



Missionary momentum

Father Edwin Metzger began dreaming of a missionary career 33 years ago. Now that dream is about to come true, as Father Metzger begins a Maryknoll training program. Page 3.



Painful price

The lack of safe, affordable housing for low-income Wayne County residents takes a heavy toll on family relationships — and in some cases costs the lives of children. Page 16.

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Sponsor offers Viet refugees final reunion

By Lee Strong

A combination of misunderstanding, poor communication and distance has compounded the tragedy of a Vietnamese woman with tuberculosis dying alone in a Philippine refugee camp.

On the recommendation of the Center for Disease Control, Mai thi Thoa has been denied entry to the United States because she has a highly contagious strain of tuberculosis that is resistant to all known treatments.

Meanwhile, the woman's two daughters, Phung Nguyen, 25, and Thanh Mai, 19, have been living in Ithaca since March 28, 1987, waiting for their mother to arrive. Unaware of the seriousness of the woman's condition, parishioners of St. Peter and Paul's Parish, Elmira, who sponsored the daughters' resettlement, have been trying to get permission for the mother to come to the United States.

Parishioners did not learn the extent of the mother's illness until they received a telex from the Philippines on July 14, 1988, stating that the woman's condition was terminal and too contagious for her to be allowed in the country.

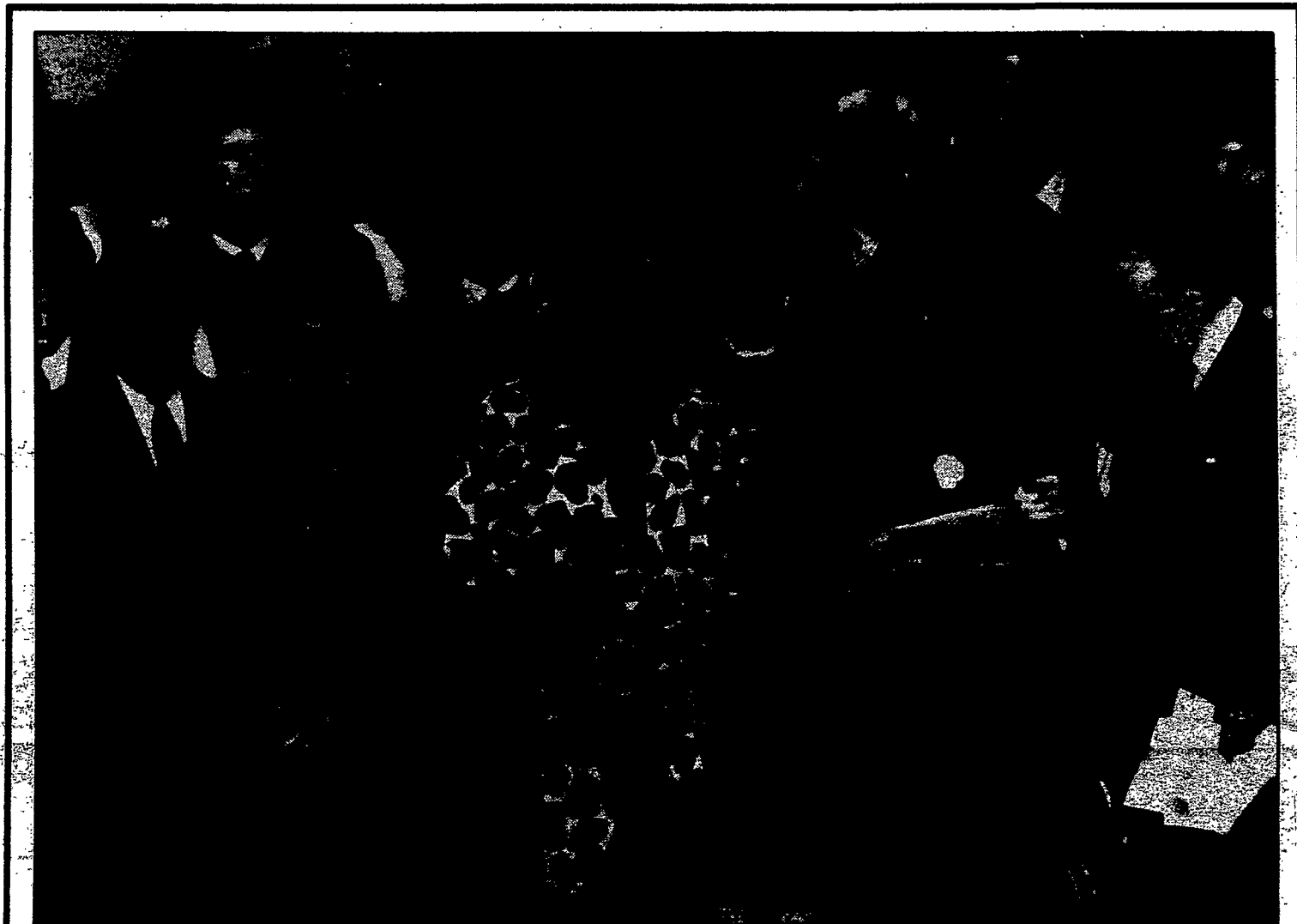
As a result of that news, the daughters and parishioner Mike Rutski will leave August 9 for the Philippines, where they will visit the Morong Philippine Refugee Processing Camp, in which the mother has lived for two years. The United States Catholic Conference is lending the three money to pay for the trip.

