

Chilean art

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ing a visit to Rochester last November, Father Mulligan searched for a gallery to sell the Chilean art. His aim, according to Roselawn co-owner Jesse O'Dell, was to create a market for arpilleras to earn income for the Chilean women, and to introduce the work of Negron — who attempts to make his living as an artist — to the Rochester area.

Since the gallery began selling the arpilleras in January, Dell reported selling nearly 30. The gallery has also sold one of Negron's paintings and two of Pezoa's carvings.

Those sales will bring much-needed funds to the Chilean artists — particularly the women. Sixteen years of military dictatorship has caused dire economic conditions in the country, and for many of the women, arpilleras are a major source of income, Sister Curtis noted.

But earnings were only a secondary consideration when the women began to produce the hangings in the mid 1970s. "They're therapeutic," Sister Curtis explained. "They were made by women whose family members disappeared ... as a way to work out the pain."

Initially, the women were encouraged to produce arpilleras by the Vicaria de Solidaridad of the Diocese of Santiago, which helped to market them abroad. The women would meet in small groups to produce the hangings, to share techniques — and to share the pain and struggles they were going through. Those groups evolved not only into outlets for the women, but also into opportunities to learn. Soon, the groups became focal points for workshops on such topics as literacy, human relations and sexuality.

When Sister Curtis arrived at Jesus Carpintero in the summer of 1987, a number of such groups already existed in the parish. A woman in the parish contacted the Rochester sister about forming a new group, which started meeting in the parish chapel.

Members of the group began to express an interest in establishing a permanent site where they could meet instead of gathering in a home or in the chapel. A series of unexpected events made this dream possible, Sister Curtis said.

First, a couple whom Sister Curtis had been helping to adopt a baby decided to sell their home and offered it to the women at a fair price. Then, a woman visiting from Germany said she would raise the money and send it to the parish when she returned home. But because of the delay in time, Sister Curtis and another Sister of Mercy on the parish staff decided to take a chance, borrow the money, and reimburse the lenders when the money from Germany arrived.

"It was like a power beyond us was helping us," Sister Curtis said. "Each time we had to make a payment, ... we got a donation from someplace."

Because most of the money received so far has been donated, the contribution from Germany will be used to help support the running of the house instead of for its purchase.

Casa de la Mujer opened in March of this year. In addition to providing a place for the women to meet, attend workshops, and produce their arpilleras, the house furnishes a site for a doctor, a social worker and a psychiatrist to offer services for the poor of the neighborhood.

Sister Curtis noted that the house is the only one of its kind located in a *poblacion* — a poor area in Santiago. And, she pointed out, it is the only house

of its sort run by poor women. "It's a house of and by poor women," she said.

The Rochester show not only provides a market for the Chilean women's work, but also attempts to educate people here about the situation in Chile. "Chile is a South American country that we don't often meet in the press here," Sister Curtis explained.

"We've heard a lot about Central America, but the situation in Chile is (also) very hard and difficult. We need to know that the United States has had a part in it," she said, noting that agencies of the U.S. government assisted in the 1973 overthrow of the Allende administration.

The poor of Chile still face repression by the government, though that repression has grown more subtle, Sister Curtis said. The mass arrests and disappearances of the early days of the Pinochet regime have ended, she explained, but the psychological scars remain so that even a single disappearance is enough to intimidate the people. No one from her parish had been killed since she arrived, she noted, but some parishioners have been arrested and tortured.

Meanwhile, Sister Curtis said, the vast majority of the Chilean people still live in poverty. "The oppression of the poverty continually grows worse," she said. "The life of the poor grows harder and more difficult." The current period is a particularly tense one. Last November, a nationwide plebiscite voted to replace General Pinochet as president. The new president will be elected this December, but Pinochet will remain head of the armed forces and will retain the right to appoint some members of the government.

Sister Curtis observed that a whole generation of Chileans has grown up knowing only a military government. Thus, if the transition back to democracy is harsh, she believes it will be "difficult for the people to be patient."

A source of strength during this period, however, will be the women and the groups they've formed over the years, Sister Curtis predicted. Running the Casa de la Mujer and selling the arpilleras has also given the women "a sense of their own dignity and worth," she said.



Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier

Artist Carl Zollo of Rochester created this metal cross which is included in Pittsford's Roselawn Galleries' exhibition "Connections and Contrasts."

One woman, for instance, remarked after a workshop, "This is the first time in my life that I've ever talked out loud at a meeting."

"There's a strength in getting together with others," Sister Curtis concluded. "There's a power in that."

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Roselawn Galleries, located at 7 Schoen Place, Pittsford, will present the exhibit Sept. 15-Oct. 13, with an opening reception taking place Sept. 15 from 6-9 p.m. Sister Curtis will be available at the gallery Saturday, Sept. 23, from 1-3 p.m. to discuss the art and the situation in Chile.

Parish groups benefit from 'at home' mission projects

"Reverse mission" may not be a concept familiar to many diocesan parishioners, but its effect is nonetheless widely felt.

Whether the outreach is a parish-based homeless shelter or an Appalachian work camp, participants find they need not travel overseas to reap the dividends of "mission" work.

In some cases, urban parishes that minister to needs among their neighbors have witnessed a rebirth of energy and enthusiasm. Corpus Christi, Blessed Sacrament and St. Bridget's — which together constitute a Rochester network of winter shelters for the homeless — have each gained increases in parish membership and participation as a result of their efforts.

Corpus Christi's response to the need for emergency shelter half-a-dozen years ago has since grown to include a permanent shelter and drop-in center at Dimitri House that operates year-round.

An Elmira parish youth group, meanwhile, has attracted dozens of new members since seven teenagers and two adults last year traveled to Wheelersburg, Ohio, to help renovate the homes of low-income residents.

Youth minister Anne Karski believes the work camp opened the eyes of teenagers at St. Cecilia/St. John the Baptist Parish to the needs of their neighbors. Since then, the youth group — which has grown to nearly 50 members — has helped elderly neighbors with spring and fall clean-up and weatherproofing projects.

"(The teenagers) looked around, saw that there were people other than themselves that needed help, and spread the word," Karski said. "They receive so much from this that they can't wait to share it."

—Teressa A. Parsons



Class at a chapel in the parish of the Rochester diocese, is part of the Associate Program, sponsored by the diocese.

of the left. After the coup, the defense of the rights of people living with the poor, whether those of political parties or not. With statement, church leaders risked in the press, and a campaign to afraid of participating in parish would simply stay at home. Parish gents, and bishops stood together

ence, I would single out two qua- a genuine commitment to living out on behalf of the poor:

ic need of the poor now. It is im- and advocating for an increase in allowance — without leaving this asic issue may be the situation of lies or of youth in poor communi- be for family or job training. But ed with which leadership in poor uld identify.

dressing this need — parish and egion and diocese. Otherwise the y there, not really putting its iden- that need.

't want to be preachy. I do believe day is called to be the germ of a at goes beyond national boundar- mbodied in our pope kissing the tion after nation — one love, one m. In this sense, all of us are mis- beyond the shackles that our cul- very successful history as church gination.

MISSION