

CAN MIRACULOUS HEALING HAPPEN AT A DISTANCE?
 CAN IT HAPPEN THROUGH PRAYERS? THROUGH THE
 PRAYERS OF SOMEONE YOU HAVE NEVER MET –
 SOMEONE WHOSE FAITH YOU DON'T EVEN SHARE?

THE IMPOSSIBLE CONNECTION

BERNARD ELLIS

London businessman, Bernard Ellis, suffered clinical depression for eight years. He was nearly bankrupt, addicted to anti-depressants and alcohol, suffering panic attacks and suicidal impulses.

On 24 August 1988, during a last desperate business trip to Malaysia, Ellis felt startlingly better. He thought it must be the weather but his depression stayed away.

He later learned that on the same day a man he had never met had prayed for him in Northern Ireland. Coincidence? ROCHELLE M. GIBLER met Bernard Ellis and the man who prayed for a stranger, Father Peter Rookey.

Did they have it all? Anyone looking at Bernard and Sue Ellis in the high-living Eighties might well have thought so. They lived with their five children in a palatial house with swimming pool and stables set in 15 acres of rural Surrey, England. Staff looked after the house, grounds and horses so the family had time to ride with the Old Surrey and Burstow hunt.

But what few could see was that Bernard Ellis had slipped into clinical depression. The family business was on its last legs.

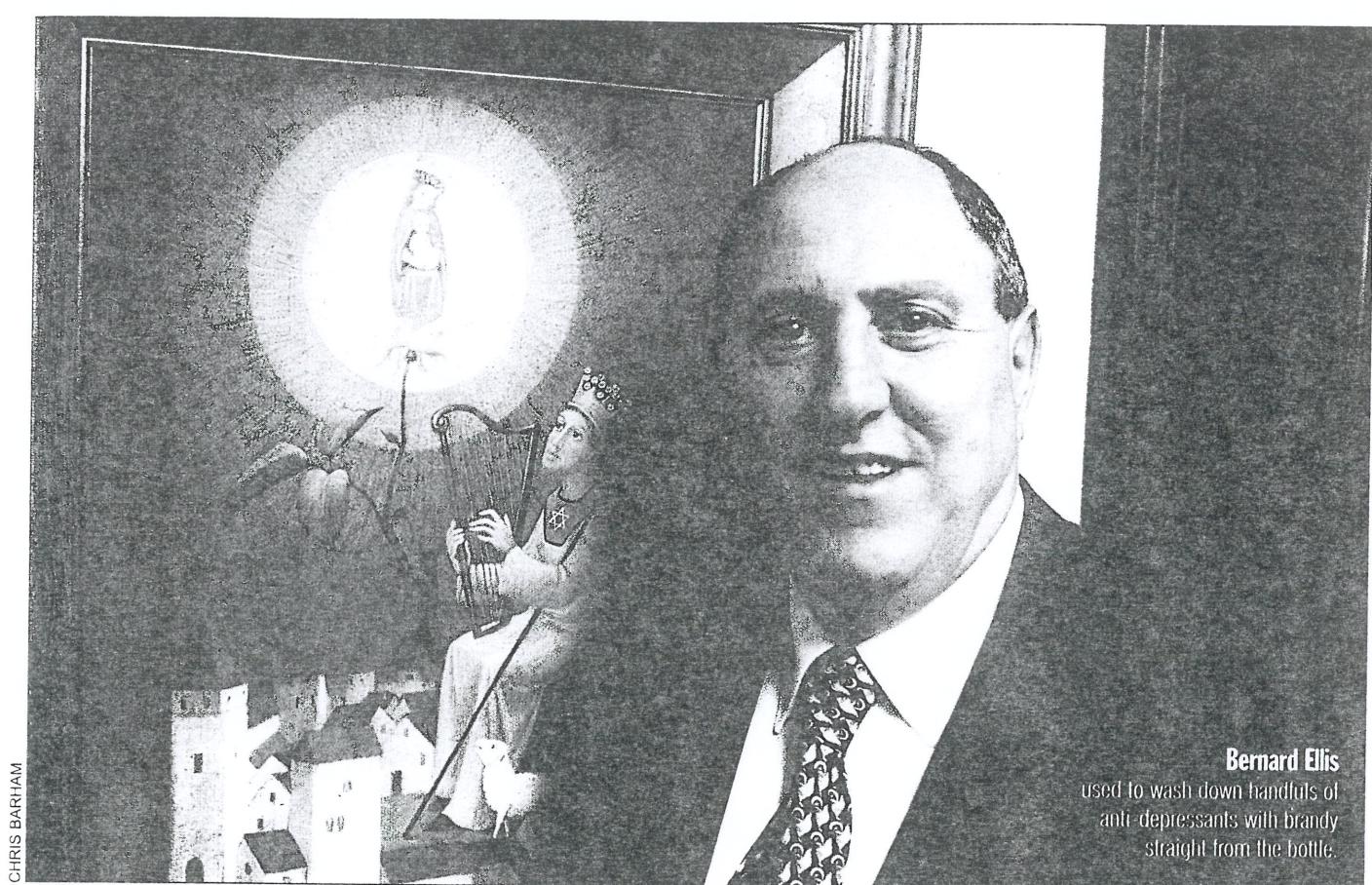
"Sue and I thought we were happy because we were earning lots of money and living in a big house," Bernard Ellis said as we sat stalled in London traffic surrounded by a tottering stacks of

