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FEATURE

Chiapas

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According to Father Romo, villagers said that the three elders later were brought, bleeding, out of the rectory and were last seen being taken away in a military ambulance.

On Feb. 11, vultures circling overhead led townspeople to discover the site of the victims' remains. According to Mexican rights activists quoted in the Mexican press, relatives of the slain men were able to identify the remains only by items of clothing and dental features.

The Dominican priest said that a videotape has been made documenting the discovery of the remains and that the government's National Human Rights Commission has been asked to investigate.

Officials of the Mexican government report that more than 100 people have been killed since the Zapatistas began their rebellion. Church human-rights workers say desperation led indigenous people — mostly Mayan Indians — to rebel against the government's economic program. They also say the death toll could be as high as 400.

Meanwhile, a key leader of the rebellion said local Indians took up arms after non-violent action advocated by Catholic Church leaders "failed" to help them escape poverty and discrimination.

In a Feb. 6 interview with the Mexican daily newspaper *La Jornada*, the rebel chieftain who calls himself Subcomandante Marcos said that when some local clergy "realized that (an uprising) was being readied, they insisted that it was madness, that it was absurd."

When asked whether liberation theology had played a role in preparing the



AP/Wide World Photos
Members of Mexico's National Human Rights Commission cover bodies removed from a mass grave in Ocosingo, Mexico. Residents of the town, which was held by the rebel Zapatista Army for National Liberation for three days, claimed that the grave contained a dozen bodies.

Chiapas rebellion, Marcos repeated an earlier Zapatista communique saying that the local church and Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia of San Cristobal de Las Casas had nothing to do with the uprising.

"There was no support, not even a blessing, no approval from anyone in the church," the rebel commander said. On the contrary, he said, the pastoral work of the San Cristobal diocese hindered efforts to organize a rebellion.

According to Marcos, the church went in "the other direction," counseling local Indians in non-violent participation in politics, self-sufficient agricultural production, grass-roots cooperatives and health-care projects.

Despite comments such as those by Marcos, Bishop Ruiz has emerged as a key mediator in the rebellion. He has received strong backing from the Mexican bishops' conference for his efforts.

In the meantime, a fact-finding delegation of seven Mexican bishops determined that "continued racial, social and economic discrimination, along with marginalization" of Indian peoples are the main obstacles to peace in Chiapas.

In a report issued Feb. 4, the bishops said the church must embark on a national evangelization program to encourage "profound changes to lead our society away from the inequalities and marginalization present throughout the country."

Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari — in a nationally broadcast speech Jan. 17 — called for a unilateral cease-fire and offered amnesty to participants in the rebellion.

But as Salinas spoke, viewers could see over his shoulder a portrait of Venustiano Carranza, a revolutionary leader who became the republic's first chief executive and whose administration was responsible for the ambush slaying in 1919 of Emiliano Zapata, the modern Zapatistas' namesake.

Zapata was himself a prominent revolutionary and land-reform advocate who was aroused to rebellion over the abuse of poor farmers by landlords. He opposed Carranza, who was reluctant to carry out the social reforms he and others demanded. Zapata and his followers continued an independent revolutionary movement until Zapata's death.

The slain rebel and his followers were closely associated with Mexico's most revered religious image, Our Lady of Guadalupe, an image that was recalled again in this year's revolution.

During the revolution of 1910, thousands of rebel Indians and small farmers rallying to Zapata's call for "Land and Liberty" wore the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on their sombreros as they marched into battle.

The blend of popular religiosity and demands for social justice — dubbed "radical millenarism" by Mexico's Nobel Prize-winning writer Octavio Paz — was so pronounced that Zapata's troops also marched behind a banner bearing a likeness of the Virgin as they made their triumphant entry into Mexico City in November, 1914.

Our Lady of Guadalupe had been taken as a symbol by an even older revolutionary movement.

A century before Zapata, the Indians and poor farmers who heeded Father Miguel Hidalgo's cry for Mexico's independence from Spain likewise marched into battle behind a standard bearing the Virgin's image.

In fact, the red, white and green of modern Mexico's national flag are colors that have been associated with various images of the Virgin as long ago as the 16th century.

