

WORLD & NATION

NYC children get chance to visit the suburbs

By Jane Harriman
Catholic News Service

HOCKESSIN, Del. — When 13-year-old Alfredo Moncilla of Brooklyn, N.Y., arrived in Hockessin this summer to visit the Lo Porto family of St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, one of the first things he did was check out their laundry room.

Yes, he saw, the growth chart was still on the frame of the closet door, with pencil lines and initials demonstrating the growth of five Lo Porto children, ages 2 to 16, and "Alfie," who becomes part of the family each summer.

When Teresa Lo Porto recorded Moncilla's new height, it showed eight inches of growth since his first vacation, in 1999. But through his annual visits, Moncilla has also grown in ways less easily measured, as have the Lo Portos.

Moncilla is one of about 6,000 youngsters aided by the Fresh Air Fund, which brings children from low-income New York City neighborhoods to vacation with volunteer families in suburbs or towns on the East Coast or in Canada.

"They seem so different but they discover they are not; they have so much in common," said Marianne Caven, the Fresh Air Fund's volunteer representative for Delaware, in an interview with *The Dialog*, Wilmington diocesan newspaper. "Bringing someone into your home gives you perspective and broadens your horizons."

Moncilla said he misses his mother, the all-night and all-day noise and "all the people" on Brooklyn's streets. But when he returns home, he misses the quiet and peace of Hockessin. And, of course, the Lo Portos.

Both Teresa Lo Porto, a nurse at St. Francis Hospital, and Joe, a manager at Conectiv, are from the New York/North Jersey area. As soon as Joe's career brought them to Delaware and a spacious house, Moncilla came into their lives.

"Having him works out well," Teresa says, "especially for Christopher, who kind of looks up to him."



Don Blake/CNS

Alfie Moncilla, right, of Brooklyn, N.Y., plays a video game with Christopher Lo Porto as the rest of the Lo Porto family watches in their Hockessin, Del., home. They benefit from the Fresh Air Fund, which brings children from low-income New York City neighborhoods to vacation with volunteer families in suburbs on the East Coast and in Canada.

The Fresh Air Fund was born in 1877, when a minister in rural Pennsylvania asked his congregation to open their homes to give disadvantaged New York City children a healthy vacation. Since then more than 1.7 million New York City children have been sent on free vacations, and Fresh Air is now an independent, not-for-profit agency that also offers summer camps and other programs.

Community agencies in New York register children in low-income or welfare families. Many are minorities or in fami-

lies headed by a single parent. In matching kids to families, Caven said, the Fresh Air Fund will not consider race or religion, but it does try to satisfy gender and age preferences. Children ages 6 to 12 are eligible to go on a Fresh Air vacation the first time. From ages 13 to 19, only those invited back by their previous host family are eligible.

The program accommodates family work schedules.

"Working moms are OK," Caven said. "Some set their vacations so they can be

home or they send the Fresh Air child to day camp with their own children."

Potential host families must give references, including one from an employer and a member of the clergy or a professional. Caven and other volunteers visit the family when everyone is home and spend about 90 minutes asking and answering questions and screening for potential problems.

"Flexibility is so key," Caven said. For example, a family with lots of rules or a rigid diet with unfamiliar foods might present problems for a child who is adjusting to being far from home for the first time. Or a child who always falls asleep watching TV, Caven said, might not do as well if he is put to bed with lights out at 8 p.m. instead of being allowed to read himself to sleep.

"The family doesn't have to be traditional," Caven said. "We have single people, retired people. They don't have to be wealthy. They needn't have a farm, but the whole point of the program is to get the child away from the hot city streets. A high-rise in the heart of the city or a row house is not what the child would want."

When Katie Hegedus grew up in Connecticut, her parents had a Fresh Air child and she is now in her fourth summer in the program. While she obviously admires it, she admits that hosting a child does require flexibility and minor adjustments each year.

"There's a honeymoon period when everyone is happy and excited, and then reality hits" in the form of normal spats, jealousy and power struggles, she said. "Then the last few days, when they realize the end is in sight, they settle down so they can enjoy them."

Peruvian church wants 3 priests canonized

WARSAW, Poland (CNS) — The church in Peru has requested the canonization of two Polish Franciscan missionaries murdered in 1991 by Maoist Shining Path guerrillas.

The Diocese of Chimbote ended the diocesan phase of the process for Fathers Michal Tomaszek and Zbigniew Strzalkowski.

Polish Franciscan Father Wieslaw Bartoszewski told Catholic News Service Aug. 28 that documents about the causes had been sent to the Vatican Congregation for Saints' Causes.

The Polish priests, who began working in Peru in the late 1980s, were abducted from their house at Pariacoto and shot in the back of the head Aug. 9, 1991, by members of a Shining Path faction.

The priests, who came from the order's Krakow province, were buried four days

later at the church in Pariacoto, where they had helped install water and electrical systems and set up medical facilities to combat cholera.

Poland's state-owned press agency, PAP, said guerrillas had accused the Franciscans of "activities humiliating and dampening the revolutionary consciousness of Indians."

It added that a card with the words "Thus die servants of imperialism" was found on Father Strzalkowski's body.

Father Bartoszewski said the canonization process had been initiated by Peru's Chimbote Diocese, with help from the Polish Franciscans.

"It will take some time yet to uncover all the details of this case, including the motives of the persecutors and whether the two priests died exclusively for the faith," said Father Bartoszewski.

"But this process clearly has great significance for the whole Conventual Franciscan order, not just its three Polish provinces," he said.

The Conventual Franciscans have more than a thousand Polish members, of whom 250 work abroad or in missions.

Polish Franciscans have worked in Peru since 1988; the order has seven missionaries working in Pariacoto, Chimbote and Lima.

In its report, PAP said the murdered Franciscans were immediately recognized as martyrs by the Peruvian bishops' conference. The report said Father Strzalkowski was revered in Pariacoto as a patron of the sick and Father Tomaszek as a guardian of children.

The Peruvian church is also seeking the canonization of an Italian, Father Alessandro Dordi, killed by Maoist guerrillas.

Padre Pio's named used by fraud ring

ROME (CNS) — Nine Italians, including a Capuchin friar, were arrested in late August on charges of fraudulently collecting \$200,000 in donations by using Padre Pio's name.

Italian authorities said members of the alleged fraud ring ran an association called "Padre Pio With the Children" that sold mail-order Padre Pio videos and books with the claim that the bulk of the money would benefit children in developing countries.

Capuchin Father Alfonso Parente, 40, once a member of the famous Italian saint's friary in San Giovanni Rotondo, served as honorary president of the association.

Italian investigators said none of the money collected went to charity.

The Capuchin province that carries on Padre Pio's charitable works denied any connection with the association and said Father Parente has been on leave for two years, living with his family, to reflect on his vocation.

Father Parente is well known in Italy as the "Singing Friar" since taking the stage at a popular national musical festival in 2000. His participation caused controversy not only because his superiors said he had not received permission but also because he lied about his age in order to enter the competition's youth category.

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