books. With us in the converted van was the stranger who once prayed for Ellis. We were taking Father Peter Rookey to a healing service in London.

These days Bernard Ellis spends a month to six weeks a year, booking Father Rookey's appointments in the UK and sometimes telling his own story at the healing services. The two old friends make a striking pair – the younger Ellis in beautifully tailored pinstripes, highly polished wing-tip shoes, the more exuberant Peter Rookey in his accustomed black habit (along with his summer habit, it makes up his whole wardrobe) and sandals. The books are the ones Bernard Ellis plans to sell at the service. But this is getting ahead of the story.

"When we got married in 1967 – Sue is Catholic and I am Jewish – I never changed my religion because we were in love and it didn't seem to matter that we were different religions," Bernard Ellis said. "Then 16 years later Sue had a conversion experience and tried to persuade me but I never listened to her."

"I have been an importer and exporter since I was 16 and our company, Anglo-World Steel Exports Ltd, was having great success buying and selling stainless steel. But the more money we earned, the more I relied on things. I became disappointed and disillusioned and ill with really bad depression. I used to take Atavan, an anti-depressant, and washed it down with large quantities of brandy. After a while the Atavan didn't work so I would take more and more. I was gulping pills down and swigging more brandy straight from the bottle. So I was

**Bernard Ellis**

used to wash down handfuls of anti-depressants with brandy straight from the bottle.

"The train was coming in and I was really depressed and I heard a voice, an audible male voice, say 'You're useless. You're no good. Throw yourself under the train.'"

drug-dependent, alcohol-dependent and in a terrible mess. Then my business started to fail and none of the psychiatrists I saw was able to help me. It just didn't work at all. The doctors tried to treat me by suppressing my anxiety and I used to suffer from panic syndromes.

"When I'd get a panic attack, I'd focus on pains in my chest that I now think were psychosomatic. I'd coil up like a spring and the more I'd focus on the pain, the tighter the spring became and I just didn't know where to go.

"Panic syndrome is a terrible thing. You can't escape from it. And then business was getting so bad we were practically bankrupt and my beautiful wife said 'It doesn't matter. You should only be well,' and she was desperate. I was spiritually sick and physically sick. So Sue started to pray and she started to ask other people to pray. She wanted to bombard heaven with prayers for this poor fellow she loved.

"By this time I had been ill for about seven years and I was getting worse. I remember about this time I

was standing on New Street Station in Birmingham," Bernard continued. "I'd gone to try to trade my way out of my problems, but because I couldn't do business successfully, I had absolutely no confidence.

