

Fr. Belitz moves mystical ministry to new site

The Criterion, April 26, 1985

by Patricia Kelley

Last fall, Franciscan Father Justin Belitz left Alverna Retreat Center to create a new avenue for his programs. Encouragement came from his superiors, brother friars of the Sacred Heart Province in St. Louis.

Just a little more than six months later, on April 17, Father Belitz and his staff moved into the Franciscan Hermitage at 46th and Fall Creek Parkway.

The stately old home once belonged to the Roberts family, owners of the Roberts Dairy. It has now become home for a community of people seeking spiritual growth for themselves as well as the general community.

The house itself is now home for Father Belitz, providing him with both private living quarters and office space. The panelled dining room has been given new dignity as the chapel for the Hermitage. Plans are under way for stained glass windows to be constructed by Father Belitz's cousin in Omaha, Neb.

The official prayer of the church, the Liturgy of the Hours, is prayed each morning in the chapel. Each day at noon, the staff of the Hermitage meets again for prayer, often joined by outside guests. The work of the Franciscan Hermitage, as well as the many special intentions requested, are lifted up in prayer each day. Permission to celebrate Mass and to retain the Blessed Sacrament in the new chapel is being applied for through the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

Each room in the old house can look forward to new life. Rusty C. Moe, director of counseling services and program development, uses the downstairs bedroom suite as his office. The roomy foyer serves as the official place of welcome for all who enter the Hermitage. It is staffed by Kathy Kingery, full-time receptionist. The elegant living room with fireplace will be used as a meeting room when needed. The solarium, complete with fireplace, will be home for the volunteers who play a big part in the operation of the Hermitage. The lower level will provide additional meeting rooms.

About halfway up the staircase to the

second floor, French windows open up to a terrace and garden under the trees. Insets in the circular walls boast small, ornate brass light fixtures which cast a soft glow upon the stairwell. Up another few stairs, sweeping halls open into other rooms that are used by Father Belitz, the Rev. Joe F. Bottorff, executive director, and Patricia Kelley, executive secretary.

All this is made possible through the contributions of hundreds of people. Many contributions came from local people but a large segment came from all over the United States as well as Australia and Europe. All donors have been recipients of Father Belitz's ministry.

Father Belitz's background suits him well in this work. His early years growing up in a Polish community in Omaha created the warm, loving person he is today. His love and need for people serve him well in the small community of the Hermitage as well as in his larger apostolate, that of serving the needs of the general community.

After 15 years of teaching in Franciscan high schools in Cleveland, Father Belitz took a year's sabbatical to begin preparing for the special ministry in which he is now involved. During that time he studied under Franciscan Fathers Conrad Harkins and Alphonsus Trabold at St. Bonaventure University in St. Bonaventure, N.Y. Franciscan spirituality and mystical phenomena were his chosen courses of study. Father Trabold is recognized as an expert by both secular and ecclesiastical professionals.

He encouraged Father Belitz to pursue his interest in mystical theology and its application to basic spirituality. This led to what is commonly referred to as "mind expansion" but is known in more traditional theological terms as the theory and practice of meditation.

Having completed a semester at St. Bonaventure, Father Belitz took up residence in Jerusalem at the Terra Sancta convent of St. Xavier in the old city and began a second semester of private study based on Father Trabold's suggestions. This period of time was spent in study of the mystical (or, in modern scientific ter-



NEW HOME—The new home of the Franciscan Hermitage. This sketch was done by Grace Roberts, a relative of the original owner.

minology, "psychical") phenomena from both the New and Old Testaments. During this period Father Belitz began teaching the Silva Method of Meditation in Jerusalem.

Following his residence in Jerusalem, Father Belitz went on to San Damiano in Assisi, where he hoped to absorb the real spirit and idealism of St. Francis. In keeping with Franciscan tradition he sought to apply all previous study to practical application in daily life for the average person. It was during this period in his life that he developed the material that is so popular today in his parish missions, nuns' retreats, days of recollection, etc.

Father Belitz carries an undergraduate degree in philosophy from Quincy College, a graduate degree in theology from the Antoniaum in Rome, a graduate degree in music education from Case-Western Reserve, certification in administration from Cleveland State University and a master's degree in psychorientology from the Institute of Psychorientology.

He has lectured in Israel, Greece, Italy

and Australia. In the U.S. he has lectured extensively, including retreats and workshops for seminarians and religious women of numerous congregations and orders, inservice workshops for educators, executives, managers and salespeople, motivational sessions for students ranging from junior high school to university level, parish retreats, renewals and days of recollection.

He is the founding director of the Franciscan Hermitage and offers courses to the general public on Successful Living, the Silva Method of Meditation, Creative Family Living and Musical Perceptions.

He has been featured on radio and television in Cleveland, Houston, Omaha, Philadelphia, Indianapolis and Perth, Australia.

On May 1, Father Belitz and Moe will facilitate a lecture on "Creative Family Living" and on May 2 Father Belitz will present a lecture titled "How Meditation Can Help You Take Control of Your Life."

Both lectures are free and open to the public. For information, call The Hermitage at 317-545-0742.