

# Deacon hopes for knights' help in ministry

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

Carlos is a 40-year-old alcoholic living in Brooklyn. He has spent 20 of his 40 years in prison.

Some of that prison time was spent in Orleans Correctional Facility, where Carlos met Deacon Stan Zawacki. After being released from prison March 16, Carlos called upon Deacon Zawacki to help him stay out of prison.

"What I would like to do is bring Carlos up to Rochester so he could be with a support community that he has worked with the last three years," Deacon Zawacki said. "He may not make it in Brooklyn."

But the deacon has another desire for Carlos and other ex-offenders like him. "I'd like to have something down in Brooklyn so that I don't have to bring him back up here."

Deacon Zawacki is working to provide just that sort of support system for prisoners not only in Rochester and Brooklyn, but across the state as well. Working with Knights of Columbus councils throughout New York, he is trying to create a statewide network of volunteers to counsel prisoners before and after release, prisoners' families, and crime victims and their families. He also hopes to start programs of crime prevention and awareness.

"My goal is to get 1,000 volunteers over the next two years," Deacon Zawacki declared.

Those volunteers are to be recruited from the approximately 114,000 members of the 485 Knights of Columbus councils across the state. Deacon Zawacki outlined his proposal in the Albany area July 7-9 at a meeting of the state's grand knights. He will return to Albany July 21-23 to explain the plan to the knights' state chairmen and their deputies. "That'll be the point when I get the network of evangelizing various councils going," he predicted.

The plan calls for knights from each council to undertake some form of criminal-justice ministry. That ministry might involve going into a nearby prison or county jail to work with inmates through such programs as Residents Encounter Christ or Fully Alive; to pray the rosary; to conduct education and literacy programs; to work with marriage and family support groups; or to lead prayer and Bible-study groups.

Other knight volunteers might help provide housing for inmates' families when they have to travel long distances to visit the prisoners, or provide emotional support for prisoners' families at home. As part of the program, knights will also be encouraged to become involved in forming assistance programs for the victims of crime, and to implement such crime-prevention programs as support groups for the elderly and drug and alcohol education for youths.

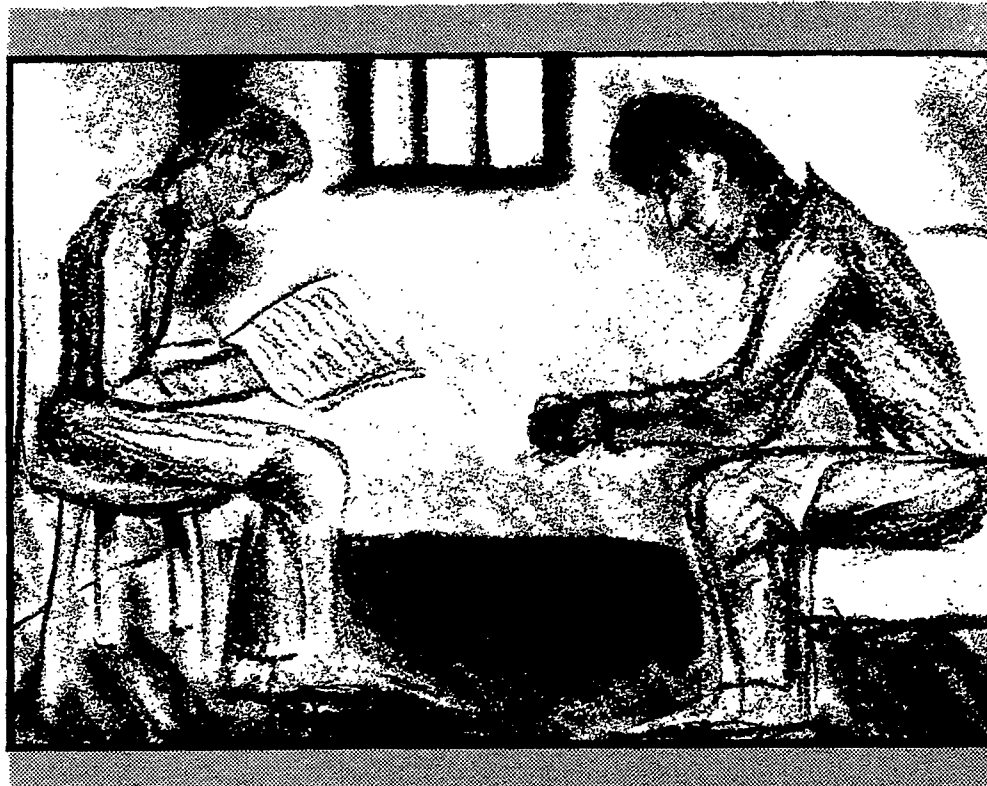
According to Ray Pfeifer, administrative assistant to the state deputy of the Knights of Columbus, Deacon Zawacki's plan is part of an ongoing effort to move the organization away from its stereotyped image as a "beer-and-pretzel drinking society."

That stereotype belies the knights' tradition of work on behalf of the church and the community. The organization's annual activities survey for 1988 alone shows that the knights contributed more than \$85.3 million and 27 million hours of service to charitable activities.

Deacon Zawacki's plan challenges the knights to turn some of that service orientation towards criminal-justice issues.

