

Activist urges Americans to seek Soviets' human side

By Teresa A. Parsons

"Do not depend on the hope of results," Thomas Merton once wrote to a brand new peace activist named Jim Forest. "When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on, essentially an apostolic work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect."

That's not the kind of encouragement one might expect to inspire a lifetime of devotion to the cause at hand. But it's worked for Forest so far.

The executive secretary of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR), Forest spoke Sunday afternoon at St. Mary's Church in downtown Rochester, one stop on a 25-day tour of the United States.

He affectionately described IFOR headquarters in The Netherlands as the "glue factory," which earns its title by holding together a loosely constructed network of chapters working for peace and justice in 30 countries throughout the world.

Founded in 1914, the IFOR recognizes abolishing war as the primary responsibility of people, both Christian and non-Christian. Members seek to accomplish their aims through non-violent activism, by promoting the unconditional love taught by Christ in the gospels and by following the examples provided by such leaders as Gandhi and Martin Luther King in everyday life.

What difference could such a tiny, esoteric-sounding organization realistically expect to make in relation to geo-political conflicts around the world?

How about a bloodless change of government in the Philippines, for starters?

Although Forest wouldn't claim that triumph for the fellowship alone, he did assert that a fellow IFOR staff member, Hildegard Goss-Mayr, "was certainly a good part of it." Over the past several years, Goss-Mayr, who also visited Rochester last

year, has conducted seminars and retreats on non-violence for the Philippine bishops.

Her training became evident in the Church's handling of the the Philippine crisis. "To my knowledge, that's the first statement by any group of Catholic bishops that called for non-violent civil disobedience," said Monsignor William Shannon, director of the local Merton Society, which co-sponsored Forest's visit.

On his first trip to the U.S. in more than three years, Forest, a Utah native, hopes to make a similar contribution to the eventual breakdown of a far more formidable barrier — that which exists between Soviet and American peoples.

"That enmity is not something invented in our lifetime," Forest said. "It's an old enmity, but one that's been growing stronger in recent years."

The East-West conflict may have predated him, but so far Forest has spent a sizeable chunk of his life — 25 of his 45 years — as an advocate for peace and non-violence. After becoming a Roman Catholic in 1961, he was discharged from the U.S. Navy as a conscientious objector. Forest then moved to New York to join the staff of The Catholic Worker.

In the summer of 1961, Dorothy Day read a letter to the Catholic Worker staff from a little-known Cistercian monk named Thomas Merton. Merton's first article on non-violence was published in the newspaper the same year, and he and Forest began a correspondence that continued regularly for the next eight years.

In 1964, Forest helped to found the Catholic Peace Fellowship, through which he established ties with the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He was then named editor of the organization's monthly magazine, "Fellowship," in 1973 and four years later became general secretary of the IFOR. For the past 10 years, he has served the fellowship's branches around the world and



Teresa A. Parsons/Courier-Journal
Jim Forest (second from left) paused willingly in the sacristy of St. Mary's Church after his presentation Sunday to autograph books and discuss issues with Ruth Hauser (left), and Peggy and George Rosenthal.

has edited the IFOR Report, which is issued five times a year. He has also written biographies of Merton and Dorothy Day, and is a contributing editor to "Sojourners" magazine.

Forest began his personal assault on the East-West conflict with two trips to Moscow in 1984 and 1985 to meet with peace groups, members of the Russian Orthodox Church and as many ordinary Soviet citizens as possible.

