Priest calls for new social structure

By Rebecca Stingley

The problems in El Salvador were not inspired by Fidel Castro or caused by the Soviet Union, according to an exiled Salvadoran priest.

Herman Montoya spoke to a group of UNL students Tuesday night as part of the University Program Council's International Peace Symposium.

Montoya said the real struggle in his country is a result of the misery imposed upon the peasants by the ruling oligarchy and is supported by U.S. tax dollars.

He spoke about the land ownership reforms that came about when the nations of Central America became independent of the Spanish Crown in 1821. The history of land ownership in El Salvador provides a basis for the struggle of the peasant people today, Montoya said.

At the turn of the 19th century, 2 percent of the population of El Salvador owned 60 percent of the land, Montoya said. "The El Salvadorans are descendants of the Maya Indians who lived for the land," he said. "When the land was taken away from them, the repression in El Salvador began."

Montoya spoke about the peaceful means used by the landless people to rebel against the oligarchy during the 19th century.

Having no land "was a miserable reality for people who used to work and strive for life through the land. So in 1932, the people revolted and tried to establish a new democratic government. This was the beginning of the end of the repressive state in El Salvador," Montoya said.

The people of El Salvador began to form political parties, emulating those of the United States and elections were held every five years. But candidates of the military official party were always elected, even though they were in the minority, and elections were rigged by descendants of oligarchical families, Montoya said.

"In 1977, the people formed a mass organization and went to the streets to protest. What did they get? Bullets. And they said democracy is not our cup of tea. We must try another way," he said.

Today, the people of El Salvador are demanding their human rights to education, medical attention and housing. In 1968, the Latin bishops of the Catholic Church, once supporters of the military dictatorship, spoke out for peace and justice, saying, "The existing structure of violence calls for urgent, reaching and innovative changes in the government of El Salvador.

Montoya said, "The fundamental right to revolt is affirmed by the blood of American and French revolutions. A complete change in the structure of society is needed in El Salvador. All peaceful means have been closed to us; thus, the use of violence is necessary to end the violence. The El Salvadoran people will not stop fighting."

Betty Williams, recipient of the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize, will speak about the violence in Northern Ireland tonight at 7 in the union Centennial Room.

Banquet date is set

The Nebraska/Iowa chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers will have its annual awards banquet at the Happy Hollow Club Nov. 13 at 7:30 p.m.

The winner of the 1982 Designer of Distinction Award will be announced at the banquet.

Reservations for the dinner can be made by phoning David Rice of Lincoln ASID chapter at 556-7050.