But as he implements the plan, Deacon Zawacki realizes that he will have to address the misconceptions and fears that knights might have about prisoners. All too often, he said, that fear is created out of an image of inmates as "muscular guys lifting weights, with tattoos on their arms." The only way to overcome that fear, the deacon said, is through contact with inmates.

Carl Loewenguth, a member of council # 178 in Rochester, discovered what



prisoners are like by assisting with prison-ministry volunteer programs.

"So many people think they're just criminals and they're no good," he said. By meeting with prisoners, Loewenguth learned that inmates are people just like himself. "They're God's creation," he said. "They make mistakes, but they can change."

To help create contact between inmates and inmates, Deacon Zawacki's plan calls for local councils — in conjunction with the local prison-ministry team and with support from the deacon and other volunteers — to hold open houses in nearby prisons. Deacon Zawacki observed that people who visit prisons even for such a short time come away with their attitudes changed, and often want to return to help. Those who return can then begin to work with whatever volunteer programs are

available in the prison.

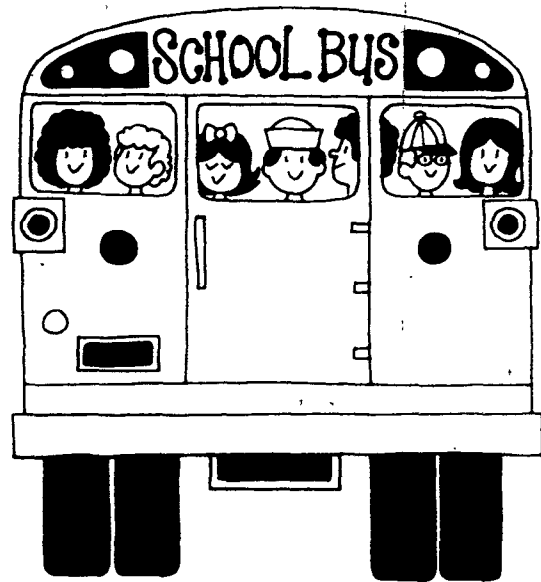
Thus far, Deacon Zawacki has run several pilot programs in jails, attracting as many as 15 potential volunteers. He anticipates that after this summer's meeting with Knights of Columbus leaders, more councils will begin sponsoring open houses in the fall.

One of the deacon's hopes is that by providing support for prisoners both in and out of jail, the knights will help them avoid returning to crime, and thus help stop the growing crime rate. A key part of that effort is to help raise prisoners self-esteem and to provide positive role models.

"There's a great need for contact on the part of the guys in prison," Loewenguth said. "So many of these guys have no one to care for them. So that amount of contact just changes their lives."

Continued on page 9

## DON'T GET LEFT BEHIND



### Catholic Courier's Special Back-To-School Issue

August 10, 1989

Advertisers interested in being in this attractive issue are invited to call (716) 328-4340 - Advertising Dept.

## Funding restrictions hamper endeavors in prison ministry

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

If workers in the Diocese of Rochester's prison ministry program were tempted to paraphrase the Bible, they might render Matthew 9:37 as, "The laborers are abundant, but the money's not there."

The money — funds provided by the State of New York for chaplain's salaries — is not enough to provide a sufficient number of full-time chaplains for state prisons, according to Sister Clare Roland, SSJ, human resource administrator for the diocesan Division of Social Ministry.

"We can find the chaplains, but if the state is not willing to pay these people, that's the problem," Sister Roland said. Compounding the problem, she noted, is that the state not only appears unwilling to pay for enough full-time chaplains, but also offers insufficient salaries for part-time chaplains.

"The difficulty with hiring part-time chaplains, especially of deacons or lay people with families, is the salaries are not enough to maintain them," Sister Roland said. "It's difficult to find people to work only 20 hours per week."

Nevertheless, the diocese, using a combination of full- and part-time chaplains along with volunteers, has attempted to meet the spiritual needs of inmates housed in local state prisons. Currently, the 12-county region has five correctional facilities: Auburn, Cayuga, Elmira, Groveland and Southport (also in Elmira); two shock incarceration

camps, Monterey in Elmira and Butler in Wayne County; and two division for youth facilities at Industry and Lansing. In addition, Catholic chaplains minister to inmates in the 12 county jails throughout the diocese.

Chaplains in these facilities carry out many of the same pastoral duties that a parish staff member might perform, such as leading study groups and religious-education programs, visiting those in the hospital, providing the sacraments and counseling. But chaplains must also visit prisoners in lock-ups, serve as a liaison for volunteers, convey information about sickness and death to and from inmates' families on the outside, and deal with prison administrations.

And chronic understaffing adds to the demands placed on chaplains. At Groveland, for example, the one-full time Catholic chaplain, Sister Elizabeth Conheady, SSJ, along with two part-time chaplains, must work with an inmate population of 1,400 — approximately 45 percent of whom are Catholics.

"I wear out a lot of shoes," Sister Conheady said. "You just do what you can do."

Sister Conheady and her fellow chaplains may be wearing out more shoes in the near future. In June, the state legislature approved a \$900-million bill to build new prisons and add beds to existing facilities. The plan calls for expanding the current prison in Groveland, ad-

Continued on page 9