

# Priest: More Catholic jail chaplains needed

### Corrections officials respond that priests are in short supply.

By ADON TAFT  
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The Rev. Mark Santo, director of prison ministry for the Catholic Archdiocese of Miami, has charged that a "good old boy" system puts prison chaplaincies in the hands of aggressive

fundamentalists with a missionary zeal. Santo has complained to Frank D. Metcalf, administrator of chaplaincy services for the Florida Department of Corrections, that there is only one Catholic among 49 full-time chaplains serving in the state's 36 prisons and other correctional institutions. Santo also asked Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy to question Fred Crawford, director of the Metro Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, because no full-time Catholic chaplain serves Dade's six jail facilities.

"I think subtle pressure prevents Cath-

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olics from fully practicing their faith," says Santo, a chaplain at the federal Metropolitan Correctional Center in South Dade.

Both Crawford and Metcalf say Santo is off-base. They blame the situation on a shortage of Catholic priests and a lack of understanding of the prison population on Santo's part.

Santo figures that 65 percent of the 120,000 inmates who go through the jail system in Dade County during the year

are Catholic. He complains that recently the county added a second chaplain, and a qualified priest who applied was not selected.

"His numbers are just incorrect," says Crawford. About 65 percent of the inmates are black, and few of them are Catholic. Only about 30 percent of the total inmate population is Hispanic, and not all of them are Catholic. Many indicate no religious preference. Many attend both Prot-

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stant and Catholic services.

"We have not denied religious rights to anyone that I know of,"

Crawford says. "We've even allowed the Yahwehs to hold services. You don't get Utopia in jail, and we only have so many resources to disperse the best way we can."

"Our big problem is getting qualified applicants," says Metcalf, a Baptist who formerly was an Air Force chaplain. "You can't hire people who don't apply, and since I've been here, we've had only one priest apply and he didn't meet the state requirements."

"We don't have many applicants because there is a shortage of Catholic priests. Most bishops don't want to release priests to work for the department of corrections when they need them in parishes. We had the same problem in the military. We were begging to get priests."

While 26 of the chaplains in state correctional institutions are Baptists, Metcalf says, "they are basically administrators. Every situation has Catholic coverage. The bishops are gracious in providing volunteers to conduct Mass and to counsel with inmates."

It is the same with services for other denominations, Metcalf says. "The chaplains themselves cannot meet the needs of the inmates. Some 2,000 volunteer clergy and lay persons conduct most of the ministry."

Santo says he just wants change



The Rev. Mark Santo: He fears subtle pressure against Catholicism.

from a system that he thinks has not kept up with the changing population.

"The history to all this is that this used to be a heavily Protestant state, and the Baptists did a good job recruiting chaplains, and there was a degree of indifference on the part of the Catholic Church," Santo says. As the Catholic population in South Florida has grown, the church has become more aggressive in seeking to minister to them.

Rabbi Solomon Schiff, president

of the Florida Chaplains Association, agrees with Santo that there was a problem in the past. He notes that the association two years ago helped organize a state advisory board to make sure that jail chaplains were open to ministering to those of other faiths. While there still are no full-time Jewish jail chaplains in the state, Schiff says it is because no rabbi has applied. But he says there are still reports of efforts to proselytize or coerce Jewish and other inmates to follow a Protestant

point of view.

Jose E. Hernandez, coordinator of religious activities for the Dade County corrections system, is a non-denominational Protestant who emphasizes that he is no longer a chaplain but an administrator. He says that when the system's one full-time chaplain, James Martin, was hired recently, a qualified priest in his 60s was one of the applicants. "But since most of our inmates are young black men, we wanted a young black chaplain who could relate to them."

Hernandez points out that "we have volunteer representatives from the Catholic clergy as well as Catholic laymen at every facility. We also have rabbis recommended by the Greater Miami Jewish Federation and the Aleph Institute assigned to each facility."

All together, there are 23 volunteer chaplains, Hernandez says, including six Catholic priests and six rabbis. "I meet regularly with Archbishop McCarthy and Bishop [Agustin] Roman and belong to the Coalition of Religious Leaders, and I have never had a complaint from any of them," he says. "I've had both Archbishop McCarthy and Bishop Roman speak at our graduations."

Albert Alea, an executive of a textile import company, who helps organize lay volunteers for jail services, notes that the Agrupación Católica Universitaria presented Hernandez with a plaque for the work he is doing with inmates. "He is doing a good job. We just need three or four more like him," Alea says.