



FR. JAMES CARNEY

On September 19th, I was notified that Fr. James Carney was dead. A number of newspaper articles, television and radio reports were heard and seen, especially here in St. Louis. I want to let you now what information we now have.

Father Carney was a missionary in Honduras for 20 years. He had a great love for the poor and lived with them. He helped them with food and clothing, tried to get land for them to raise their own food, taught them agricultural methods, and helped them for co-operatives. About 90% of the people in Honduras are very poor as a few rich people own most of the land. The poor work for the rich land owners. The average income for the father of a poor family is \$475 [USD] a year. He works all day for \$1.75. The rich land owners and the military did not like Fr. Carney for trying to help and educate the poor. In 1979 the Army shipped him out of Honduras. He

then went to Nicaragua to continue working with the poor.

This past June Fr. Carney left the Jesuits as he felt a stronger stand had to be taken on behalf of the poor. He did not leave the priesthood. After 20 years, he felt the poor would never escape the terrible injustice and suppression without revolution. Missionaries in Central America have to make a choice when they work with the poor. They can take a strong stand and likely be either expelled or killed, or they can take a low-key approach and be able to stay in the country with the poor. Our Jesuits felt that it would be better to take the low-key approach. Fr. Carney felt the Lord was asking him to take the stronger stand. He left the Jesuits without bitterness, and he thought by doing so he would not endanger the other Jesuit missionaries in Honduras.

Fr. Carney returned to Honduras in July or August to be with his poor people. The Army in Honduras announced on September 19th that Fr. Carney died of starvation. They said he was acting as chaplain to some of the poor who were revolting. Later the Army changed the report and said he was killed. Our Jesuits asked for more details, but were given no satisfaction. The Carney family went to Honduras and were given Fr. Carney's chalice, holy oil kit, and the stole he used for Mass. They requested Jim's body, but were refused and were given no more information. Most in Honduras believe Fr. Carney was tortured and killed by the Army. A small possibility is that he is still alive and is being held prisoner. A number of people in Honduras have disappeared or have been killed, so Fr. Carney's case is not the only one.

Fr. Carney was a very prayerful person. He himself never carried arms, but administered to the poor as a priest, chaplain or in whatever way he could help them. He did what he thought the Lord was asking him to do. If he is dead, may God grant him Eternal Rest. If he is alive, may God strengthen him.

Father Ronald Zinkle, SJ