



AP/Wide World Photos

While an army patrol stands watch, an Indian family walks along a road near Larrainzar in the southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas. The Indian population has had an ongoing confrontation with the Mexican government since January of 1994.

Delegation spends week in Chiapas

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

IRONDEQUOIT — While celebrating Mass recently for a group of Catholics in Mexico, Father Enrique Cadena called for volunteers from the congregation to help build a miniature "church."

The associate pastor of Corpus Christi Church, 864 E. Main St., had taken a group of eight Corpus parishioners on retreat to Chiapas, site of a rebel movement that made headlines in January, 1994, when it was first launched.

The Corpus parishioners lived with families residing on the unpaved outskirts of Tuxtla, Chiapas' capital.

As the Corpus parishioners watched at Mass, the volunteers Father Cadena had called were told to not speak to each other as they went out and gathered such materials as stones to build the tiny "church."

When the volunteers, ranging from young children to elderly people, returned, they assembled a rather hideous-looking structure, according to Pamela Edd and John Solberg, two of the Corpus parishioners who were part of the retreat from March 5-13. The pair spoke of their experiences in Mexico on Thursday night, March 16, at the Sisters of St. Joseph Spirituality Center on Rogers Parkway.

Once the ugliness of the first structure had become apparent to all present, Father Cadena asked the volunteers to try again, this time making sure to tell each other what they wanted in their church.

The volunteers' effort to communicate produced a radically different result: an attractive structure garnished with decorative flowers, Solberg and Edd explained.

"They assembled this really quite beautiful church," Solberg continued, noting that Father Cadena stressed "this is what building a church is about."

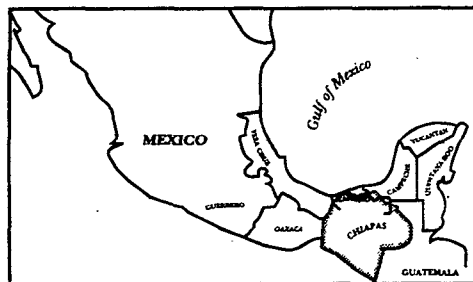
Edd added that she had never seen such a homily in the United States, and seemed skeptical she ever would.

"You wonder, in the states, if any of that would fly," she said.

She and her fellow parishioners have now returned to Rochester to ponder whether other lessons they learned from impoverished Mexican Catholics can be learned by Catholics here.

For example, Edd said, she was impressed by the way many of the residents had adapted to living in homes unfinished for lack of funds or materials to complete them.

Her own host, a widow named Ada



Lorraine Hennessey, Graphics manager

living with two of her daughters and a niece, took the fact that a roof on an addition to her house was unfinished in stride.

"I said to Ada, 'What do you do when it rains?,' and she said 'Well, I don't know. It hasn't rained yet,'" Edd laughed.

Edd pointed out that her host family did not allow their lack of material wealth to impede their hospitality at all.

"They wouldn't let us do anything for them," she said. "It was like an insult to them if we tried to do that for them."

Solberg noted that his hosts — a family of five — also treated him like a king in their one-room home and were eager to speak about their lives. For example, the husband had established his own successful specialty tortilla business.

"He was full of dreams which, in fact, he was making real," Solberg said.

Solberg added that he and his host also spoke of Mexico's fiscal crisis and how it affected people's daily lives.

Austerity measures recently imposed on the nation to stabilize its debt situation have hit the average man in his pocketbook, Solberg noted. For example, bus fare in the Tuxtla area had increased from 10 cents to 16 cents. The increase created a real hardship for people who often work up to 10 hours a day for a mere \$4, he and Edd said.

The Corpus delegation also learned

about the ongoing confrontation between the local Indian population and the government, which the world first heard of last year when Indian rebels took up arms against the Mexican army to protest various perceived injustices.

On one day, Father Cadena took the Corpus parishioners to San Cristobal de las Casas where they witnessed a rally by Indians in the city's plaza which was surrounded by soldiers, Solberg said.

He recalled Father Cadena interpreting what the Indian speakers had to say.

"They're talking about their willingness to die for this," Solberg remembered Father Cadena saying. "It felt like history was unfolding right there."

The Corpus delegation also met Bishop Samuel Ruiz, one of the chief negotiators between the government and the rebel forces. Between 50 and 100 Indians have been regularly sleeping outside the bishop's cathedral in an attempt to protect him from death threats he has received, Edd and Solberg said.

Now that they're back in the United States, the Corpus parishioners hope to continue to build bridges between Mexican and U.S. Catholics. Despite the somewhat negative reputation the United States has historically had in Mexico, the Corpus delegation found the Chiapas residents friendly toward them.

In particular, Edd recalled a night when the Corpus delegation met with some residents of the neighborhood where they stayed. After listening to the Rochester Catholics speak about why they had come to her hometown, a young woman spoke to Edd.

"She said, 'I have never felt very positive about American people,'" Edd recalled, adding that the woman then said, "It really is so nice to meet all of you and to realize that you're just like us."

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Survey

Continued from page 3

to have a higher income than the national population in general.

Another area covered in the study was the *Courier's* circulation policy. Current diocesan policy requires parishes to enroll registered parishioners as subscribers. The requirement that individual subscribers reimburse their parishes for subscriptions varies from parish to parish, but most parishes expect subscribers to pay at least a portion of the cost.

In many cases, however, parishioners are not aware of this obligation, leaving their parishes to pick up the bill, Franz said.

"A lot of people don't know they are expected to pay for the *Courier*," Franz said. "That's a big problem for parishes."

Although 86 percent of the respondents indicated they thought subscription should be entirely voluntary, Franz said financial concerns preclude any immediate move in this direction.

"The truth is that almost all Catholic newspapers rely on diocesan mandated subscription plans," Franz explained, adding that those not using mandate plans receive direct diocesan or parish subsidies. "There is a mission and a ministry involved in the newspaper. This is the bishop's tool for catechetical education," she noted.

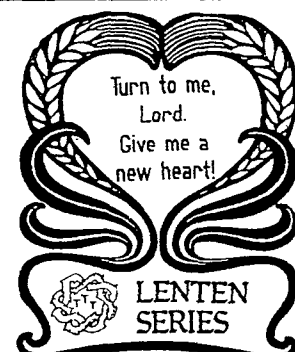
Currently, Franz reported, the *Courier* is conducting a series of focus groups comprising priests and pastoral administrators to gather parish input on the possibility of modifying the subscription policy.

Overall, Sorce said, the results of the study are difficult to assess without taking into account previous studies and how the study will be used. At the same time, the results do hold some positive indications.

In 1989 study, 61.2 percent of the respondents said they would miss the paper. In the new study, that figure rose to 67 percent. Even taking into account the 5 percent margin of error in both studies, the increase over the past six years indicates the newspaper is being better received than it was.

That result fits in with the overwhelmingly positive response to the question about the paper improving in the last five years, Sorce said.

"Internally, we have some suggestion that the changes (in the *Courier*) have been well received," Sorce concluded.



March 29, 12:15 pm Mass

Guest Homilist

Dr. Ralph Anderson
Lutheran Church
of the Incarnate Word

A coffee hour in the rectory will
immediately follow the mass

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