

# religion

The Morning News, Saturday, October 13, 1973 • •

5



**MISSIONARY WITH NEEDLE** — An unlikely job for a priest is that of Columban Father **John Roche** who heads the Kangnung Sewing School for Poor Girls in Korea. After finishing the eight-month course, Father **Roche** says, the graduates have little trouble finding jobs as apprentices, even though there are some problems with the school—like getting fabric with which to practice.

## Korea missionary helps poor to sew

By Eileen C. Spraker  
Religion Editor

Most priests don't know much about the latest women's fashions, but the **Rev. John Roche**, a Columban missionary priest, not only knows fashions, but also how to sew them.

His story comes from the St. Columbans Foreign Mission Society, which has its Eastern headquarters at Goshen near West Chester, Pa. The Goshen house where five priests live full time is an education and financial link between home base and the more than 600 missionaries on the field all over the world.

The annual country fair held the last Sunday in June each year at Goshen nets something like \$20,000 for mission work. A number of Delawareans help with that project. The **Rev. Theodore Caffarelli**, former missionary to the Philippines is superior for the eastern facility.

As the director of the Kangnung Sewing School for Poor Girls in Kangnung, South Korea, **Roche** has to worry a great deal about such things as tucks, pleats and darts. But his biggest problem is finding material for the girls to practice on.

**Roche**, originally from Boston, has been assigned to Korea since his ordination in 1959. The school in Korea began on hope and a few old sewing machines to give girls in the poverty-stricken area a chance to earn a livelihood. Now, seven years later, fabric is still a luxury the school budget won't allow. So the girls must make their creations out of paper. It may seem a waste of time and ability, but it's the only way they can afford to practice their developing skills at all.

Another problem for the missionary is the 20 ancient sewing machines shared by the 25 students. **Roche** has become an expert in coaxing just a little more output from the chronically broken-down equipment.

But despite the problems, he claims the school is a success. Several hundred graduates now are able to make a decent living.

Good seamstresses are in demand and the girls have little trouble finding jobs as apprentices. Without the school's training, it would be five or six years before they could earn the same salary. After finishing the eight-month course, some of the girls return to their villages to supplement the family's income by becoming the village dressmakers.

A former student, Elizabeth Reh, is the chief instructor. After graduation, she worked at various dressmaking shops until she earned a government teaching certificate. She then returned to the school eager to share her knowledge and talent with the students.

**Roche's** present parish begins 50 miles south of the demilitarized zone in South Korea and extends from the east coast far up into the Kangwondo mountains. Many early Christians sought refuge from persecution and made their homes in the rocky hills.

The same grit and determination is reflected in their descendants' eagerness to learn fashion design and construction even if they must use paper for fabric.

**Roche** is rightfully proud of them. In an area where poverty is the lifestyle, they are learning a very practical way to improve their own and their families' lives.