Hope emerges from encounter of Brazilian communities

By Beatrice Ganley, SSJ

Aptly named "the Vatican II of the poor," a four-day national encounter of Brazilian base ecclesial communities itself seemed to be a realization of "The Struggle for a New Society," the title of one of the sessions on the July meeting's agenda.

Trinade, in the state of Goias, was the site of this sixth national encounter. There, cardinals stood in food lines chatting with Indians, brick layers and office workers. Bishops took instructions from housewives on the best method of washing dishes, and everyone sat on the grass, balancing plate and cup, eating together in a "foretaste of the society of equals" envisioned by the members of these base communities.

According to Sister Dolores Turner, a Sister of St. Joseph of Rochester who participated in the encounter, these base ecclesial communities are "modeled on the example of the first Christian communities described in the Acts of the Apostles. But they are strongly marked by the reality of Latin America, arising as they have from a



Sisters Dolores Turner (left) and Ellen Kuhl, SSJ, stand outside their convent in Goiania in the Brazilian state of Goias.

POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT

political, social and economic context marked by oppression.

"They have sprung from a situation in which millions of Latin Americans are daily crushed by hunger, sickness, lack of access to land, insufficient salaries and violence of all kinds," Sister Dolores relates.

Sister Dolores, who lives and works as a pastoral agent in Goiania with Sister Ellen Kuhl and three Brazilian novices, writes that this new way of being Church is a people's expression of Christian experience. It is strongly rooted in scripture and is multiplying throughout Brazil. These groups, she says, "are not simply communities of faith and study. Each one is a community of life which overflows in mutual help, interest in community problems, involvement in popular movements for human rights and solidarity with international problems, particularly the struggle in Nicaragua."

An important element of the "struggle for a new society" in Brazil is the matter of land distribution. Without such reform, "the cycle of violence, which has seen landowners sending hired militias against landless peasants, will not end."

Sister Dolores Turner's comments are in a similar vein. She writes of the third day of the encounter, at which participants considered the land question. As she listened to the small farmers recount their stories, Sister Dolores realized that the land reform initiated by the new Republic of Brazil does not begin to respond to the urgent needs of a landless people.

Nearly 2,000 representatives comprised the encounter, including 800 lay delegates farmers, factory workers, laundry women and housewives. Nearly half of those present had suffered persecution because of their commitment to work for peace and justice, Sister Dolores writes.

In spite of the problems, persecution, and the recent deaths of land-reform advocates and parish priests who have worked with farmers seeking to gain legal title to their land, the encounter concluded in a spirit of hope.

POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT

Sister Dolores' description of the participants' nighttime march to Trindade's Basilica of the Divine Eternal Father is testimony to that spirit. "The night was filled with the joyous explosion of fireworks and bells," Sister Dolores writes.

When participants rose each morning at 6 a.m., "groups from the Northeast and the South would circulate among the people, providing a joyful atmosphere with their regional songs and instruments," she relates. "colorful banners decorated the streets, and on the walls of the stadium, 30-foot-high banners recalled the annual gatherings of the past five years."

At the closing celebration, soil from each state of Brazil was mixed in a large vessel and placed before the altar as a symbol of the mission to which these base ecclesial communities have pledged themselves: to transform Brazil into a true "Land of God, Land of Brothers and Sisters."

People of faith seek justice through non-violent action

A second second

whole world, very much in a faith consent, as you can see from the title of the encounter. "The People of God in Search of a Promised Land."

Sitter Katherme explained that for a year or more this theme has been the topic of reflection in all the base communities throughout Brazil.

According to Sister Katherine, the term "land" refers to more than agrarian reform and land rights. It includes the concept of basic human rights — medical care, education and just wages — the simple human dignity to which a person is entitled simply because he or she is a child of God.

Is this philosophy — also called "liberation theology" — merely a political movement? Is it Marxism and socialism "using" the gospel to achieve political ends? Sister Katherine seems certain that this is not the case. "Remember the biblical orientation of this," she said. "We are not Marxists... : but tast is nor-dilies a ment

equations. The families convertices in the new for eight mouth. Iving notion plastic, trasts. Church performed mobilized to and in fund and molical repplies for this extended side. Family, the families were granted legal title to the land by Brazil's highest court. Throughout all of this. Sinter Katherine said, "the camp was orgamized around daily prayerful reflections, community living and the use of all legal channels, open to them. There was no

sense of arming to get their rights." Such people, she notes, appreciate the presence, of priests and sisters who accompany them in their journey to "assume one's life as agent rather than as subject."

Perhaps to understand this inspirited sense of hope and possibility coming out of Latin America, we in the United States should reflect upon our own history as an immigrant Church. The same desire for a life of self-respect and human dignity was the impetus that called our predecessors to engage in a struggle for the sake of a newer, fuller life.

There availab monkey signed take an number year's s for a De

COUR

De

pr

DeSa

musical

prepara

underw

story by

E.V. H

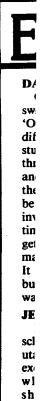
school

can be

time.

Volu

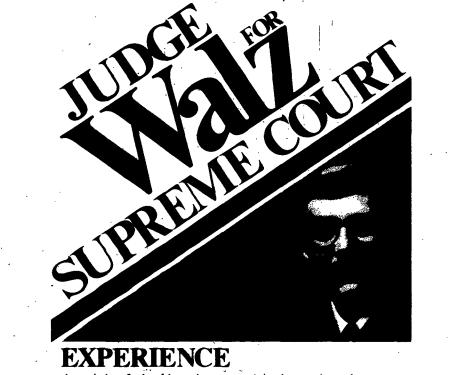
The (Counci older re Volunte Term C to six h



exe ed In of

stu cli an

th





As a sitting Judge I have been aggressive in my courts because I know:

How crime affects neighborhoods
How drugs destroy our families
How alcohol destroys lives

"Offenders should realize that actions have consequences, which is why I have been an innovator in my approach to these common problems."

JUDGE WALZ A Man in touch with the Law!

A Judge in touch with the People!



Committee to Elect Judge Walz Supreme Court Judge Treasurer-Carolee Conklin—29 Cambridge Street, Rochester, New York 14607

For Companionship & Security.

Is Living Alone No Longer the Answer?

Call us. Come visit. You'll be enchanted with our homey, family-like settings featuring:

- Very reasonable rates
- Quiet companionship
- · Security and safety at all times
- Privacy in comfortable surroundings
- 24-hour trained assistance
- Mealtimes with great food and conversation
- Caring staff who remember medication and never forget birthdays
- Favorite activities, parties, classes, and exercises right in our home
- Outings, luncheons, and shopping sprees in our community and beyond.

Rochester's Adult Homes. Affordable Care for the Elderly.

Hilton East Residential Home 231 East Ave., Hilton, NY 14468 Contact: Elisa Loomis (716) 392-7171

Rochester Presbyterian Home 256 Thurston Rd., Rochester, NY 14619 Contact: Patricia Weise (716) 235-9100

Town Gate East

2006 Five Mile Line Rd., Penfield, NY 14526 Contact: Josephine Kennedy (716) 381-0282

Town Gate Manor

150 Towngate Rd., Rochester, NY 14626 Contact: Richard Hood (716) 225-3010

West Side Manor

1404 Long Pond Rd., Rochester, NY 14626 Contact: Peggy Secor (716) 225-7210

Each Day is Precious. Call or Visit Us Today.