

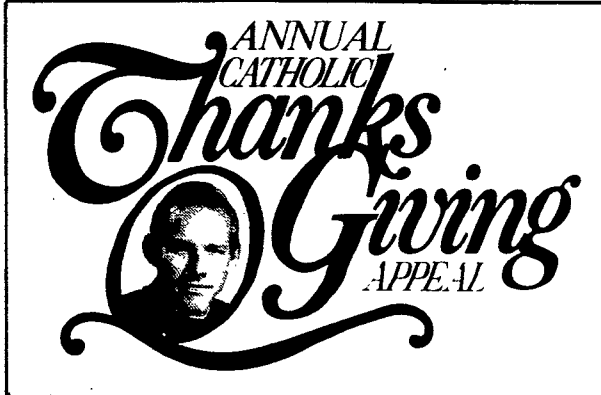
Social Ministry Counseling Services 1984-85

At some time in life, almost everyone experiences the need for a type of counseling service. This need may range from a particular experience from the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, sickness, confusion or separation from family and friends. In 1980, Sister Judith Reger SSJ, CSW, was appointed the coordinator of Social Ministry Counseling Services in the Southern Tier. This is a program sponsored by Catholic Charities. Sister Judith's experience working at St. Ann's Home and the Office of Human Development gave her ample background to spearhead this ministry in the Southern Tier of our diocese. She was also part of the inner-city outreach of Catholic Family Center and had worked at a prayer center for Sisters of St. Joseph in Rochester. Both of these opportunities gave her sensitivity to the spiritual and physical needs of others.

The counseling services provided by the diocese are distinctive. Persons opt to seek them out because they are looking for an agency which esteems values related to both Church and Faith. Although the counseling service sees clients from all denominations, often individuals who come with personal or family related problems have had a negative experience with some members of the Church, or have problems related to her teaching and legislation. In the context of the counseling services they often find a mutual accepting.

The Social Ministry Counseling Service is an extension of the counseling services provided by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester. It receives its major funding from the Thanks Giving Appeal of the Diocese of Rochester, some funding from Tioga United Way and some income from fees assessed on a sliding scale for certain services based on the client's ability to pay.

The counseling program has five components:



Family Counseling, Individual Counseling, Marriage Counseling, Adolescent Pregnancy Counseling, Adoption Assistance.

It is through its outreach offices that the five-county area is served. Sister Judith works in Chemung, Schuyler and Tioga counties; Ruth Wilson-Kauffman, M. Ed., in Tompkins County; Janet Kass, MSW, in Tioga County; and Charles L'Esperance CSW, ASCW, in Steuben County. It is the dedication and commitment of this support team which "bring much joy," says Sister Judith, in spite of the fact that budget constraints allow only 15 hours or less of counseling service each week in the respective areas.

Charles L'Esperance notes that "the counseling program seems to be meeting a need since the referral program is working well in Steuben County. There is good support from church pastors in this county where one-half of the clients are not related to the Catholic Church."

Janet Kass thinks the program is incredibly meaningful to herself and the persons she serves. "However, it does reach such a small number in proportion to the need. We have a need for more skilled and sensitive clinicians."

"There is a great need for counselors to help young women and families," reports Sister Judith. "And since there is so much more awareness now of problems related to teen pregnancy, there is a need to be linked with other agencies who are able to provide the social services that the teen mother needs. There is also a greater awareness of adoption as an option for the young



Sister Judith Reger SSJ.

teenage woman who is pregnant." Sister Judith also works with the Teen Parent Program of the Alternative High School of the Schuyler-Chemung-Tioga BOCES, counseling with students on a half-day basis.

As for the future of the program, Sister Judith sees the need for counseling services under the auspices of the Church. The record of this program for the past four and a half years indicates a potential for growth even though its services vary from county to county.

We are grateful for your contributions to the Thanks Giving Appeal to make this work possible!



Father Bruce Ritter

THANK YOU

Thanks, Bruce, for running this place. When I become a millionaire, I'm going to open a center just like this.

The voice welled up out of the darkness on the floor of the lounge in our Center. We had just bedded down 50 overflow kids there. Another 200 were upstairs.

I had stopped in about 11:00 p.m. It's one of my favorite times to be in the Center — to watch the magical transformation of dozens of street-wise drifters, wanderers, mid-night cowboys and potential Mary Magdalenes into a gaggle of sleeping very vulnerable children.

