmen J. Viglucci
Penn Yan -- Upset because abortions are performed at Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hospital, staff surgeon Dr. Kenneth Berkes decided "to take a walk."

But when the 47-year-old who had been at the hospital since 1969, began his walk last Friday, it was more toward something than away from the hospital and his professional partnership of more than 14 years.

Dr. Berkes' decision to resign from the hospital and his partnership was not a sudden thing; it seems to have grown from a deepening "commitment to the Lord."

And now he is seeking direction for that commitment.

"I just couldn't be involved day-in and day-out in a situation I felt was just not proper. . . there was no way I was going to be involved anywhere where abortion was occurring," he explains.

First, Dr. Berkes asked his

partner to give up abortions -- "for one reason or another he couldn't see clear to let them go."

In February, he went to the hospital board and asked it to stop permitting abortions. "They felt it was a community hospital and that all legal services should be provided."

Berkes' decision to take his walk might have begun three years ago when he read an excerpt from Father John Powell's book "Silent Holocaust."

"Afterward, I thought I really must talk to my partner. Then I thought forget it -- he's doing them, not me. But my commitment to the Lord deepened. The answer in prayer (should he stay?) came up, 'No!'"

For a time of about 10 years of his life, Berkes "got away" from his "deep faith" as a Catholic when he was a child. Now he describes himself as an "almost daily Communicant."

His wife, Willa, of course, had a role in the whole situation. She just became a Catholic last Easter at St. Michael's Church.

"I was not really always opposed to abortion," she said. "It was something far removed from me. I was probably like most people -- I

wasn't personally affected because it was so far removed.

"I have done a lot of reading and I, too, see the horror that man is creating under God's nose."

"I support Ken's decision. I have always kind have known that he was right. Yes, I am supportive even though for a time I was caught up in my own fear of what the future would be."

The Berkes family consists of more than Ken and Willa. There's Kyle, 24; Kenneth, 22; Kari, 20, and Kevin 19.

How did the younger members of the family feel?

"For the first time, the kids saw us stepping out in faith. I think they were a little disturbed. I think there was a feeling that I should stay and fight."

"But there was nothing I could do by staying. It would only split the hospital and the partnership anyway."

"Like any faith dream, it has been a battle with the flesh. To throw away a good partnership just when we were coming into our own financially. . . the kids almost finished college. . . just me and the Mrs. to ourselves. . . we have our health. We put all that on the line."



DR. BERKES

issue. I feel like the Lord is calling us to do something more.

"I've been asking a lot of questions of people in the pro-life movement. I want to prayerfully discern where to put my efforts as to what we can do about the whole abortion issue. Maybe tie into the process of evangelization. Temporarily, I have given up medicine. I want to speak on abortion, primarily in Yates county where they know I'm not a nut -- at least most of them know that (said with a smile)."

Obviously, the Berkes' relationship with the Lord is not brand new.

"We were involved in Charismatic Renewal. In the search for spiritual direction, we wound up at St. Mary's House of Prayer in Corning -- the Anawim Community."

The spiritual approach is evident in the use of prayer as a resource. Saying that the whole experience has drawn him and his wife closer together, Berkes said. "Our prayer together is deeper. We pray the rosary every day. We pray openly together. Spontaneous prayer together. . . one of the great graces is the strength of Christian community, almost daily Eucharist, great support, tremendous grace. God has let us move closer to His pain. Close to Mary at the foot of the cross, her ability to forgive. These are great graces."

"Yes," Dr. Berkes said, "it is like a walk -- our deepening relationship with the Lord -- putting Him first in our lives. As you come to understand your own brokenness and sin, comes the realization that life is a passage to eternity -- a faith walk."

Little Rock Bible Study Hailed Here

The success of a program of Bible study in the diocese has encouraged its promoters to offer it more widely.

According to Georgette Ermatinger, the program, devised by the Diocese of Little Rock, Ark., was introduced to the diocese in the Fall of 1982 at St. Paul's Parish in Webster. Since then, the program has spread to St. Anne's, Rochester; St. Lawrence, Greece; St. Agnes, Avon; and St. John the Evangelist on Humboldt Street.

"It's popularity stems from the fact that it is a guided program. . . distinctly for the laity and given by lay leaders, thus not adding to the ever increasing responsibility of the clergy," she said.

She described the format as "extremely simple. The pace is not burdensome. The week's assigned reading with required written answers to 18 questions is discussed in small sharing groups which grow to become true Christian communities."

"The principal emphasis is on the application of biblical principles to everyday life. In that manner, the participants become increasingly aware of the eternal wisdom to be gleaned from the Word of God."

Further information on the program is available through the diocesan Catholic Charismatic Center, 34 Monica St., Rochester, N.Y. 14619; (716) 436-6252.

Mrs. Ermatinger also will provide information, 224 Shorewood Dr., Webster, N.Y. 14580; (716) 671-5389.