"People who had been business friends of mine for 15 years had placed a really good transaction for my company on a plate and because of my lack of confidence I turned it down saying things like 'We can't handle it. It's too big for us'. They were giving me this deal that could have earned a lot of money and I was in such a bad way I was talking myself out of it.

"When I got back to the station, I realised how stupid I'd been. I turned down the contract that could have saved us. And the train was coming into the station and I was really depressed and I heard a voice, an audible male voice, in my ear say 'You're useless. You're no good. Throw yourself under the train.'

"After that happened, Sue got me to carry a cross because she was worried that I was being attacked by the devil. I didn't know what she was talking about but I knew her intention was good, and when you're at the bottom of the barrel you'll do anything. A doctor even suggested to Sue that she have me hospitalised."

At about this time Sue Ellis spoke to a woman called Mary Paynton, the housekeeper of a priest who is a friend of Father Rookey's. Soon afterward, unknown to the Ellises, Mary Paynton met Father Rookey in Belfast, Northern Ireland. At her request, Father Rookey prayed for Bernard Ellis – who was

on the other side of the world. The result, in Bernard's words, was: "Coincidence or supernatural, whatever we believe in, faith... the day he prayed over me in Belfast when I was in Malaysia, I got better after eight years. That's eight years when it was really bad - I'd been depressive, on and off, for 25. I said to Sue, 'I'm feeling good today. It's a good climate here. It must be the climate. I'm feeling a lot better.' It was like a great weight had lifted off me."

"Then Sue got me to stop taking the Atavan. I had been on it for 10 years and I felt no side effects of stopping and I haven't had Atavan since. Doctors have since told me that was impossible. They tell me people sometimes have to be hospitalised because of the side effects. And as for the brandy, I now take a drink with my friends or with a meal but no more grabbing and swigging."

Ellis didn't meet Father Rookey for another year. He knew vaguely that he had been prayed for but he didn't really appreciate the striking, life-changing connection until the two men ran into one another in Medjugorje, the Croatian village where apparitions of the Virgin Mary have been seen nightly since 1981.

The meeting was casual. "You're Father Rookey?" Bernard asked.

"You're that Jewish man from London I prayed over," Father Rookey answered. "How are you feeling, because Mary Payntor told us you got better?"

Bernard Ellis summed up: "So we had a drink together and we've been friends ever since. Lovely, lovely man. At that time he had never held a healing service in England, so I started phoning up a few

churches and he's been beautifully accepted and people have been healed."

Today Bernard Ellis, an ardent Christian, raises money for refugees in Bosnia. So far he has collected £3 million in cash and £10 million in relief supplies. As for his business, Bernard Ellis concluded: "Every year since that day in Malaysia my profits have been higher. It seems the more time I give to helping others, the better the business goes."

PRAYERS FROM PRISON: THE KRAY TWINS

Reggie and Ronnie Kray were powerful gangsters who held the East End of London in thrall for years during the Sixties by torture and extortion until they were finally jailed for murder. Their life story was recently shown in the film *The Krays* with Martin and Gary Kemp of Spandau Ballet playing the twins.

On 16 January this year Yvonne Ross, who works for Bernard Ellis, took a phone call from Reggie Kray who wanted to talk to Father Rookey. When Ross suggested someone was winding her up, Kray answered: "Oh, darling. I wish I was. I've been here for 30 years." She transferred the call to Ellis who heard Kray announce that he was a Christian. It was not a pose he was adopting to get out of prison, Kray insisted, he really was and he wanted Father Rookey to pray for a friend's son.

So he did, and two days later Father Rookey went to Maidstone jail in Kent to pray with Reggie Kray. Then Kray asked Father Rookey to pray with his brother, Ronnie, in Broadmoor, a British high security hospital for the criminally insane.

Father Rookey phoned Ronnie from Reggie's cell. They prayed together and Ronnie repented. Reggie later wrote to Father Rookey and said that Ronnie had never expressed any regret before and that he felt much better, that a great weight had been removed from him. That was three weeks before Ronnie's death from a heart attack.