The boy made no attempt to whisper. He wanted to be heard. I kicked the kid gently in the leg. I'm glad you're here, I said. I hope you become a millionaire real soon — like tomorrow. He grinned quietly back up at me.

I walked around a bit, stepping over a dozen kids, kicking them if I thought they wanted to be kicked, grabbing a few hands that rose up out of that dark floor to block my path for a moment.

The kids quieted down real quick that night. It is almost magic the way 250 assorted urban wolfings can turn into children again. An extraneous text from the Gospel slid through my mind: "Unless you become as little children..." I banished it quickly, the thought somehow incongruous, out of place. The gaudy, colored lights from the Cameo porno theater and Paradise Alley (the peep show across the street) flickered through our windows and touched the faces and bodies of our sleeping kids: "...you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven," said the lights. Oh yes they will, I said. And the text was no longer incongruous and out of place.

And in my guts where logic has no place and in my head where it rules too often there erupted again that absolute conviction that I have come to recognize as the voice of God: these kids are His and He loves them and that is the only, best and sufficiently compelling reason to be here, or in Houston, or Toronto, or Guatemala, or Fort Lauderdale.

For the moment at least it seemed the crisis, the anxiety, the pain, the lonely terrors they would wake to were forgotten. And then my thoughts turned bleak and sour when they wake tomorrow, they would be engulfed again by that implacable and unrelenting anxiety that rules their

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway boys and girls all over the country.

lives, and that is so often manifested by an extreme need for attention — and the behavior designed to get it.

"On Thanksgiving we just naturally count our blessings..."

Our younger children are hungry, jealous gossings, jostling each other away from the mother/father source of warmth and safety. They cry out to be owned. Our older kids hurt more, more suspicious and independent, hawkish and wary, circle in erratic near, then far orbits. Owning them is risky.

On Thanksgiving we just naturally count our blessings — a bit guiltily perhaps — and try to figure out, once again, why we, among so many, should be so favored.

We're grateful, most of all, for our kids, who every day reveal the face of God to us: the kid who thanked me — the one who wanted to be a millionaire, so he could help other kids — was grateful for a place on the floor. He preached a sermon that I could never equal.

Betsy is grateful, too. I never met her — she's one of the thousands of kids who come to Covenant House whom I never see — but she wrote me a letter to say thanks:

I've been running away for about 4 years. All the time I ran I never wanted help from authorities or anybody. I was always satisfied being on my own. The last time I ran away was last summer and that was the one time I was glad for help. I'm only 16 but I have a maturish baby face, a face and a body that many men like. I met a pimp... who promised me a lot of things, but what attracted me to him the most was the way he paid attention to me and listened to me. I really needed somebody to listen to me and when he came around, I was just so down. I was vulnerable. I went with him to his place where he pampered me for 3 days and really appeared to care. Then the time came when I had to 'repay' him. I was so scared I just ran from him and luckily I found Covenant House.

The people on the staff were so nice. I was scared to trust them with the truth about my name and address so I gave a phony one. I was treated very nice by the others there and I even made a friend, one who knew what the life on the street was like. He really scared me pretty bad, but it did make me go home and boy, oh, boy, I'm so glad. My mother listened to me, and she actually helped.

I just want to say, "Thank You", just for being so kind enough to care about kids to have Covenant House available to others like me.

Betsy Akron

I like to think we own our kids. Certainly, in all the basic human ways they are ours. They belong to us as surely as any wandering maverick on the range belonged to the first cowboy who found it. Last night we "owned" 550 "mavericks" we found wandering in the concrete canyons of our cities and brought to the safe corrals of Covenant House.

You own them too, of course. That's part of what binds us together. Beyond any saying of it, this Thanksgiving, we are grateful to the Lord for you.

I've never met most of you personally, yet I find myself worrying about your families, your kids, especially. Rejoicing when things go well with you, unhappy when they don't.

"I hope this Thanksgiving is a happy and peaceful and love-shared time for you."

I hope this Thanksgiving is a happy and peaceful and love-shared time for you. It will be for us and our kids.

In their name I thank you for loving them and caring about them. They are grateful. We are, too. Thanks for helping us pay our bills each month. God is the only compelling reason why we should be here for our kids, but you make it possible.

Pray for us. We pray for you all the time.

Yes, I agree all kids should have an opportunity like Betsy. Enclosed is my gift of \$_____ please print

NAME _____
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Please send this coupon with your donation to:
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