"It's very frustrating," said Rutski, who chairs the parish's resettlement committee. "We should have been told when the girls arrived how sick their mother was. We've been working with the assumption that she would eventually be able to come once she was healthier."

Carol Mortland, head of the Refugee Assistance Project, which assists refugees and their sponsors in the Ithaca area, said that information about such medical problems is usually sent to sponsors before the refugees arrive in this country. In fact, Mortland said she was appalled when the girls arrived without their mother.

"Usually when a family member has a medical problem there is a 'medical hold' and the whole family waits (until the problem clears up)," Mortland explained. "(Immigration officials) never explained why the girls were sent on without their mother, and we were not told how sick the mother was."

Although Mortland was upset about the lack of information provided to the sponsors, she was not critical of the U.S. government or international refugee groups.



CONVENTION PRAYER — Atlanta Archbishop Eugene A. Marino leads the closing prayer at the Democratic National Convention July 21. For convention coverage and analysis of the Democratic Party platform, see page 7.

"When you consider the number of countries, the number of refugees, the number of agencies involved, it's understandable," she explained. "It's difficult getting information back and forth from the camps. It's difficult to point a finger at someone when so many people are involved."

Mortland said she also was unaware until July 14 that the mother would not be allowed into the United States. She acknowledged, however, that a photograph that arrived in February made her first suspect that the mother's condition was more serious than had been thought.

"She looked like one of the pictures of people coming out of a World War II concentration camp," Mortland reported. "I was in the camp in 1982 and I saw people coming off the boats after two months without food, and she looked worse than they did."

One of the most frustrating aspects of the case is that although Mai thi Thoa and camp officials had known of her condition for several years, the information had not been communicated to the sponsors, Mortland said.

Richard Hess, director of the Philippines branch of the Joint Voluntary Agency, a consortium of groups supervising international resettlement efforts, said that agency and camp officials had attempted to make the mother's condition clear to the daughters before they left the Philippines. According to Hess, a camp doctor along with a Vietnamese translator had spent close to two hours with the young women, explaining to them that their mother had virtually no chance of being allowed to move to the United States.

"Perhaps they didn't completely understand it or thought with the passage of time the situation would change," Hess suggested, adding, "I think the daughters know; I don't think they want to accept it."

Mortland said she had known of the daughters' conversation with the camp doctor, but

not that it had been so extensive.

"(The depth of that meeting) explains why they were constantly asking us questions about tuberculosis once they got here," Mortland said. "They were probably hoping to get a different answer than they'd gotten in the camp."

According to Hess, the mother has had tuberculosis for many years, and had even attempted to hide it when she first left Vietnam, managing to enter Thailand with a set of lung X-rays that she had purchased. When it became obvious she was ill, however, refugee camp officials ordered new X-rays, which re-

Meanwhile, Rutski and the two daughters are completing arrangements to fly to the Philippines. On Monday, July 25, they went to New York City to get visas at the Philippine Embassy. They also visited the offices of the United States Catholic Conference, which is coordinating Vietnamese refugees resettlement efforts in the United States.

Rutski, who is using vacation time to make the trip, said that in the Philippines he will talk to camp personnel, Joint Volunteer Agency officials, and U.S. immigration representatives about the mother's case. He will return to the

'When you consider the number of countries, the number of refugees, the number of agencies involved, (the situation) is understandable ... It's difficult to point a finger at someone when so many people are involved.'

Carol Mortland

ealed the tuberculosis.

She has been receiving treatment for the disease for the last two years, but the particular strain has been resistant to all known treatments, Hess reported. Doctors speculate that the woman has taken medication for the disease for so long that it is now immune to all medications.

"In 99 out of 100 cases, treatment works," Hess said. "Her's is that one case out of 100 when treatment just won't work."

Hess said the woman had spent most of her time in the camp in the hospital's isolation ward. As recently as a month ago, she was in critical condition. "She improves and weakens, improves and weakens," he noted. At this point, he added, camp doctors say they are certain that she will die, but are uncertain how soon it will happen.

United States with the youngest daughter in early September so that she can return to school. The oldest daughter will remain in the camp with the mother, either until she dies or her condition improves.

Rutski said he still hopes that she will recover enough to receive a medical waiver to join her daughters in this country. "She wanted to come to the United States so her daughters could have a future," he said. "Now she's stuck there all alone and the family's split up. That's a tragedy."

Hess, however, believes talk of the mother's recovery is just wishful thinking.

"I very much doubt she's going to leave the camp," he predicted. "She's too weak and she's had it too long." The only hope is for a miraculous recovery, he added, concluding, "This is the kind of case we need prayer on."

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