

GUATEMALAN FAMILY REACHES REFUGE

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Body

With church bells resounding over the snow-covered landscape and hundreds of people looking on, 12 Benedictine monks welcomed a **family** from Guatemala to the sanctuary of a hilltop monastery here today.

The seven members of the **family**, who entered the United States illegally and used the assumed name of Excot, arrived this morning with a caravan of 28 cars ending an eight-day journey from Chicago. As the Excots stepped out of their van, all except a 7-month-old baby, Inez, wore bandanas to shield their faces. With photographers pressing close, the **family** was embraced by the monks of Weston Priory.

Benedictine monks at Weston Prior, Vermont, welcome **Guatemalan family** of 7, using assumed name of Excot, which entered US illegally and was escorted from Chicago by 28-car caravan of supporters, who oppose US policies on immigration and Central America; **family** illustrated, wearing masks to protect identities; Excot was farmer who said he was sought by Govt forces for teaching villagers to read (S)

The caravan was organized by the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America, an interdenominational group that has helped establish 110 sanctuaries across the country for refugees from Central America. While the **family** was traveling from Chicago, the group held rallies in several cities to dramatize opposition to the Government's policies on immigration and on Central America.

After their arrival in Weston, Felipe and Elena Excot and their five children joined about 500 well-wishers in a barn festooned with streamers and enclosed with sheets of plastic against the cold.

The monks led the gathering in a ceremony of song and prayer with the **family**, still masked, seated in a semicircle in the front of the room.

The Excots, in Spanish, told of atrocities suffered at the hands of the military Government of Guatemala.

By offering public sanctuary to the **family** and other refugees who might follow, the monks are defying Federal law and risk a penalty of five years in prison and a \$2,000 fine.

Over 10 years, the monks have traveled to Mexico several times, visiting with refugees there and returning with stories of persecution and murder. They decided to declare a sanctuary to make known their difference with United States policy. One of the monks, Brother Philip, said they also wanted to provide a shield against publicity for the Excot **family**.

Brother John, another monk, said, "What we are doing is a demand and a consequence of our faith."

Immigration Officials' View

Immigration officials showed no interest in intercepting the Excot caravan.

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William J. Dempsey, deputy director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service for the district that includes Vermont and Maine, said the agency's highest priority was apprehending employers of aliens who are in this country illegally rather than bothering with the relatively small number of illegal aliens who have sought sanctuary with church groups.

In the gathering at Weston was the Rev. Daniel Jensen, a Maryknoll priest who hid Mr. Excot in Guatemala City three years ago. Mr. Excot was a farmer who said he had been sought by Government forces because he had been teaching villagers to read.

Father Jensen, who said he left Guatemala after receiving death threats, said of the Excot family, "If they're deported, they'd be killed."

A person who traveled with the caravan quoted Mrs. Excot as saying upon her arrival in Weston, "I am very, very happy, and it's perhaps the saddest day of my life." It was explained that she was expressing her grief for the country she had left behind.

Graphic

photos of Excot family

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