

# Volunteers aid families of prison inmates

by Robert Lothian

Olga Delgado, Concha Castro and Donna Hunter shivered in front of a downtown theatre. They were waiting for a ride to Salem to visit relatives in prison.

Soon Mary Ellen Ambrose arrived in her Volvo. Hunter loaded a sewing machine she had brought for her son at Oregon State Penitentiary and they were off.

Because they can't afford public transportation to Salem (about \$25 round trip), Ambrose volunteers to drive the women each Wednesday.

Hunter and Ambrose are members of a support group called "Waiting Outside." The group organizes rides and offers other help to prisoners and their families.

"There's no other way you can do it," said Hunter about the help with rides.

Ambrose volunteers because "I felt that anything I could do to help keep families together would help," she said.

Waiting Outside, organized in 1983, operates under the umbrella of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The society provides a Volkswagen van for Sunday trips to Salem. It also provides a telephone, an office, and meeting space for Waiting Outside.

The group meets monthly at the St. Vincent de Paul Center, 2800 S.E. Powell.

Group members volunteer their time, cars and gas. Rides go to Oregon State Penitentiary and Oregon State Correctional Institution now, and MacLaren and Hillcrest schools may soon be included.

"We've got people waiting three weeks just to get a ride," said Tim Hornbecker, Portland director of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Hornbecker, who oversees prisoner support activities for the society, was a lay minister at Rocky Butte jail for three years. He continues to visit prisoners at the Justice Center.

The free rides often provide "the only opportunity family members have to see loved ones," said Hornbecker.

Studies show a decrease in recidivism, or prisoners returning to prison, when they are visited at least twice each month, he said.

"We see the visits as not only humane but beneficial to the prison system," said Hornbecker.

On a sour note, he said that prison officials have not been very cooperative with Waiting Outside's visitation program.

"Just because someone is in jail doesn't mean they don't need a visit," he said. "We've forgotten that these jails are houses for people."

"It's the only contact they have with real people," said Hunter, referring to the prisoners and family visits.

Another woman active in Waiting Outside spoke of the sense of loss when a loved one, often a breadwinner, is sent to prison. Her son is serving time at the O.S.P. Tillamook work camp.

"It's a hidden thing and these people really need someone to talk to," she said about grieving loved ones. "They're really hurting."

Not all prisoners are hardened criminals and they, too, need support, she said. "I've found that very tough men who have done a lot of bad things have some very tender feelings," she said.

Linda Fay Hunter, administrative assistant at St. Vincent de Paul, coordinates the rides. Waiting Outside has helped at least 50 people with rides, mainly wives, mothers, girl-

friends and children from Southeast Portland, she said.

"A lot of them have experienced devastation because of what has happened to them," she said. "They find that it's not that easy to be a head of household and keep things running smoothly."

Hunter said that her work with prisoners' families often involves helping them with medical and utility bills, counselling and referrals to other agencies.

"Some really don't know where their next meal is coming from," said Hornbecker. "It's really hard on families." For more information on Waiting Outside, call 234-0594.



Members of the "Waiting Outside" prisoner support group shown, from left, are Concha Castro, Olga Delgado, Donna Hunter and Mary Ellen Ambrose. (Photo: Kris Altucher)

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### CIA debate

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Cuban soldiers.

In Nicaragua, the so-called CIA secret war there is "a weak substitute for foreign policy when the public will not support U.S. intervention," he said.

"It does not work to fight terrorism with terrorism," said Schloming.

But "not all the actors on the world stage are boy scouts," answered Stephenson. Democracy is under attack on all sides and faces defeat in a few short decades, according to Stephenson. Covert actions are necessary to defeat democracy's enemies, he said.

"We have to do things we find repugnant. If we stay pure and clean, then democracy's fate will be decided."

"Without secrecy the operations almost certainly will fail."

Stephenson alluded to democracy's "inherent weaknesses," like free speech, which allows enemies to organize freely. He implied that it might be necessary to destroy democracy a little in order to save it.