

Bilingual priest hopes to unite cultures at Corpus Christi

By Teresa A. Parsón

Parishioners at Corpus Christi and Hispanic people throughout Rochester have gained a priest, a brother, a friend and a prophet in Father Enrique Cadena.

A member of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit order and a native of Mexico City, Father Cadena, 34, will live and work part-time at Corpus Christi for the next two years while studying pastoral counseling at St. Bernard's Institute.

"We see him as a real gift in working with the Hispanic community and in the relationship between Hispanics and the Anglo community, especially since he is bilingual," said Sister Margery Henninger, parish associate. "He also possesses the same vision we share in this church."

For the past four years, Father Cadena has served in Rochester's sister diocese of Tabasco, organizing Christian base communities. "We tried to prepare leaders to have their own Christian life" when priests were not available, he said.

Those occasions were frequent since, along with five other priests and two brothers of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, Father Cadena ministered to 96 communities, or 'rancherías.' In the largest ones, Mass was celebrated every week, but the smaller rancherías only had a priest once a month. Each ranchería had at least one base community, and some had as many as 10.

Although his community could ill afford to spare him for two years, Father Cadena believes his training so far has been inadequate to meet all the needs of the people.

"People who come for spiritual direction very often need counseling or psychiatric help,"

he explained. Some were abused children; others suffered from alcoholism or marital conflicts.

But they were unwilling to seek professional help, even in the rare instances when it was available. "They have great trust in priests," Father Cadena said. "They said 'Father, pray to God for me.'"

As his conviction grew that he needed further study, Father Cadena outlined his situation in a letter to Father James Callan, Corpus Christi's pastor. Father Callan, who met Father Cadena during a visit to Tabasco several years ago, invited him to visit Corpus Christi, which he did last year.

"I felt very comfortable right away — that this was a very special family atmosphere," he added. "I really like the communities formed around the parish. They do a lot of sharing of life, of faith and work."

While at Corpus Christi, Father Cadena stressed, he will work as part of the parish's existing ministry team to Hispanics, which includes Gamaliel and Nancy Beltran, along with Father Callan. Together, they plan to help train more Hispanic leaders and establish small communities of 12 to 15 people, who will meet weekly for prayer, sharing and discussion.

The aim of the communities is to encourage integration of faith into daily life. "For so long, the Church didn't pay any attention to the need to really relate our faith with our life," Father Cadena said.

Hispanic people in the United States suffer from "a crisis of identity," he said. "Many of the people are not really Hispanic any more, but not really American either. Being here is being in a strange place for them. Many long to go back (to their countries), but don't have

'I don't agree with the way of living of many people here. They are so individualized, living by and for themselves totally, wanting to have everything ... (But) I am glad to see Americans fighting for justice here.'

Father Enrique Cadena, MSpS

"It's a challenge for people to discern the type of faith they really have," Father Cadena said. "I'm not going to tell someone not to go to a particular church. I'm not concerned as long as they do something."

But he believes that such sects are often politically based, particularly in Mexico. "There are lots of missionaries supported by American denominations. They always have lots of money," he said. "Almost overnight, new, well-equipped churches spring up."

What the missionaries preach is passive resignation to the will of God. "They tell people to depend on God — that as long as they only pray, He will do everything for them," he said. "Then they don't get involved in social activities — the building of the community ... They are not strong any more."


Such intervention only complicates what is a "very hard" political situation in Mexico, Father Cadena said. Shortly before he left, the government posted notices warning priests and religious to stay out of politics.

Historically, he said, trouble started in Tabasco when PEMEX, the Mexican oil company, "purchased" drilling rights to land that belonged to the peasants, or *campesinos*, promising to pay later. When the company failed to pay, the *campesinos* began to organize and demand payment. They were supported in their effort by local church leaders. "We were supporting them because we felt what they were doing was right," Father Cadena said.

"The government tried to make it seem like a revolution," he said. Then they tried to buy the people off, promising them schools, health

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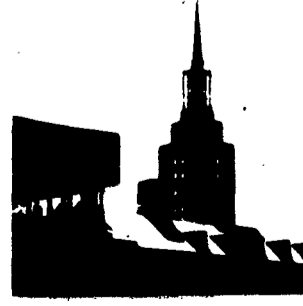
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