

Letter from Lisbon

Church action on housing and jobless

THIRTY-thousand people are believed to visit the Commercial Centre of Amoreiras in Lisbon each day. This huge complex of shops and restaurants has so intruded upon the elegant skyline of the city that the local jokers say they would rather be inside, so as not to be able to see the outside.

The Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon decided to start a Christian centre in the middle of the building. So there is now a chapel where Mass is being offered and the Blessed Sacrament reserved. Space for conferences and smaller rooms are available for groups and meetings and it is hoped and expected that numbers of people will seize this chance of peace and quiet in the midst of the turmoil of the city.

The Caritas Organisation, also in the Archdiocese of Lisbon, is active in promoting housing estates built by co-operatives of the future inhabitants. They have now branched out into the teaching of handicrafts and skills to unemployed young people with low scholastic qualifications.

To this end they have opened workshops in Vila Franca de Xira, about 20 miles up the Tagus from Lisbon. So now there are 260 boys and girls taking 11 different courses including plumbing, electricity, carpentry, ceramics, pewter work, weaving, basket-making and dressmaking. They are divided into two groups, those aged 14 to 18 and those between 18 and 25 years old.

The European Social Fund is supporting the project. It is expected that the pupils will gain enough practice in a year to be good enough to be taken on by firms or small businesses. The progress already made is remarkable. At the beginning a basket may take two hours to make, but a month later the same pupil can make a similar basket in half an hour.

Portuguese Caritas is hoping through their contacts with similar organisations in France and Germany to enter the export market with these handmade objects. Although the numbers of the unemployed in Portugal have recently come down to seven per cent of the workforce, it is the school leavers who are chiefly affected.

Here come the sun

THE Algarve, a favourite spot for tourists seeking sun and relaxation, is one of the least Christian parts of the country, and there is a grave shortage of priests. Bishop Ernesto Gonçalves, a Franciscan, is starting a school for younger boys who show signs of a vocation. They go on living with their families while attending school, but maintaining close contact with their parish priest. Ten boys have so far joined the

scheme.

In a somewhat similar way there is a flourishing group of almost 100 boys in the diocese of Oporto who are in the higher classes of their local schools and who are considering whether they have a vocation to the priesthood.

But this diocese does not seem to be short of candidates. At the present time there are 268 seminarists ranging in age from around 15 to the sixth year of theology. Some of these live with their families while they study. The younger are under the care of the pre-seminary organisation.

Even so the age of the diocesan priests in the Oporto diocese is steadily rising. Only 40 are under 39, 79 between 40 and 50, 245 between 50 and 70 and 84 from that age upwards.

Vocations pastoral

A MEETING was held recently at Fatima of 208 representatives of men and women's religious institutes who hoped to form a common pastoral policy for vocations. Another meeting brought together 80 elderly Brothers of St John of God who are devoted to the care of the insane. They decided that they could still be useful in the sphere of hospitality which can be exercised at any age.

Timor violence

TIMOR continues to be in the news. A Portuguese Jesuit, Joao Felgueiras, who was for many years Rector of the Seminary in Dili, the capital of East Timor, has been held up in Jakarta awaiting permission to return.

He came back to Portugal on leave after an absence of nine years at the end of 1986 and was kept waiting here for several months for an entrance visa. It is understood that Fr Felgueiras will join the Indonesian Province of the Society, and will work in a parish and not return to the Seminary which is now under the care of another Portuguese Jesuit, Fr José Alves Martins.

On Christmas night there were violent scenes in Dili when a group of Indonesian protestors raised a Portuguese flag. The Indonesian Commander-in-Chief, General Benny Murdani was spending the feast with the 10,000 soldiers who are stationed in East Timor.

The General, who is a Catholic, declared at a Press Conference that it would take several years to overcome the resistance of the local people and that it was necessary to convince the guerrilla fighters that the Indonesians are not colonisers, and are not there in order to kill or to subject the people.

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