DAVID PARKES

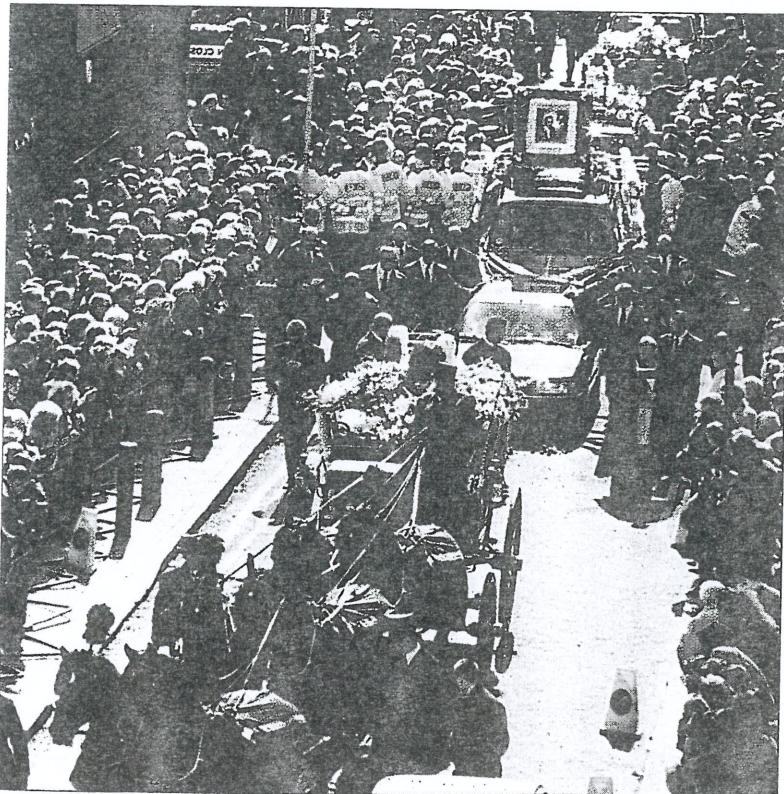
David Parkes started out as a footballer. But music soon pushed sport aside. After winning Ireland's National Talent Contest, he formed a band in his native Dublin which he fronted as the lead singer.

But in 1977, at the age of 27, Parkes developed Crohn's disease, a condition that attacks the bowel. Weight dropped off him, he suffered constant diarrhoea and vomiting. Ten operations in as many years to remove the ulcerated parts of his colon didn't help.

Just before Christmas 1988 David's condition worsened. By the New Year doctors told him nothing else could be done. He faced death. To help pay him his huge medical bills, David's band staged a

Ronnie Kray

His funeral drew thousands of mourners from across England



AUDRIAN BROOKS/REX FEATURES



David Parkes (right) who nearly died of Crohn's disease, a condition that attacks the bowel, with Father Rookey.

charity concert. They advertised and tickets sold well, many people coming especially because they thought it would be the last chance they would have to hear Parkes sing. In the audience was Heather Parsons, a local travel agent who regularly booked trips to Medjugorje. That evening she had a premonition that if David Parkes would see Father Rookey he would be healed.

The following April, David and his wife Anne were given tickets to visit Medjugorje in a party escorted by Father Rookey. David had no interest in anything religious but the trip appealed to him because he and Anne had spent their honeymoon in Yugoslavia.

Parkes met Father Rookey at the airport and gave him a hard time. "I don't wish to speak to you," he told Father Rookey archly. "I am very ill and I want to be left alone." He explains: "I was totally disenchanted with Medjugorje. There was one restaurant, two bars, the house we stayed in wasn't even fully built. It was a backward place and I had no interest in it whatsoever. I saw the whole thing as hysteria on a grand scale. They were religious freaks. Everyone kept falling over backward when they were blessed in church. In the end I wasn't sure if it was genuine. I thought they thought that if they kept standing, they would be the odd one out, feeling rather self-conscious. My wife kept urging me to go up and be blessed but I resisted. Finally I decided it was better just to go up and get it out of the way to make her happy."

"The next thing I knew I was looking up into people's faces. I asked who hit me. Apparently I was out for 20 minutes. I felt so foolish. And I could feel burning heat in my head and from my finger tips to my toes.

