

Priest tells of plight

Hunger plagues Cambodia

By NANCY AUSTIN

When the Rev. George Torok speaks about the refugees in Cambodia, he speaks from experience. Father Torok spent five weeks in Cambodian refugee camps recently. Earlier, he experienced how being a refugee can ravage mind and body.

"I have never seen anything like this since the time of the Nazis," said Fr. Torok. "He was a refugee from the Communism regime in his native Czechoslovakia. He was imprisoned after World War II and escaped to the West by swimming the Moravia River."

Last week he visited St. Regis Catholic Church in Birmingham, Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church in Plymouth and St. John Seminary in Plymouth on behalf of Catholic Relief Services.

"Four million people have died," he said, speaking of Cambodia. "This is apocalyptic tragedy." The priest appealed to Americans to support the relief efforts of the Catholic Relief Services to avert further disaster in that country where 1.5 million people fled their homeland to seek help across the border in Thailand.

A FILMMAKER as well as priest, Fr. Torok was asked by his agency to make a documentary about the starving and impoverished people of Cambodia. He described his arrival at the closed border.

"It was a ghastly vision," he said. "As they approached the border, we saw destitute beggars. Walking cadavers come out from bushes and approached our trucks to receive food."

"They are not aggressive. They are most gentle you can find. It's like watching slow motion. When they would return to the woods."

The military, he said, was lined up behind the truck convey with machine guns. That convey consisted of 15 trucks, which transported 36 metric tons (a metric ton equals 2,205 lbs.) of food, medicine and clothing.

When the borders opened as a result of an agreement between the government of Thailand and the United Nations high commission on refugees, Fr. Torok said, there was an incredible flow of refugees, 200 every 15 minutes. In less than one month, holding camps were established by international

relief agencies to accommodate 2.5 million starving people.

THE CAMPS were nothing more than open fields, encompassing one square mile, surrounded by barbed wire fences and soldiers with machine guns, Fr. Torok said. The refugees could not leave the compound under any circumstances.

The relief agencies then began providing food, medicine, clothing and shelter. The largest camp held 200,000 people. Plastic canvases draped over bamboo sticks became shelters.

Mosquito netting was important in preventing malaria. Water was trucked in from a nearby river. A kitchen was established to feed some of the people. Others would take the food back to their shelters and cook for themselves.

Sanitation consisted of a trench dug on the perimeter of the camp, then sprayed daily with disinfectant. The people and their shelters were also sprayed daily to ward off further disease.

The health of the people was deplorable, said the Rev. Torok. Starvation and malnutrition were the worst problems, followed by malaria, tuberculosis (85 percent of the people were infected with TB), bronchial diseases, pneumonia, diarrhea and a lack of vitamin A, which leads to eye infections and blindness.

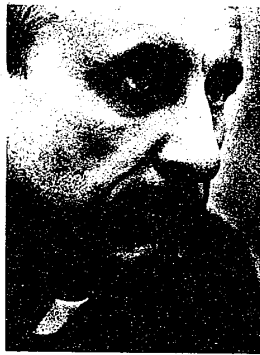
"I deplore to observe this before your very eyes," Fr. Torok said. "And there was something I was totally unprepared for."

"The real medical problems were the terminal cases under bushes, trees, and in tents. They were so bad, they didn't have the strength to walk to clinics. The team of nurses had to look in these places to find these people."

Fr. Torok said priorities were assigned to save those closest to death.

"Those under five and over 45 don't have the resources to resist starvation and disease," he said. But when the team arrived, he said, "It wasn't a moral dilemma to decide, who to save. It was how much life you could save."

Two doctors, 40 nurses, six paramedics and two public health nurses made up the medical team, he said. Even with other agencies helping, that



The Rev. George Torok spoke of relief efforts in Cambodia during his recent visit to the metropolitan area. (Staff photo by Bill Bresler)

amounted to one doctor for every 30,000 people. "We had a death tent in the camp," he said. "It had a sign above it which read, 'Death tent. Bring all dead bodies here. In the evening (the military will take bodies out.'"

