

# Youth Village Hopes to Transform Delinquents Into Leaders

By Larry Levy  
New approaches toward rehabilitating troubled young men between 12 and 26 are projected by a recently formed Oklahoma organization, Youth Village, Inc.

Although neither a church-sponsored nor a church-oriented organization, its founder and director is Rev. Francis A. Mantica, who was officially designated to pursue the project by Bishop Victor J. Reed, of the Oklahoma City-Tulsa Roman Catholic Diocese.

Youth Village is chartered as a non-profit corporation "for prevention of cruelty to children and to provide a home for boys and young men from the ages of 12 through 26 who are without homes or who are homeless or destitute or neglected or abandoned and to provide such home in an atmosphere of love and understanding, such home to be provided regardless of race or creed, to be supervised by competent adults interested in the welfare of boys and young men."

In brief interviews and written statements, Father Mantica, 40, has described his concept of Youth Village.

The Village is to become a controlled environment not just to rehabilitate a boy away from delinquency, but to produce men "who will lead society."

Father Mantica said the Village will be a "non-competitive . . . more Christian approach to the delinquency problem" and the only hope to get ahead of the problem rather than today's legislative way.

Since rules, laws and binding customs are bones of contention for youths, Father Mantica doesn't envision any hard and fast rules.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "have as hard and fast rules of any sort would be a negative destructive element for the type of environment we are trying to establish at Youth Village."

Father Mantica expects newly arrived youths to take advantage of no rules. "This is expected and not at all to be feared. For by their taking advantage of staff and other delinquents . . . they will see that this is not a community which operates by rights or justice, but that it demands far more of them if they wish to become a part of it than simply acknowledging the rights of others."

The approach to handling a boy that is a chronic liar is not to ask him more questions than necessary. Although the Village may have no rules, its residents will be expected to obey both moral and public laws, he said.

Youths will not necessarily be assigned to Youth Village by the courts. Some will be referred there by others and some boys will simply "drop in."

For youths that have just been released from a reformatory, Youth Village will be "a haven . . . a decompression chamber."

Father Mantica said a boy may stay there "a day



Rev. Francis Mantica . . . Christian approach.

or overnight" but probably not for less than three months nor more than three years, although some may become members of the young adult staff.

A young adult staff, 16 to 24 years of age, will be a principal innovation for Youth Village, said Father Mantica. The staff will largely design the program and it is a way to utilize "youth power" to direct the delinquents.

The young adult staff will not be delinquents, but as a person becomes rehabilitated he will "become assimilated into the young adult staff," he said.

Father Mantica said there are never to be more delinquents than young adult staff members.

The young adults will provide examples to the delinquents by the way they "live their ordinary day-to-day lives as students or laborers" without specialized social agency or counseling training. It makes an natural atmosphere for the delinquents as possible, he said.

Father Mantica, a former army chaplain, described a boy as three dynamic parts—a body, a mind, imaginative, creative, confused and hopeful intelligent human being, and a heart, a lively, overflowing, bottled up reservoir of love.

"All must be taken into consideration," he said. The problem is "how do you awaken a slumbering giant. I think these boys have a slumbering giant potential."

The youths are breed and look outlets for their

the final phase with the staff.

In addition to the young adult staff there would be a married staff.

Like the younger staff members, the married members of the staff would not be professional social workers.

"We take just fine people into the program, instead of too much professionalism," said Father Mantica. Primarily, the married staff will serve as "sympathetic intermediaries" between the delinquents and the outside world. Because they have professional and social contacts outside of their homes and work at the Village they will introduce the boys to others so the delinquents "can begin to acquire a more balanced view of society."

The boys also will be able to view and experience the varieties of married and family life, said Father Mantica. The married staff also would have other Village functions, such as psychologist, athletic director, business manager, cooks and custodians.

A comparison to the famed Father Flanagan's Boys Town is not exact. Father Mantica said the Youth Village "is more of an adult version than Boys

Town—a 14-year-old boy is older today than 20 years ago."

But, when speaking of Father Flanagan, Father Mantica says, "I think some of his spirit went into me."

Father Mantica first began thinking of the delinquency problem when assigned to one of his first parishes, which had a high delinquency rate.

"Bishop Reed is the fundamental reason I am here . . . there are not many bishops like Bishop Reed," said Father Mantica.

The father said he asked Bishop Reed if he could do the Youth Village program if he came to Oklahoma City. Bishop Reed has since assigned Father Mantica to full-time activities with youth. Youth Village is presently being conducted as a pilot program at a seven-room house on 19 acres of land rented for \$200 a month near SW 29 and Portland.

There are five boys in the program—three live at Youth Village and the remaining two are called "day hops" for they live at home, but spend the day at the Youth Village.

Mantica said funds for operating the present pilot program have come pri-

marily from the board of directors and incorporators.

Board members have also asked their friends to join the \$2 a month club to help support the pilot pro-

gram. There presently are about 100 members.

On the board are Father Mantica, director; Floyd L. Mays, 3835 NW 17, president; Louis Dillenaw, 3719 N Shawnee, vice president; Cheryl Wesenick, 2204 NW 16, secretary; treasurer; John H. Havens, Margum, executive director; Carrell Freeman, 2637 NW 67; Rev. James Norwood of St. James Episcopal Church, 1517 SW 28; Gary A. Pellegrini, 2841 N Utah; Joe Phipps, 1713 N Byron St.; Joannesian Price, 2803 SW 29, all listed as incorporators and Frank Mountain, assistant director, 533 SW 23, and Ed Edmiston, 3038 NW 16.

Also listed as incorporators were Don J. Karmaly, Mrs. Gary Pellegrini, Allen R. Cherry, Randolph R. Frost, H. Edwin Cauldwell, Donald G. Oliver and Joe Proffitt.

A board of advisors for the village also is being formed.

Eventually, Father Mantica sees the village as an \$8 million to \$10 million plant on 300 acres of land.

Father Mantica feels that Youth Village is a community project, not "a Catholic program as such."

He said no application is being made for public funds, for he wants to get people interested in the Youth Village first and then possibly having a fund drive.

His long-range planning includes a Youth Village for girls "with considerable interaction between the two." No detailed planning has been done on the girls' version.

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