

How Sanctuary Works

By EMILY POU KENNEDY

This article will answer some questions about how individuals from Central America find refuge or sanctuary in U.S. churches.

Maryknoll sisters and many human rights workers have worked in the war-torn areas of Central America and have themselves suffered at times by government troops who called them communists. For most people in these countries, just

feeding their families is all they have time to do. A few of the families live under life-threatening conditions.

In El Salvador, Guatemala, the Catholic Church and other relief agencies house people who have lost their homes and family members. Most of the losses in these countries are caused by forced relocation, government repression and civil strife. Unable to return home these

refugees turn northward to Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. The conditions in the overcrowded Mexican refugee camps have for years been considered horrid by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, so refugees generally look beyond Mexico to the U.S. and Canada.

Mexican and Canadian officials recognize these people as politically persecuted refugees. The United States, which provides financial support for these nations, classifies these people as economic refugees. Economic refugees immigrate in

order to improve their personal economic situation and are not granted political asylum. In the U.S., Central American refugees who cannot "prove" a "legitimate fear of persecution upon return to their country" are either imprisoned as illegal aliens or deported back to Central America. This is where the sanctuary movement comes in.

Once a person is accepted for sanctuary, phone calls are made around the U.S. Refugees may travel by night from one home to the next for weeks or months before they cross the border. From the time they enter the U.S., they are sheltered by concerned families or churches until a "real" home may be found for them.

Many denominations have approved "sanctuary" status. That means a congregation is willing to accept imprisonment for sheltering an illegal alien. Lately, congregations have been playing host to refugees within weeks of adopting sanctuary status.

Once a home is found, the individual or family travels to that church. A room is provided. Since they are there illegally, they risk deportation or imprisonment if they venture out of doors. In some churches where parishioners are hostile, the refugees assume false identities to protect themselves and surviving family members.

With the risk, the church becomes responsible for supporting this individual or family until one of three things happens: Canada accepts them as refugees, the U.S. government enters the church and seizes them, or their home country becomes safe enough to return.



"DON'T FORCE THE U.S. TO CHOOSE BETWEEN SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS — YOU NEVER KNOW, ONE OF THESE DAYS WE JUST MIGHT CHOOSE HUMAN RIGHTS...."

Capital Punishment Sends Mixed Signals

At 2:11 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 19, John Rook became the third person to die in North Carolina's death chamber since the death penalty was reinstated by the U. S. Supreme Court in 1976. He followed Velma Barfield and James Hutchins who were executed in 1984.

At 2 a.m. Rook had been injected with sodium pentathol which was followed at 2:05 with Pavulon, a muscle relaxant, and John Rook's heart was stopped forever.

About 50 death penalty supporters cheered, laughed and chanted "Na na na na, hey, hey, hey, good-bye" while 150 persons who opposed the death penalty lit candles and sang "We Shall Overcome". I was unable to make the trip to Central Prison in Raleigh but there was at least one candle burning on the St. Andrews campus. I believe, as many others do, that no one, not even the State, has the right to take another human life.

Perhaps the Rook case is not the best on which to debate the death penalty. If ever there was a senseless crime, it was the murder of Anne Marie Roche. She was abducted from a shopping center parking lot on May 12, 1980. The Raleigh nurse was raped, beaten with a tire iron, stabbed with a fishing knife and run over with a borrowed car. Medical investigators reported that it may have taken Ann Marie Roche up to 24 hours to die from loss of blood.

Maybe it is the sheer violence of the crime that makes it easy for many to accept the death of John Rook. But the manner in which Ann Marie Roche was killed tells only half the story.

The people who laughed and cheered as John Rook was put to death preferred to overlook his violent childhood. Most of them were probably not victims of the physical and emotional abuse that John Rook was. They were not beaten until they bled. Their fathers never forced them to become stone drunk on liquor and beer. Perhaps they waited until after puberty to experiment with such drugs as marijuana, hallucinogenic mushrooms, cocaine, amphetamines and heroine. Maybe the level of emotional stability that allowed them to cheer and laugh at the death of another human being kept them from selling themselves as homosexual pro-

stitutes, as John Rook did.

"I do think that's what caused the death of Ann Marie Roche and John Rook," said J. Frank Johnson in a report by the Raleigh News and Observer on September 20. Johnson, who was Rook's defense attorney in 1980, was referring to the history of mental instability, drug and child abuse, which characterized the convicted killer.

"Killing him is using violence to show violent kids they shouldn't be violent," said Isabel Day, Vice President of North Carolinians Against the Death Penalty and a Mecklenburg County public defender. "It's the most mixed up signal I ever heard of." Indeed. How can we teach young people that killing is wrong and then turn around and kill the killers?

Durham resident Randall B. Klett, an hour after Rook's execution, sat staring at the candle flickering in his hand. "I hurt," he said, "because there were human beings cheering the death of another human being."

That type of attitude was popular in first century Rome but I expect more of a modern society. Randall Klett was stunned, as I was, that the state of North Carolina could do nothing for John Rook except inject him with lethal chemicals.

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