

Missioners' impact exceeds those they daily serve

By Teresa A. Parsons

From the slums of Santiago, Chile, to rural villages in India and Mexico, to a speck of island in the South Pacific, the Diocese of Rochester has scattered a handful of its most precious resources halfway around the world.

To Kothagudem Mission, in a remote area of southeastern India, went Kevin Conheady, the 33-year-old son of Martin and Elizabeth Conheady of Rochester.

To Colegio Monte Maria in Guatemala City, Guatemala, 20 years ago went Sister Agnes Donovan, MM, an Auburn native and graduate of St. Mary's School. Meanwhile, her sister, Esther—who's also a Maryknoll sister—has served in the Central and South Pacific islands since 1937.

To the Diocese of Tabasco, Mexico, went Mark VanDerwater, Mary Jane Brennan, Lisa Kowalewski and Madalyn Kaniecki for two years—the latest in a series of lay missioners who have served Rochester's sister diocese.

To parishes in the slums of Santiago, Chile, went Father Charles Mulligan, a diocesan priest accepted into the five-year Maryknoll Associates Program. Next month, another diocesan priest, Father Edwin Metzger, will head for Nairobi, Kenya, for a five-year assignment with the same program.

Each is an idealist and an adventurer, willing to leave behind what is familiar and comfortable for the chance to enrich themselves and those around them.

In their individual ways, each of the missioners whom the Rochester diocese has nurtured and sent forth is seeking a piece of the answer to—in Mark VanDerwater's words—"why things are the way they are."

"(Mark is) a very kind and sensitive person with a great deal of empathy for the people who are really poor," explained his father, Bruce VanDerwater. "He was interested in how people can live with so little, and yet still be happy."

During a sabbatical trip to Latin America, Father Mulligan was similarly fascinated by the contrast between Chileans' economic poverty and their spiritual wealth. As diocesan director of social ministry from 1977 to 1985, he was already well-acquainted with poverty from the standpoint of issues. What he sought was a new awareness of the "people side."

"I think the Church ought to deal with ques-



Madalyn Kaniecki, Mark VanDerwater, Father Paul J. Ryan and Lisa Kowalewski constitute the diocesan mission team in Rochester's sister diocese of Tabasco, Mexico.

tions of life," he remarked shortly before leaving for his five-year assignment in September, 1986. "At the point where the fabric of people's lives is coming apart, that's where the Church ought to be."

While some find answers to why great poverty and wealth coexist couched primarily in social, economic or political terms, others, like Kevin Conheady, are also searching on a more contemplative plane. India's rich mystical tradition was part of what attracted Conheady to teach English at the Carmelite-founded Kothagudem Mission, which includes 180 villages scattered over 1,500 square miles. "Sometimes ... the poverty seems immense, and my heart cries out, not knowing how to respond," he wrote shortly after arriving in India six months ago. "There is much to learn from the mystery of suffering that exists in this world of ours."

Ever since Kevin Conheady graduated from McQuaid Jesuit High School in 1973, the seventh of Elizabeth and Martin Conheady's nine children has pursued that mystery, beginning with service to the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in



Father Charles Mulligan and Bishop Matthew H. Clark look out at the congregation during the Mass commissioning the priest to begin his missionary service in Santiago, Chile.

Seattle, Wash., and continuing at a Franciscan-run soup kitchen in Portland, Ore.

Beginning in January, Conheady expects to continue his search at a mission site near Manila in the Philippines. "He's a young man who's always been seeking something," explained his mother. "If he's got two coats, he gives two coats away."

Like Conheady, most of Rochester's missioners were drawn to serve people in need long before they departed the United States. Lisa Kowalewski also joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, then taught in a local Head Start program and served as director of the emergency shelter program for homeless men at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, operated by Ro-

chester's Catholic Worker movement.

Knowing what they did about needs closer to home, why did these men and women travel halfway around the world to serve the poor?

