

U.S. Priest Gives Hope To Thousands of Lepers

Tala, Philippines.—More than 800 infants saved from leprosy, caring for a 2,400 population in the leprosarium, erecting Holy Rosary Church, a vocational school, and the first college in a leper colony — these are some of the achievements of a former Air Force chaplain.

He is Father Anthony **Leo Hofstee**, O.P., from Seattle, Wash. He returned to the Philippines after World War II to serve as resident chaplain to the leper colony. For 14 years the 58-year-old priest has served as educator, counselor, sewing-room director, recreational organizer, and general cheerleader.

His college gives degrees in education. All the professors are college graduates, and all, except Father **Hofstee**, are patients. Students come from five other government leprosaria to attend the college.

Leper mothers give their babies at birth to the safety of the nursery. From then on they see the infants only from the other side of a partition, for the tots can be easily infected by the disease.

To Place 275 Tots

Father **Hofstee's** problem is to provide or find some place for the 275 children in the nursery after they have grown out of this stage. An incubator given by a U.S. Navy ship is a life-saving device for premature infants.

About half the colony's population lives in small family houses. The others dwell in dormitories and wards. Many live normal lives cultivating the soil, working at handcrafts, studying and teaching.

Father **Hofstee** works for all of them. His day begins at 4:40 a.m., bringing Communion to every ward. Then he says Mass for the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, who staff the nursery. A leper priest offers Mass in Holy Rosary Church.

A complete chapter of Dominican Tertiaries, all lepers, recites the entire Office daily in common. The high school has 200 students. It graduated its first class in 1955.

About 30 miles from Manila, Tala was a bare, sun-seared place when he came to live. No living quarters were available. He placed his cot in a corner of the administration building. His "living room" was the morgue. Mass was offered in a hall.

Worth Of Soul

Father **Hofstee** relies much on his lepers' prayers. Some of the victims are badly disfigured and blind. But the worth of the soul is known as felt in Tala and it is seen as the lepers sing, in the words of "O Holy Night."

"Long lay the world in sin and sorrow pining.

"Till He appeared, and the soul felt its worth." [NCWC Radio and Wire]