In the rebellion, which began New Year's Day, 1994, a Chiapas town that served for a time as a rebel stronghold echoed the famous icon.

The town, Guadalupe Tepeyac, is named after the Virgin of Guadalupe and the hill of Tepeyac near Mexico City where legend has it the mother of Christ appeared miraculously to an Indian named Juan Diego in 1531.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is venerated by Mexicans of virtually every social class, political bent and racial heritage. But she has special significance for the poor, many who have Indian blood.

Throughout the colonial period, the "little dark Virgin," as a famous painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe came to be called affectionately, was seen by the Indians as their protection against the oppression of the European culture.

Uprising

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found or suspected, he explained, the Mexican government can simply order the people off their land without being required to compensate them.

"We found the same thing in Tabasco," noted Father Ryan, who served in that Mexican state from 1985-90.

The diocesan priest also expressed profound respect for Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia of San Cristobal de Las Casas, who is attempting to mediate between the Mexican government and the rebels of the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

"Bishop Ruiz is very progressive," Father Ryan said. "I take my hat off to him for what he has been trying to do for his people."

Indeed, Father Ryan speculated that the rebellion may have been spurred in part by the Mexican government's at-

tempts to persuade the Vatican to remove Bishop Ruiz. Although the Vatican did not do so, the people feared that he might eventually be removed and so they acted.

"The very fact that it made it into the press made things difficult," he said. "The government itself lit the fuse."

Now that negotiations are underway, Father Ryan said, the government needs to guarantee that "the people have rights to their land, the right to live out their culture as they want to, the right to better food, medical care, education."

After talking to people in Tabasco during his visit, Father Ryan said he believes that a solution will not come soon. "For some time to come there's going to be political confusion," he predicted.

The people in Tabasco partly blamed the delay in starting the negotiations on practical problems, Father Ryan reported. Transportation, for example, is difficult in the region due to mountains and jungle terrain. He recalled that dur-

ing his mission work in Mexico, he had to travel on horseback in order to celebrate Mass in Chiapas.

Father Ryan also urged people in the United States to become more aware of the situation in Mexico.

"As Catholics, we need to be aware that it's our brothers and sisters who are being mistreated," he said.

He called for the United States to pressure the opposing sides in the conflict to negotiate in good faith and come to "a just and equitable settlement."

But, the diocesan priest emphasized, such pressure should not mean dictating the terms of the settlement.

"It's something where we have to be very careful not to meddle in the internal affairs of a sovereign country," Father Ryan said.

"I think it needs to be them sitting down together eyeball to eyeball and negotiating," he concluded. "I think the best solution will come from the people themselves."

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
MARCH BINGO CALENDAR SPECIAL PAID ADVERTISEMENT	Holy Apostles Our Lady of Mercy St. Stanislaus	1 The Aquinas Institute Bishop Kearney Guardian Angels Holy Family Home School Assoc. Our Lady of Perpetual Help	2 St. Anne St. James St. Michael's St. Stanislaus St. Jude the Apostle	3 Most Precious Blood St. Cecilia's St. Mark's	4 Good Shepherd St. Thomas the Apostle	BINGO TIMES & LOCATIONS Aquinas Institute 1127 Dewey Ave. 254-2820 Wed. 8pm Bishop Kearney 125 Kings Hwy. S. 671-1065 Wed. 8pm Good Shepherd 3288 E. Henrietta Rd. 334-3518 Sat. 7:30pm Guardian Angels Church 2061 E. Henrietta Rd. 334-1412 Wed. 7:30pm Holy Apostles 6 Austin St. 254-7170 Tues. 7:30pm Holy Family Church 899 Jay Street 328-3110 Sun. 7:30pm Holy Family Home School Assoc. 899 Jay St. 328-4800 Wed. 7:30pm Most Precious Blood 170 Stenson St. 458-9078 Fri. 7:30pm Our Lady of Mercy 600 Denes Rd. 885-0775 Tue. 7:30pm Our Lady of Perpetual Help 923 Portland Ave. 467-2725 Wed. 7:30pm St. Anne 1600 Mt. Hope Ave. 271-3289 Thur. 7:30pm St. Boniface 15 Whelan St. 271-1488 Sun. 7:30pm
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