"That same day I ate some greasy food and normally I would have been ill. My wife commented how unusual it was that I wasn't feeling any discomfort. Three days after I got home I went to the doctor. He couldn't believe what he saw. There was no sign of disease in my body. I didn't need my medication. I was healed."

A MIRACLES ADVERTISING FEATURE

TIME FOR MERCY

THE century, indeed the millennium, is ending, and with it come doubts. This award-winning new video from Marian Communications *Time for Mercy* looks at natural catastrophes, wars, disease, immorality, rising crime rates – a 560 per cent increase in violent crime in the US in the past 30 years – and fears the worst. It also points towards more than 300 Marian apparitions in 232 countries this century as a warning.

The film's central question is: "Are the events we are witnessing simply a quirk in nature or is what we have seen just a small sample of what is yet to come? Is God increasing the intensity and severity of His warning to try to draw souls back to Him before it is too late, before the day of justice?"

Time for Mercy is written and directed by Drew J Mariani, produced by the non-profit, film-making group, Marian Communications, and narrated by the actor Joseph Campanella.

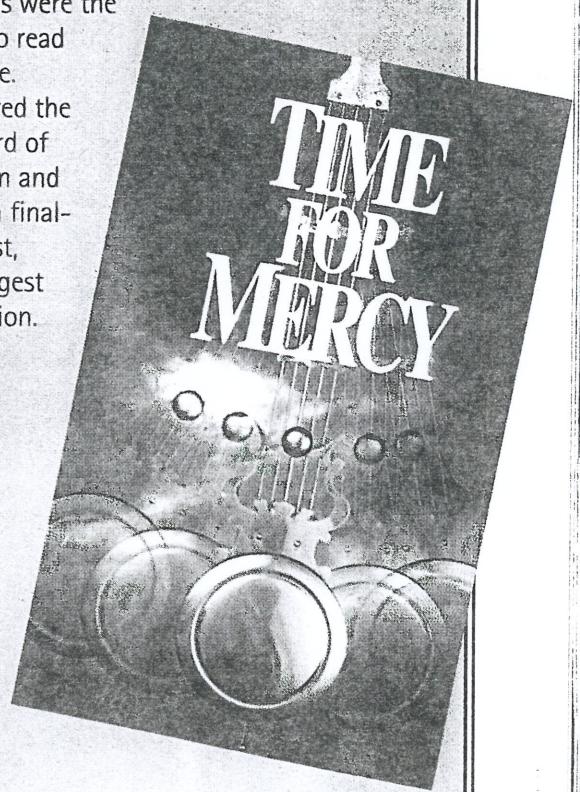
"The film began as a story of the beatification of the Blessed Faustina but after looking at the material I proposed a broader concept," Mariani says.