"One morning when I went to the tent, there were 17 bodies. By evening there were 36. Death is so normal — the people develop an attitude that (death) is just one more thing that you do."

SURVIVAL was each day's great accomplishment, and sometimes it was accomplished through the refugees' "good neighbor" policy.

"In the next tent," he said, "there could be a neighbor who had enough strength to drag you (in a makeshift stretcher) to the clinic."

"And children developed a responsibility to each other. A five-year-old would feed a three-year-old."

"Many children did not have an adult responsible for them. They had been caught up in the flow of refugees and got separated from their parents."

Fr. Torok said he hopes people will be able to return to their homes to begin their lives again.

Thursday, March 20, 1980

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Church sets family talks

Strengthening the Catholic family will be the focus of the Detroit Archdiocesan Pastoral Assembly March 22-23.

meet 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. All interested persons are invited to attend as observers. For information, call 237-5854.

More than 400 lay persons and clerics will gather at Sacred Heart Seminary, 2701 Chicago Boulevard in Detroit, for the seventh annual assembly. Family ministry as the first step to evangelization is the meeting's theme.

Cardinal John Darden, Detroit's archbishop, and assistant bishops Thomas Gumbleton, Arthur Krczewski and Walter Schoenherer will participate. The assembly convenes in the spirit of shared responsibility, now encouraged by the church. Representatives to the assembly have been elected or appointed from the grass roots level in each of the archdiocese's six counties.

Delegates will discuss six areas of family life, including pre-married and single, parenting, married, developing families, hurting families and ministry to family leadership. Recommendations of the assembly will be submitted to the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council for consideration.

The assembly will

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Sunday Worship: 10:45 AM
School: 9:15 AM-Nursery Provided

St. John American Lutheran Church
23225 Giff Road Farmington
Charles Fox - Pastor
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Sunday School at 9:45 AM
Nursery at 11:00 AM
494-0504

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Bloomfield Hills (2 miles East of Woodward)
338-8233
9:45 a.m. - Church School
9:45 a.m. - Pastor's Class
11:00 a.m. - Worship
Nursery Provided
Dr. David Truett, Pastor

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
3312 Grand River
Farmington - 474-6573
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Church School: 10:00 AM
Nursery Provided
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1589 West Maple at Pleasant
Ministers: James W. Wright - G. Bryn Evans
Douglas W. Vernon - Harold E. Wennhoff
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at 11 A.M.
School: 9:30 & 11 A.M.

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Church School 10:00 am
(Nursery through High School)
Minister: John W. Bray
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SUNDAY CHURCH SCHOOL 9:00 AM
The Rev. C.W. Foster, Pastor
645-5207

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10:45 am - Worship
7:00 pm - Evening Rally
7:30 pm - Thursday
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The Congregational Church of Birmingham, U.C.C.
Woodward of Cranbrook
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East R. Eubank
645-1202

SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
16360 Hubbard Road Livonia, Michigan 48154
421-8451
8:00 A.M. - Holy Eucharist
9:30 A.M. - Family Service
10:00 A.M. - Christian Education Classes For All
11:30 A.M. - Family Service
Sunday Morning - Nursery Care Available
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1/4 Mile West of Orchard Lake Rd. 655-9191

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Phone 357-5483
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The Service
The Rev. L. Aden Erickson

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10:15 am Divine Worship
Rev. James A. Nelson, Pastor
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Parsonage - 474-2944

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SUNDAY SCHOOL 10:30 A.M.
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READING ROOM - 355 East Maple - 644-7935
Mon., Tues. 9:30-5:30 and 7-9:30; Wed., Sat. 9:30-5:30; Thurs., Fri. 9:30-9

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST FRANKLIN-MEADOWLAKE
Maple at Inkster
SUNDAY SERVICES 10:30 A.M.
SUNDAY SCHOOL 10:30 A.M.
WEDNESDAY TESTIMONY MEETING 8:15 P.M.

READING ROOM - 4361 Orchard Lake Rd. - 851-7740
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