



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
**Father Jon de Cortina, SJ, who continues to serve in El Salvador despite assassination attempts, was at Corpus Christi Church Feb. 28 to speak about the strife in his war-torn country.**

## Jesuit shares struggle of Salvadoran people

By Lee Strong  
 Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Father Jon de Cortina, SJ, slender, slightly stooped, gently closed the door of a small office at the Corpus Christi Rectory.

He looked at the cigarette between his fingers waiting to be lit, smiled, and shrugged.

"In El Salvador," he said softly, "you die one way or another."

Father Cortina has come far closer to death than smoking thus far has brought him.

On Aug. 21, 1990, he and a fellow Jesuit were driving into the Salvadoran community of Guarjila when a sniper began firing at their vehicle. One bullet struck within three inches of Father Cortina's head.

And on the morning of Nov. 16, 1989, Father Cortina was supposed to be at the Jesuit residence at the University of Central America, where he was the dean of the engineering department. But fighting between government and rebel forces delayed his return to the residence from a country village he had been visiting. Had he returned on schedule, Father Cortina would have been killed along with the community's six other Jesuit residents,

their cook and her teenage daughter.

Father Cortina was in Rochester Feb. 28 as part of a Feb. 16-March 13 tour of 11 U.S. cities. While here, he met with Bishop Matthew H. Clark, and spoke at at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church and at Corpus Christi Church.

During his U.S. tour, Father Cortina has talked about the current situation in El Salvador, and visited a number of sister parishes — including Corpus Christi — that have established ties with parish communities in El Salvador.

The sister-parish relationships are vital to the Salvadoran communities, Father Cortina said.

"In the middle of the war, in the middle of persecution, to know that somebody likes you, somebody cares about you, that gives you hope and strength to continue the work," he explained.

The work for most of the people in his rural parish of Guarjila is simply survival, Father Cortina said.

"The situation for the people is not to attain a certain level of commodity," the priest observed. "It is to overcome the level of death and life. The situation is to fight to survive."

He said his parishioners live in a constant state of fear as a result of the ongoing civil war, which has claimed more than 75,000 lives.

"The war destroys lives," Father Cortina said. "It destroys everything. It makes work difficult. It really hinders any kind of life necessary for us to survive."

Father Cortina recalled an incident one night at about 10:15, when he was staying in a small room near a road. Suddenly, he heard some soldiers passing by. He blew out the candle and turned off his radio.

"I was afraid to move, to breathe," Father Cortina said. "Sometimes when the soldiers are around, you think, 'If they see me, they might aim at me.'"

Still, he said, the Salvadoran people try not to let fear control them. "If you get scared, then you can't function," he said.

Fear did not control the six Jesuit priests killed by government soldiers in November of 1989, Father Cortina observed.

"They spoke out the truth about El Salvador — the truth about the poor, the truth about the human rights violations," he said. "If you speak the truth, you are accused of being a communist."

"It is being said that you are free to express your thinking, but all those who have expressed their thinking — my brother Jesuits, Archbishop Oscar Romero (assassinated March 24, 1980) — they got killed," Father Cortina said.

Continued on page 14

## Dalai Lama to visit Ithaca Catholic parish

ITHACA — The Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, will join Bishop Matthew H. Clark and other religious leaders in an interfaith peace service Wednesday, March 27, at 5 p.m. at Immaculate Conception Parish.

The service is part of a three-day Ithaca visit by the Dalai Lama, winner of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize.

In addition to being the spiritual leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama also was its temporal leader until 1959, when he was forced into exile after an unsuccessful uprising

against the Chinese.

Leader of his people's resistance to China's occupation of Tibet since 1951, the Dalai Lama was invited to Ithaca by Cornell University as the Henry E. and Nancy Horton Bartels World Affairs Fellow.

The Dalai Lama is scheduled to arrive in Ithaca early on March 25. On the March 26, he will bless a sand mandala created by Tibetan monks at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art. Common to Hinduism and Buddhism, a mandala is a circular design

symbolizing the universe, totality or wholeness.

At 6 p.m. on March 26, the Dalai Lama will speak at the university's Barton Hall on the topic, "Overcoming differences." The talk is free. The next day at 9:30 a.m., he will deliver an academic lecture, "The Buddhism of Tibet," at Cornell's Bailey Hall.

The interfaith service at Immaculate Conception will take place that evening. The service was added to the Dalai Lama's schedule after consultation with him and Cornell University.

The service will include not only the Dalai Lama and Bishop Clark, but also Bishop O'Kelley Whitaker, leader of the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York, and religious leaders representing Ithaca-area congregations.

The peace service will include prayers for world peace offered by several of the represented faiths, music from the various faith communities represented at the service, and closing remarks by Bishop Clark.

Officials at Immaculate Conception Parish note that all available seating has been reserved for Ithaca-area congregations sponsoring the service. No additional seating will be available.

— Lee Strong

## Wife of ex-Reagan aide to speak in Elmira

ELMIRA — Sarah Brady, wife of former presidential press secretary James Brady, will be the keynote speaker March 19 for the annual Founders' Society Dinner of the St. Joseph's Hospital Foundation.

James Brady was critically wounded in the March, 1981, assassination attempt against former President Ronald Reagan. Brady recovered from the shooting, despite overwhelming odds that he would die from injuries to his brain. He now appears with his wife on television programs and on the lecture circuit to discuss his recovery and the skills the Brady family used to overcome adversity.

David Sullivan, executive director of the hospital foundation, said Sarah Brady's

keynote topic is a "natural" for her Elmira audience. "The founders' audience is made up of individuals and organizations that have demonstrated their commitment to St. Joseph's and quality health care," Sullivan said. "They are aware of the hard work and effort it takes from the patient, family and medical staff when someone suffers the type of injury that Jim Brady suffered."

Sarah Brady will hold a press conference in the hospital at 8:30 p.m. March 19. She will also take a tour of the hospital's rehabilitation departments.

The founders' society is made up of donors who have contributed \$1,000 or more to the foundation during the previous year.

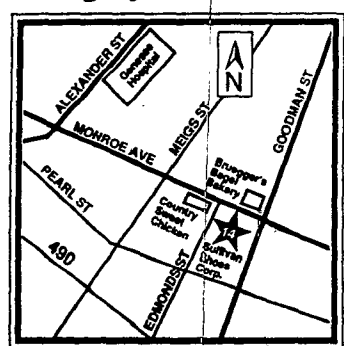
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