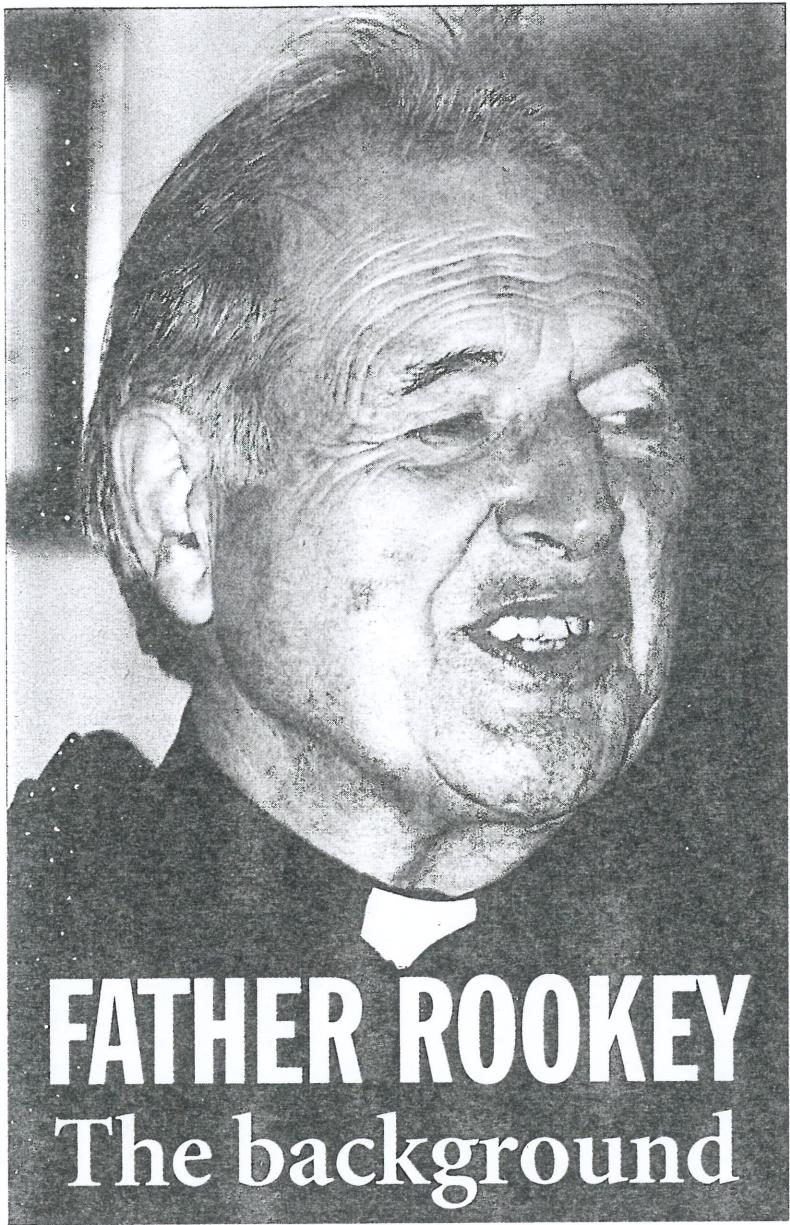
Sister Faustina, born Helen Kovalska, was a Polish mystic who died of tuberculosis at the age of 33 in 1938. She set her visionary experiences down in six volumes of journals which were investigated in 1978 by a priest who 10 months later was invested as Pope John Paul II. So great is the Pope's interest in Sister Faustina that after he was shot in 1981 her journals were the first things he wanted to read during his convalescence.

Time for Mercy received the 1995 Gold Camera Award of the US International Film and Video Festival and was a finalist at the 1995 WorldFest, Houston, the world's largest film and video competition.

Time for Mercy

Produced by
Marian Communications
Directed by Drew J. Mariani
Price: \$20.00 (UKE12.99)





FATHER ROOKEY The background

Healing entered Peter Rookey's life early – in the most dramatic way possible. At the age of eight, he picked up a huge firecracker discarded in the street and blew on the smouldering fuse. It exploded and blinded him.

"I was blind only for a comparatively short time but when you're blind it seems like eternity," Father Rookey remembers seventy years later. "You can't see. Everything is dark. It must have been less than a year. The doctors couldn't do anything with my eyes. I was healed gradually, only with prayer. My mother especially. She's a great prayer . . . the rosary, the family rosary. I was also good at going through devotions in church and so on besides the regular Sunday mass."

"I think the seeds of my becoming a priest were sown at that time. When you're down, you promise the moon. You know 'Lord anything but this. Please. I'll even be a priest,' sort of thing."

Father Rookey's own healing came little by little as is the case with many of the thousands of people who

now attend his services around the world. But other people are healed instantly. There's no way of telling which, if any, outcome will happen.

"The Spirit of God blows where it will," Father Rookey points out. "But in many cases I believe it's a great grace to have a gradual healing rather than an instantaneous one, in the sense that as I pray for my healing, I am enriched by my prayer. Although on the other hand the instant healing is such a powerful grace that often the person's life turns around. And then very often I have seen people who pray for the healing of others being healed of whatever illness they suffer from."