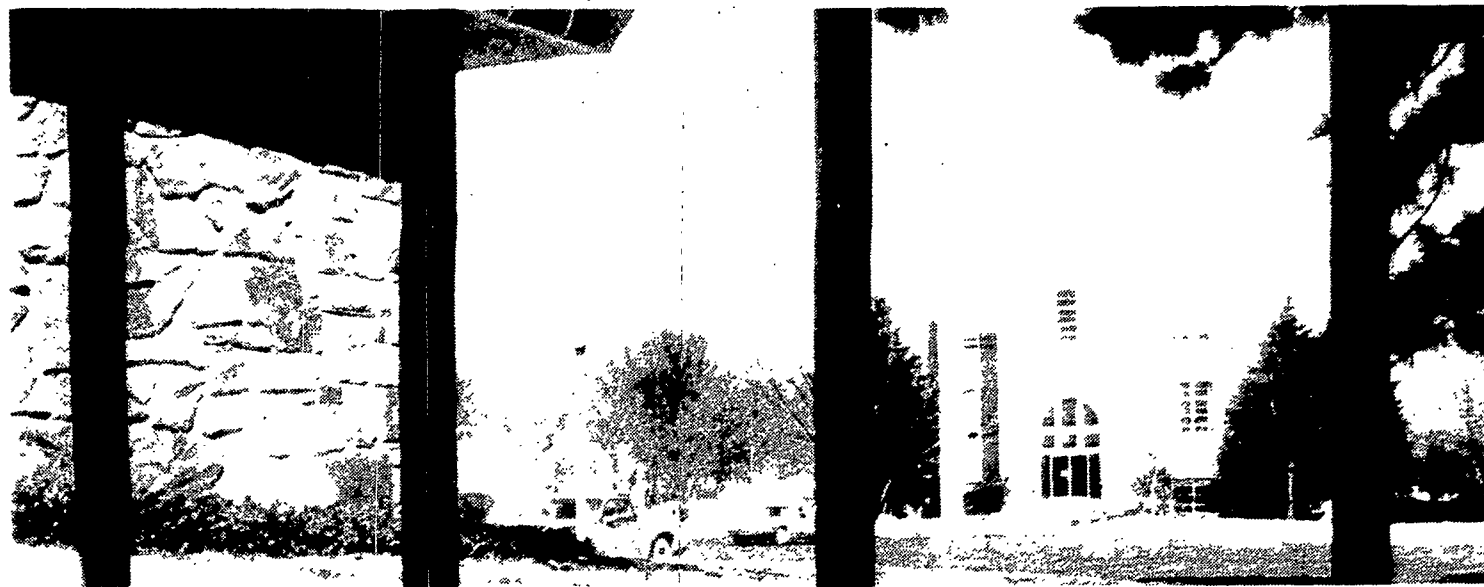
When he returned from the Soviet Union, Forest brought the people he met back to The Netherlands with him and further — to the

United States.

Last week, as a small group of Rochesterians in the darkened church gazed at his slides of the faces and scenes of Moscow, Forest asserted that major peace organizations and religious leaders alike have failed to stop the arms race at least in part because they haven't sought to arrange more such meetings.

"Since I was last in the U.S., most Americans have come to view nuclear war as a possibility, even a probability in their lives, a very likely cause of death for themselves

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Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal
Our Lady of Lourdes School building, 165 Rhinecliff Drive, will be the site of Seton Junior High School, scheduled to open next fall. Junior high students will occupy one floor of the building, while students in grades 3-6 will remain on other floors.

Seton Junior High

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option which has not been plausible for any of the schools independently.

Seventh and eighth grade enrollment at the three schools totaled 79 for the '85/'86 school

year. The plan projects initial enrollment for Seton next year at between 85 and 102 students, allowing for a 10-15 percent attrition rate. That projection is based on the three schools' current sixth and seventh grade enrollment, parish baptismal records and the introduction of a marketing plan for the school.

Although she acknowledged that public and non-public schools are being forced to become more competitive as Brighton's school-age population dwindles, Sister Patricia downplayed that as a motivation for the consolidation.

"We approached the school superintendent (of public schools) here and found

him very supportive," she said. "Our schools have all performed well on statewide tests. We all have had high standards and our purpose in going together is to preserve that and enhance it ... It's not our purpose to compete with public schools, but to offer an alternative."

"No other school in the area offers a religious, value-oriented atmosphere where a caring community can develop," she added.

No other school, that is, except Blessed Sacrament, which is designated by the diocesan urban school plan as one of two regional junior high schools in the city. Members of the Blessed Sacrament/St. John's school board are concerned about the effect of a second regional junior high school less than five miles southeast on Monroe Avenue.

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