CODOFIL Program Beneficial To Tunisian Students

By Fay W. Bowen
Women's News Writer

Tunisia is not the most likely place most people think of when the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana is mentioned. Especially because CODOFIL is synonymous with the rich Catholic heritage of Louisiana,援助.

Three women who work with Tunisian-CODOFIL exchange students in Lafayette recently with James Domengeaux, CODOFIL chairman, and spoke to the Advertiser about the program.

Mrs. Patricia Payne, director of the American Mideast Education and Training Service in Tunisia (AMIDEAST), made the first overtures to CODOFIL in 1975. "Before a Tunisian can get a certificate to teach English, he or she must spend some time in an English speaking country," she says. "When I heard about the CODOFIL program, I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity for the student teachers."

In 1977, seven Tunisian intern teachers from the University of Tunisia were brought by CODOFIL to be French assistants in Lafayette schools.

According to Mrs. Payne, the students are nominated by the Ministry of Education through the University and chosen in collaboration with the government and the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs.

After the selections are made, families must be found to house the visitors. This task belongs to Sister Mary Grace Danos of Mt. Carmel Academy in New Orleans. She works with the host school in selecting the families. "Many families want to do this for the school. Others who have traveled in foreign countries know the difficulties they have experienced and want to spare another person," she explains. A widow or a divorced person may want to host a student for company, she adds.

New Orleans has had no difficulty in placing the students, but according to Domengeaux, Lafayette parish has presented a problem. "Despite the wonderful Southwestern Louisiana hospitality, none of the Tunisian students have ever been placed in the Diocese of Lafayette," he says.

Since 1977, two groups have come to Louisiana and 13 students will participate in next year's school session. They will teach in New Orleans, Houma, Lafourche, Algiers and Metairie.

Mrs. Payne feels the program is unique because it involves not only school-related experiences but a complete cultural exchange. "Each student lives with a family as a member of the family and becomes immersed in community and family experiences," she said.

Once the students leave Tunisia and arrive in New Orleans, Sister Mary Grace supervises them and helps them to adjust. She also believes the program has been successful. "Besides bringing the French language and a love of the language to elementary students, the interns have gotten involved in the community," she says. "Outside of school, some of the students have created neighborhood night classes for adults."

Sr. Mary Grace feels the program has produced some unexpected benefits for the students. "They come here with a concept of Americans that they have seen in the movies," she says, but they are a much more realistic idea. "Another advantage has been their opportunity to travel. She says they have visited the West, Walt Disney World and Washington, D.C.

The students are also given the chance to attend high school or college classes they might have otherwise missed. "But", says Sr. Mary Grace "one of the biggest bonuses they can receive in this country is their driver's license. Very few people in Tunisia have cars or driver's licenses, so this can really mean a great deal."

Despite the potential, there have been no problems with the Moslem students teaching in Catholic schools. There have, however, been a few surprises. "Many students are surprised that Catholics are such a practice..."