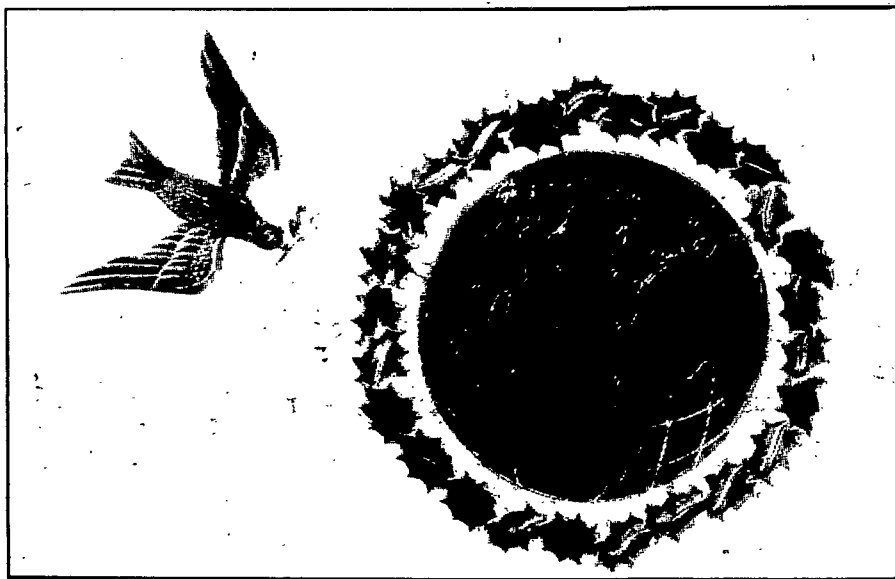
Some, like Kowalewski, sought the challenge. Her former roommate, Melissa Marquez, explained that when Lisa first left the small town of Reading, Calif., five years ago, living in a city as large and as far away from home as Rochester was a major adjustment. "She's very growth-oriented," Marquez explained. "With Tabasco, she was ready to take another challenge."

Most also hope to change those whose lives they touch for the better. With 20 years' hind-

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*I give thanks to my God whenever
I think of you and everytime I pray
for you I pray with joy.*

Ph. 1:3



WE THANK YOU ... IN THE NAME OF OUR MISSIONARIES AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD THEY SERVE IN EVERY AREA OF LATIN AMERICA, AFRICA, THE SOUTH PACIFIC AND ASIA ... FOR HELPING US TOUCH THE WORLD WITH GOD'S UNSELFISH LOVE DURING THE PAST YEAR.

WE PRAY THAT CHRIST WILL BE THE REAL LIGHT, JOY AND PEACE OF YOUR LIFE NOW AND THROUGHOUT THE NEW YEAR!

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Christmas calls all Christians to contemplate gift of Christ



Advent Reflections

By Sister Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ

How many Christmases have you celebrated? How many Christmases end with December 25th? Christmas is celebrated on December 25th—we all know that—but it is a season that calls us to celebrate for days and weeks. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany—these words have been repeated in each of these articles: One is not complete without the other. Advent is the threshold to Christmas, and the Epiphany is the culminating feast of the season. Until Epiphany on January 8th, we continue to celebrate the mystery of Christmas—"Emmanuel," "God Among Us." Oh yes, the decorations start coming down on the 26th and the business world moves to advertising the next holiday, but we can't stop celebrating because our celebration has just begun. We spent four weeks of Advent preparing and waiting, and now we enter fully into this ongoing celebration.

"Today a Savior is born; it is Christ the Lord." Today is the important word. Today is the key to unlocking the mystery of Christmas-time. If Christ is born today, we can see and touch and hold him. He is among us. Celebrating the season of Christmas offers us great comfort and joy as well as a tremendous challenge. The challenge is to take our common story—

namely the coming of Jesus—and live his coming in our present experience. The present experience of each of us gives us opportunities to let the living Christ come alive among us. Each Christmas calls us to renew our hearts. With renewed hearts, we can celebrate and experience the joy and peace of the season.

The Christmas season is a time to mediate the Christian dream—to let what is deep within us come forth. We mediate the dream, strengthen it, every time we celebrate together. It is impossible for us to gather as the people of God and not speak the dream to all the world—"Christ lives among us."

Mediating the dream also becomes a personal affair of the heart. Again the Christmas time calls us to be contemplative, to be mystics. The word mystic is not common in our vocabulary today. We think of a mystic as one who is dreamy, spaced-out, engaging in unusual forms of prayer. Karl Rahner, the German theologian, says "a mystic is someone who has experienced something. A mystic is aglow with passionate longing for Jesus Christ, who is sought, loved, and worshiped for himself alone. A mystic is a person whose life is ruled by thirst."

During these days of the Christmas season, we need to spend time in quiet with this God we desire. Our thirst for God is slaked when we take time to be with Him. Yes, the challenge is to grow quiet before "the light that shines in the darkness," (John 1:5), to enter the mystery and let the Christ of Christmas speak to our hearts.

As we interiorize these qualities, we will be transformed and the mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation and love of our God will be evoked in us. Our outlook and response to life will change. We will come to live more in the light. The contemplative at Christmas moves forward in hope that Christmas is the breakthrough of the passionate love of God in Jesus. Trusting that God is faithful to his promises, we break through in joy, announcing everywhere that Jesus lives.

Celebrate each day of this holy season!