



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal
Mary Mulligan Burkwit, sister of Father Charles Mulligan, comforts her daughter, Margaret, 9, during the sending ceremony for Father Mulligan at St. Catherine's in Mendon.

Diocesan priest seeks bridge for the gap between Americas

By Teresa A. Parsons

When he left Monday for Chile, Father Charles Mulligan was following his heart.

As a member of Maryknoll's Associate Priests' Program, the former director of diocesan social ministry will spend the next five years working as part of a pastoral team in a Santiago parish.

As Father Mulligan prepared to leave last week, Chile was in the midst of a military crackdown imposed by the government of General Augusto Pinochet, who narrowly survived a recent assassination attempt. Two American Maryknoll priests with whom Father Mulligan plans to live were among those detained by soldiers Sept. 8. Fathers Thomas Henahan and Terrence Cambias were released later the same day. But three days later, their permanent visas were revoked and they were issued temporary, 15-day visas, according to a Maryknoll spokesman.

Although he acknowledged that the political and economic situation in the country is currently tense, Father Mulligan said he harbored no apprehension about his safety.

"I may be a fool at this point, but I feel very little fear going into this," he said. "I'm looking forward to celebrating life there."

One reason for his lack of fear may be the six months he spent on sabbatical last year at the Maryknoll language school in Cochabamba, Brazil. On his way back to the United States in February, he stopped for 10 days in Chile.

"People live a very lean life there," Father Mulligan said. "But he observed an enormous difference between the spirit of the Bolivian and Chilean people. 'Bolivia is defeated,' he said. 'Chile is full of hope.'"

He believes that the people draw their hope from one another. While parishes in Santiago include thousands of people, he explained that they are comprised of hundreds of tightly knit neighborhood communities. "These life communities are part of the order of their society," he said. "Base communities are a cultural thing that the Church recognizes and works with."

Father Mulligan's missionary experience grew from a simple desire to learn Spanish. As director of diocesan social ministry, he was frustrated by his inability "to touch and be touched" by Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Haitians and other immigrants, refugees and farmworkers coming into the diocese. "I felt very deeply the struggle of people coming into this country," he said. "I also felt isolated because of language."

Although he is "deeply disturbed" by the

direction of American policy in Central and Latin America, Father Mulligan said he doesn't trust the political perceptions he gets from news reports. "I'm bothered by the harsh side of American policy — where defense of ourselves takes priority. But I'm also bothered by the liberal side's assumptions," he said.

"I had no way of making judgments about what was happening to the campesinos (rural peasants). So I decided I wanted to learn Spanish in a Latin American setting and that I wanted to learn it with committed people."

Father Paul Freemesser suggested Maryknoll's language school in Bolivia. Father Mulligan chose the school not only for the other's missionary expertise, but also because of the relationships its members forged and their care in preparing people for assignments. "I was impressed by how they as missionaries related to people," he said. "They have a wonderfully experienced way of moving you into it. They really invest in people."

He then began to consider working in the Maryknoll Associates' Program. Each year, Maryknoll accepts 50 lay and religious participants from among more than 2,000 applicants across the United States. Priests and religious commit to five years of mission work, while lay persons commit to three.

For several months Father Mulligan debated whether to apply to the program. "I finally decided (in January, 1985) I should follow my insight and the lead of my heart and do it," he said.

Despite the shortage of priests to serve in the Diocese of Rochester, Father Mulligan said Bishop Matthew H. Clark supported his decision. "He said, 'Whatever work you're doing there is the work of our Church and our diocese.'"

After being accepted as a candidate, Father Mulligan took part in a process of psychological and spiritual discernment. Candidates who remain firm in their commitment then become participants, submitting three potential locations where they would like to serve.

Once assigned, candidates need about a year and a half to learn about the language, the style and the people, Father Mulligan said. "There's an old saying among priests: 'When you go into a parish, wait a year before you do anything. When you go to another country, you spend a lot of time just listening.'"

During his sabbatical last year, Father Mulligan observed that the massive amounts of American military aid and drug money flow-



Father Charles Mulligan looks out at the congregation during the opening hymn of the Mass.

ing into Latin America "are enormously devastating to life down there."

"We're killing people... It's not simply Ronald Reagan or current policy. It's our society's obsessiveness. We want no pain, no struggle, and we want to be secure," he said.

Although he believes a huge gap exists between North and South America, Father Mulligan also believes the gap can be bridged by determined individuals.

"I want to make a statement, to say physically 'There's another way,'" he said. "I want to offer life by being there."

Once, he thought Latin America's problems would be solved when its countries became like the United States. "Now I think we'll end up

imitating them," he said. "They've got a lot of things we need — a sense of community... the capacity to celebrate, resiliency and patience, hope, the ability to listen."

When he returns to this country, Father Mulligan hopes he will bring with him a new awareness of the "people side" of issues.

"I entered Church work through issues," he explained. "Now I want to be regrounded in family and community. I think the Church ought to deal with questions of life. At the point where the fabric of people's lives is coming apart, that's where the Church ought to be."

Nazareth receives state grant

Nazareth College has received a \$110,000 New York State Education Department grant to assist the Rochester City School District in its efforts to motivate students to continue their education. The "Stay in School Partnership Higher Education Grant" is one of only 10 awarded in the state.

Under the terms of the proposal approved by Commissioner of Education Gordon Ambach, Nazareth will train selected graduate students to tutor 50 ninth graders in Jefferson and Charlotte junior and senior high schools. The students will be identified

as potential dropouts based on such criteria as poor attendance, achievement, behavior and motivation.

Graduate students in Nazareth's M.S. in Education program will be selected and trained to provide both academic and personal counseling on a one-to-one basis. Nazareth will also provide in-service training for City School District teachers and administrators who will also be involved in the project.

A program director and two on-site coordinators will be appointed by the college to supervise the program.

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