The first thing that comes to mind about Fr. Rookey is his warmth and personality, the bounce in his step as if he were 25. His friends think highly of him and often coax him away from the demands of the sick to the luxury of their country club. He invited me along. It was an oddly luxurious place for a man who takes his vow of poverty so seriously that he replaced the one upholstered chair in his room with a straight, hard-backed one.

But the country club seemed to be one of Father Rookey's comfortable, everyday haunts. Everyone stopped by the table to say hello and hung around waiting for him to play the piano for them after dinner. It was out of the ordinary for him to eat early in the evening. Usually he eats only once a day close to midnight, as he is convinced that fasting, along with prayer, sharpens his ability to transmit God's healing power. After three hours sleep, he starts praying at 5am, for two hours before mass, leaving him another hour's prayer to work in during the day.

He's been a long time with the church now. Peter Rookey left his family of 12 brothers and sisters when he was only 13 for seminary in Chicago. He was ordained in 1941 and studied at Loyola and De Paul universities in Chicago. But Peter Rookey's real work as a Roman Catholic priest started in 1948 when he went with seven priests to set up the Holy Founders of the Servites in Benburg, County Tyrone, Ireland.

He recalls: "From the first days we were there people came to be blessed and some of them came back and reported they had been cured. So the first thing you know, busloads of people were arriving and we had to have the services outdoors and that's how I got started."

Despite this success, healing ministries traditionally arouse apprehension in some parts of the Roman Catholic Church. This seemed to be the case with Father Rookey, despite the success of the ministry. "I did this work for five years in Ireland and then one day we got a telegram from Rome that I had been elected Assistant General of the Servite Order. So I packed up and had six years in Rome."

He was also requested to stop his healing services. "After I left Ireland they asked me to do every other kind of job but healing. They asked me to run an

FATHER ROOKEY

international college at the University of Lausanne. Then they asked me to do almost five years in Germany, working in Bavaria and around Dusseldorf. Then came Sweden and the Middle East."

During this time Father Rookey consulted Padre Pio, the great mystic whose own work was kept from public view by the church for decades. Padre Pio's only advice was continued obedience.

"Next they asked me to come back and be a missionary in the Ozark mountains and there were very few Catholics around, so we had a lot of territory to cover. I had a whole string of churches, over 200 miles around."

He says of his wide-ranging ministry: "I tell people I'm like manure. I'm spread around all over the world but if you don't spread it around, the crops don't grow." One of the great joys of Father Rookey's life was being asked in 1991 to take up his healing ministry again in Chicago where he was ordained.

These days he travels the world holding healing services, work made more effective and enjoyable by the seven languages he's learned along the way. And it is all run from a simple office in Olympia Fields in South Chicago. He's been a priest for a long time now and has helped heal people all over the globe, from all walks of life, and has tens of thousands at his services,

but he still chooses to lead a simple life – no fancy clothes, just his habits, daily fasting and at least three hours prayer a day. He doesn't need anything else.

Fr Peter Rookey can be contacted at International Compassion Ministry, Room 309, 20180 Governor's Highway, Olympia Fields, Illinois 60461-1067. FAX: 708 481 1929.

■ **Father Peter Rookey: Man of Miracles** by Heather Parsons (Robert Andrew Press, Dublin) £5.

Worshippers "resting in the spirit" at one of Fr Rookey's Chicago healing services. This alarming-looking phenomenon is invariably later described by those who experience it as peaceful.



Child Abuse and Neglect A Real National Disaster

It isn't automobile accidents, gunfire in the streets, residential fires, floods or other natural disasters that are

killing America's children, it's abusive and negligent behavior that is doing the most harm to youth. In 1994 over 1,036,000 children were confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect. And these are just the cases that came to the attention of social welfare professionals and the media. Many were child fatalities. Most were under the age of four.

The Children's Division of the American Humane Association is the nation's oldest agency dedicated to the protection of children. From our earliest activities to promote child labor laws, to our daily operation of the National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, a toll-free information and referral service for child welfare professional agencies and private citizens, the American Humane Association has been battling the tragedy of child maltreatment.

We can't do it alone. We need your help! Please call 800-227-4645 or mail your contribution today.

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