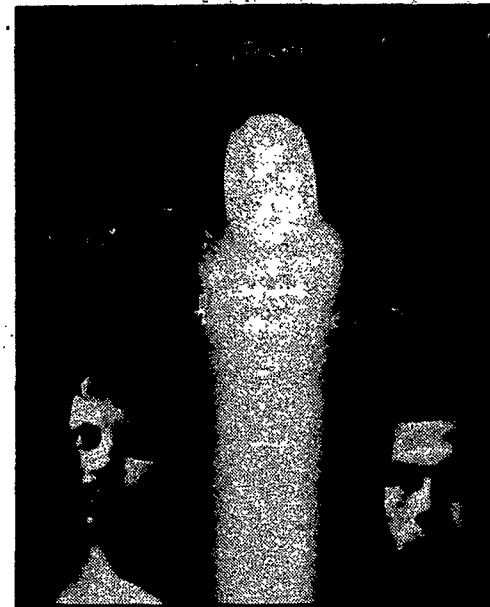




Prison Mass volunteer Brian Washburn (right) joins Don Montero (left) and other inmates for a biweekly Mass at Groveland Correctional Facility May 19.



Inmates Bruce St. James (left) and Ramon Peralta reflect during Mass.

## Brockport youth shares faith with prisoners

By Barbara Ann Homick  
Staff writer

SONYEA — Although the purpose behind the barbed-wire fences and locked gates at Groveland Correctional Facility is to keep the inmates from getting out of the prison, the precautionary measures cannot prevent the Good News of the Gospel from getting in to the institution.

As a prison Mass volunteer, Brian Washburn is partly responsible for spreading the Catholic faith to more than 30 inmates who attend the Church of the Good Shepherd on the Groveland campus in Sonyea.

Washburn, a sophomore at Brockport High School, said he decided to attend the service after his parents, Lucille and David, asked him to join them and about 25 other volunteers at the biweekly Mass.

He recalled that he felt calm about his first visit during the hour drive from Brockport to Sonyea. But then he remembered becoming apprehensive at the

sight of the institution as the Washburn's car approached the facility.

"It stuck out like a sore thumb, with the fences and all," he said. "But it was too late to turn back then."

Since that first visit in July, 1990, Washburn has attended the prison Mass on the first and third Sunday of every month. As part of the procedure, he and the other volunteers sign in at the main office and walk through a metal detector device when they arrive at the medium-security prison. A bus then takes them across the campus to meet the inmates awaiting their arrival at the Church of the Good Shepherd.

The church, which is a small building that looks like a trailer, has enough folding chairs to seat about 60 people. Sister Elizabeth Conheady, SSJ, senior chaplain at Groveland, celebrates the lively, biweekly Mass.

Before the 8:30 a.m. service begins, volunteers have about 15 minutes to socialize with the inmates while the folk

group tunes its instruments. During the socializing period, Washburn said he has been able to get to know several of the inmates very well.

One of his good friends, John Hemmers, shares Washburn's love for running. The two often share experiences about their favorite sport when they get together.

"When I strained my back muscles running, John told me different exercises I could do for it," remarked Washburn.

Hemmers, who has spent time in several correctional facilities over the past 18 years, said Groveland is the first prison at which he has seen a volunteer Mass.

"I wasn't used to all this 'huggy' stuff at first," admitted Hemmers. "It took a while for me to fit in, but it's a shame it doesn't happen all over."

Although he described Washburn as "a smart kid," Hemmers said he still tries to impress on the youth the importance of a good education. Hemmers, himself, earned his bachelor's degree in political

science while in prison.

Hemmers said he appreciates the "good group of people" who bring their love and enthusiasm to Mass every other Sunday. He jokingly added with a smile, "I'm a good Catholic, too. I only steal six days a week."

Washburn said a sense of humor like Hemmers has really changed his attitude towards those who are confined to prisons.

"I have gotten over that they are prisoners and I don't look at them like that anymore. I just keep reminding myself that they have made a mistake," explained Washburn.

Another inmate, Don Montero, said he has benefited a great deal from the people who visit to participate in the Mass. He noted that meeting young people such as Washburn is an added treat.

"I had problems in my youth and no one to turn to," said Montero. "Seeing a young guy come in with his family is really

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