

Priest hikes 600 miles to help Peru missions

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

HORNELL — You think it's a tall order for a 56-year-old man to walk close to 30 miles per day?

That's nothing compared to the kind of lifestyle Father William Brown, OFM, will return to next month.

Father Brown, a native of Wellsville, N.Y., in the Diocese of Buffalo, has been a Franciscan missionary in Peru for more than three decades. Since he began working among impoverished and uneducated natives of the South American country, his work has been made more difficult by the political warfare that has crippled Peru in recent months as terrorists attempt to overthrow the existing democratic government.

"There are a few situations where I've had very close brushes with death. I've had some really close calls," admitted Father Brown in a recent interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

It's largely because of the country's social unrest and economic difficulties

that Father Brown has returned to New York state for the first time in four years. Beginning April 29, with a 150-person send-off from his home parish of Immaculate Conception in Wellsville, he embarked on a 600-mile journey that will eventually take him through several parishes in the Buffalo, Syracuse and Rochester dioceses.

According to Father Brown, his motives during the walk are three-fold.

"First, I need (financial) help for my people," he said. "Also, I'm walking for peace because we're going through terrible, terrible times in Peru.

"This is also the 25th anniversary of my ordination. I have a very, very beautiful life that God has given me, and this is how I'd like to thank Him," the priest added.

Father Brown's itinerary consists of daily hikes, ranging anywhere from 15 to 41 miles. While stopping at churches for overnight visits, he celebrates Mass, speaks with parishioners and media, and gathers as many cash donations as possible.

Most of Father Brown's travels are



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Father William Brown, OFM, set out April 29 on the first leg of a 600-mile trek from his hometown of Wellsville across New York state. The Franciscan missionary hopes to raise awareness about the needs of those he serves in Peru.



Donna Herberger, secretary at Immaculate Conception Church in Wellsville, takes a snapshot of Father Brown wearing a jacket that was embroidered for his journey by parishioner Nanette Herman.

being conducted on main upstate highways such as Routes 17C, 11, 5 and 20. His scheduled visits in the Rochester diocese over the next few days are: Friday, May 15, St. Joseph's Church, 14 Washington St., Livonia; May 16-17, St. Patrick's Church, 115 Maple Ave., Victor; and May 18, St. Agnes Church, 108 Prospect St., Avon.

The lengthy trek is expected to conclude back in Wellsville May 29. Father Brown will then return to Peru sometime in June.

The Franciscan missionary began his expedition though New York in terrific physical shape. He began walking similar distances about eight years ago and continues to hike daily in the Andes Mountains.

His current trip is conducted mostly in solitude, but Father Brown is occasionally joined by small groups of people for short distances while he passes through villages and towns.

Arrangements for Father Brown's walk were coordinated by Sister Caritas Quinn, SSM, of the Propagation of the Faith Office in Buffalo; Father Leo McCarthy, pastor of Immaculate Conception in Wellsville; Father Elmer Schmidt, pastor of St. Ann's Church in Hornell; and several parishioners at Immaculate Conception and St. Ann's.

Father Schmidt has taken a special interest in the missionary's cause ever since he got a first-hand view of Peruvian life while visiting Father Brown early last year.

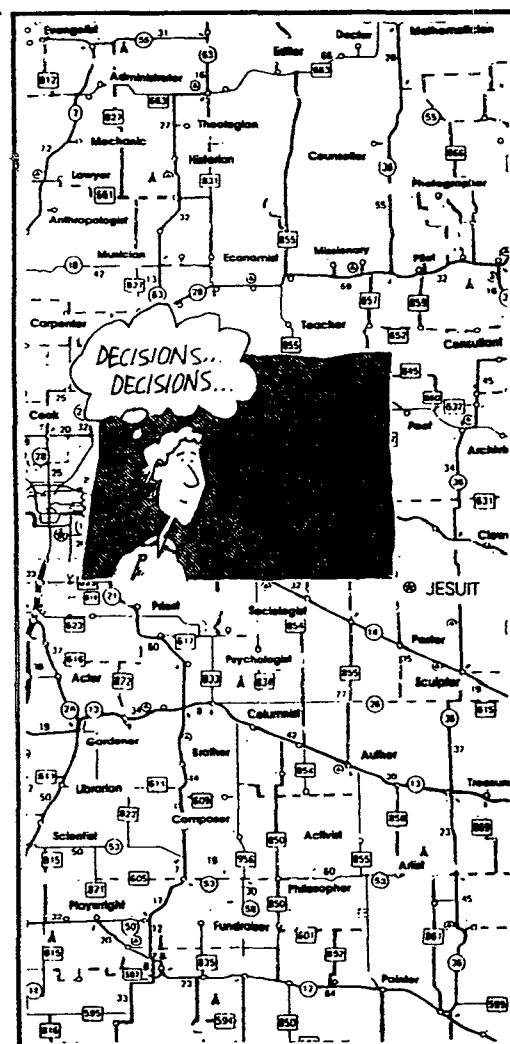
"You can feel the love of the people. If you give them love, you'll get it back," said Father Schmidt. "For them, the church offers the only hope they have because of the terrorism. It's not like they're saying, 'I've got to go to Mass.' They really look forward to seeing a priest."

Father Schmidt added, "You come back (to the United States) and say, 'We're not a perfect country, but we couldn't live in a better one.'"

Although many Franciscan missionaries such as Father Brown have long been active in Peru, he noted that there's a steadily widening proportion of residents per priest there.

"It gets worse every year," he reported. "The ratio is about 2,000-to-1 here (in the U.S.), but it's gone from 30,000-to-1 to 60,000-to-1 in Peru in the last 10 years."

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A Chance to Consider Routes... A Weekend Away...

A weekend for young men is being held in Syracuse, NY at Christ the King Retreat House from August 14 to 16. Any young man interested in considering his own future directions, and at the same time, learning something about Jesuit life, is invited to attend. The weekend will be directed by Jesuit priests and young men studying to be Jesuit priests and brothers. It will include time for prayer and reflection, discussion and fun. Meals and living arrangements will be at the retreat house. Athletic facilities will be available nearby for your use, and there is a swimming pool at the retreat house itself. As part of the weekend you will be invited to attend the Vow Day ceremony and festivities of the young men pronouncing their First Vows as Jesuits.

There is no cost for the weekend other than your own transportation expenses.

The weekend will begin with dinner on Friday evening and will end with lunch on Sunday afternoon. During the weekend we will spend time looking at what makes a person a healthy adult and what part our faith plays in our development as a person. We will look at what Jesuits are all about and how the Jesuit vision is expressed today.

If you would like more information on the weekend just ask any Jesuit you know or write or call:

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