

CATHOLIC MISSIONS

The Catholic Near East Welfare Association

Papal agency for humanitarian, pastoral support begins 65th year

By KATHLEEN COOK

Freedom, liberation, the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Sweeping changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have inspired predictions of great possibilities in those areas of the world.

Still, age-old problems such as poverty, homelessness, and hunger still exist.

"Some things never change," said Father James M. Moynihan of Catholic Near East Welfare Association, which is celebrating its 65th year. "War, famine, earthquake, drought - we still have them. The Lord said, 'The poor you will always have with you.' It's true."

Catholic Near East describes itself as "a papal agency for humanitarian and pastoral support. The agency serves people and churches throughout the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East.

Father Moynihan, pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Penfield, N.Y. from 1976 to Feb., 1991, now serves as associate secretary general of Catholic Near East, headquartered in New York City.

At the direction of Pope Pius XI, the

agency was founded in 1926 to serve both victims of famine and those ravaged by World War I. Over the years, Catholic Near East has grown in both size and scope.

In the organization's annual report, released on Sept. 20, 1991, the agency said it spent nearly \$12.6 million on pastoral and humanitarian programs throughout 17 countries in 1990, while receiving more than \$15 million in private donations.

The funded programs are as diverse as the people the agency serves. Last summer, the mission sent four doctors from New York Medical College to Tirana, Albania. The doctors were sent to assist Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity with direct medical care and to begin assessing the health needs of Albania.

Another project helped aid six Ursuline sisters who run an elementary school, orphanage, and clinic in Eritrea, a troubled area still reeling from its civil war with Ethiopia, which ended last May.

In New York, Father Moynihan works with staff and board members to review projects and requests, make plans for programs and aid, and promote awareness of the agency.

Although Christians are a minority in almost all of the areas the organization serves, Father Moynihan pointed out that the roots of the faith lie in those very countries. "A lot of people forget that Christianity was born in the Middle East," he said. "Even India - St. Thomas the Apostle traveled to India, to Kerala. The church there dates back to Apostolic times. It's very ancient."

Still, being in the minority can make survival of the church that much more difficult. "Sometimes the remnants of a congregation are very small," Father Moynihan said. "The people need encouragement, support. They need to know that someone is standing there beside them."



Thanks to support from the CNEWA, these Italian Congregation of School Sisters of St. Dorothy can continue their work at the Ephpheta Institute in Bethlehem, a school and clinic for children in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.



One of the programs offered by the agency to bolster pastoral activity is a person-to-person sponsorship arrangement, through which donors are matched with a man studying for the priesthood or a woman preparing to be a woman religious. Last year, the program served more than 8,000 young people preparing for religious life.

With the changing political climate in many countries, the association will likely be able to expand programs in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, according to spokeswoman Deirdre Boyd.

"We see a lot of opportunities," said Boyd. "Many churches were underground in some countries. They lost contact with the mother church."

But the association's criteria to help people is need, not creed. Humanitarian help such as food, shelter, and clothing is provided for anyone, regardless of denomination. As churches and rectories are built, so too are bridges and schools.

As far as pastoral work, Father Moynihan said missionaries have

learned from mistakes of the past. "A lot of times, we went in there with preconceived ideas," he said. "We thought we had all the answers."

Today's missionaries seek to bring Christianity to the culture of the people they serve, making room in the faith for people's native traditions.

"Now we're beginning to realize the Lord God is within all of us," Father Moynihan said. "Maybe these people haven't heard of Jesus Christ, but that doesn't mean God isn't in their hearts."



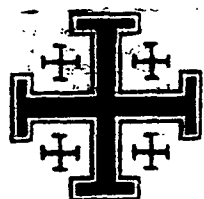
One of the many groups the CNEWA supports is a small congregation of Ursuline sisters working with children like these in Eritrea, Africa.

Experience the Holy Land Shrines and Roman Catacombs in America ...

THE FRANCISCAN MONASTERY WASHINGTON, D.C.

Let the Franciscans who serve the pilgrims, the native peoples, and at the Sacred Shrines of the Holy Land, guide you in an experience of the places connected with the origins of our faith.

For more information about our mission, and our shrine in Washington, D.C. contact:



Office of Public Relations
Franciscan Monastery
1400 Quincy Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20017
(202) 526-6800

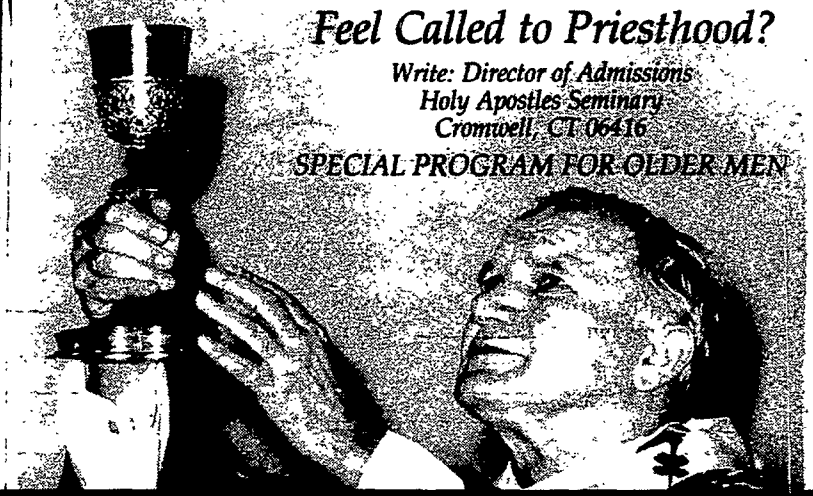
A BICYCLE FOR THE MISSIONS!

For Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique
Much needed by our catechists and teachers.

Only means of transportation!

1 Bicycle: \$150
Any amount is greatly appreciated
Tel. (908) 297-9191

Send your donation to:
Mission Director
Consolata Missionaries
RT. 27, P.O. Box 5550
Somerset, N.J. 08875-5550



Feel Called to Priesthood?

Write: Director of Admissions
Holy Apostles Seminary
Cromwell, CT 06416

SPECIAL PROGRAM FOR OLDER MEN