

"Poverty with Dignity"

The Missionary Journey of Father Martin Chambers



The journey continues...

- What is happening on the Missions
- The concrete floor of the church is finished.
- More building work at the School.
- The poor are grateful for the Jimmy Johnstone tops.
- Fundraising events that I will be attending
- Gift - not one but two dogs.



Visiting family with new born baby named 'Bismark Martin'

Welcome

It is always a pleasure to bring you, my family and friends, up to date with what is happening on the Missions of Nueva Prosperina, Guayaquil. Indeed, since every day brings you a novelty, it is difficult to fit everything in.

Church Building

Of course, the main event without question that I have to report on is the building of our Parish Church and hall. When I last wrote we had barely started work on the project but now I can say that we are well advanced. As I mentioned in the last epistle, the building on the steep hillside will be of two storeys: the lower floor (accessed from the side street) will have five meeting rooms and a large hall; and the upper floor (accessed from the main street) will be the Parish Church. Work has been steady and indeed, every day when I visit the worksite some new aspect has been added. Normally there are eight workers on-site and I am amazed to see that not one ever seems to be slacking; not that I am a slave driver but it is just impressive. At present they have just finished laying the concrete floor of the Church and are building the pillars so that the Church roof can be added. Every day I have enjoyed visiting the site and have climbed ladders at every step although I

This present edition brings you from Easter to the present moment - July, when I am gearing up to come home to Scotland for my annual preaching assignments to raise funds for the St. James' Society.

have to confess to be quite scared on various occasions - it's Ecuador and there are no hard hats or protective gear on hand!

It is certainly going to be a massive building and will dominate the skyline of this poor sector. So far over half of the money needed has been pledged but more is needed and I shall be calling on friend and foe alike to dig deep to help complete what will be a tremendous gift from the people of Scotland.

Basically we need money to buy:

- Benches at £30 each.
- Plastic Chairs for the hall - £300.
- Altar and lectern - £1,500
- Church Roof - £2,500

If you can think of novel ways of raising these funds or indeed, if you want to donate, please let me know!

Our Parish School

As if one building site was not enough... we are now continuing to build at the Parish School. Since last I wrote to you, we have inaugurated the new classrooms and the School Chapel. The inauguration itself was a tremendous affair with the Archbishop once again visiting us with his entourage of donors from the U.S.A. These donors had donated the most money to the project but I would say that over a third of the school building has been funded from Scotland. So, we have started a new year (April) with these new classrooms

and a classic-looking chapel (we also use the chapel for a new Saturday Catechism Mass which is always packed). Having said that, with these new buildings the school building programme was only half finished and it was with great excitement that I received from a donor in England enough money to start the next phase. So we are well under way with building three more classrooms (to take us up to nine brick built classes, leaving five classrooms of bamboo housing 250 pupils). We will also be laying a patio / playground to replace the dust / dirty area outside.

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Our Parish School (continued)

It is absolutely incredible to remember what the school was like two years ago when I came here at first, but with your help, donations and encouragement, we have advanced with the school building and the children and staff are very grateful for all the help received. Every time a guest comes out from back home, they want to put on a party!!!

Jimmy Johnstone & The Celtic Tops

Obviously being far away from Scotland means that I miss out on a lot of the events back home, but the Internet is brilliant in keeping up to date. I was therefore able to keep track of the sad days at Celtic Park following the death of the 'greatest Celt ever' - Jimmy Johnstone. It was tremendous to see the moving tributes, read about the Funeral Mass and processions. As usual at such events, fans came to the football park to lay their own tributes; and in this case, they left loads of signed Celtic tops in tribute to Jimmy. After the funeral was over, Celtic themselves then had a problem - what to do with all these tops. This is where my good friend Joe Bradley came in... he made enquiries and said that he knew a Missionary Priest who could use them. And so,

Nueva Prosperina is the proud inheritor of six boxes of Celtic tops - of all shapes and sizes. I have been giving them out in all sorts of ways to children and to adults; sometimes as prizes and sometimes simply to individual groups. Of course people wear football tops here not because they support a certain club but because it is an article of clothing. And so, when I see catechists going up to do the readings or teachers giving classes with a Celtic top on, it is not because they have been converted to the Hoops but because they are poor and they want to wear good quality clothes. I am not sure if the people giving tribute to Jimmy Johnstone meant this to happen, but the poor people here are very grateful.



With friends outside chapel after watching Ecuador beating Costa Rica.

Spotted –Celtic shirt

Living with Poverty

Of course, behind all these projects there are plenty of real people all around with real poverty problems. Let me tell you about four poverty issues I came up with recently:

Granny Angelita

She is always at my back after every Mass in Nueva Prosperina. She is extremely poor, living as she does with her three children and her grandchildren in a rickety bamboo hut. Her speciality (which drives me crazy) is that, instead of asking for money herself, she sends her six and seven year old grandchildren to ask. I had had enough of that line of attack and said that I would help her if we could come up with a plan to set up a wee industry or shop from her house. She is presently trying that out and I hope that by helping herself, she will lift herself out of poverty with a bit of dignity.

David - 3rd year pupil

David is a 3rd year pupil at the local San Ignacio Secondary School and lives nearby. He came about two months ago saying that he needed old

newspapers for a school project. I helped him out but he has been coming back once or twice a week since then asking for more papers. Either he has a very long school project or he is selling the papers for money to help his family. If it's the first option, then I hope he succeeds; if it's the second, then I hope his family get food and clothes.

Gustavo - 1st year pupil

Amongst all the Celtic tops that were given out was a cracking almost brand new Celtic tracksuit top that was the envy of the young family members back home. When Gustavo (1st year pupil at our Parish School) received it he was proud as punch and wore it with pride. Part of me wanted to pull him aside and tell him that it cost around £80 but discretion took over. In any case, I saw him wear it for several weeks and then last week I saw him without it and asked him how the top was; he became very embarrassed and said that he had sold it... I think Jimmy Johnstone would be very proud that, even in his death, he is helping the poor and needy.

Georgina

The story of Georgina is a sad one to tell... I have mentioned her before as she was one of the women we were able to help during the heavy rains --if you remember, she lived on her own with few family members to help her, while the water was constantly flowing through the mud floor of her bamboo house. I used to visit her at least once a month but at Easter time I noticed that she wasn't there and I asked if anyone knew anything. She had been taken to the Luiz Vernaza Hospital in the city centre. Her family eventually called on me and we went in to visit her as they felt she was nearing her final days. So I went on Saturday night to the hospital. When we arrived, only I was allowed in while the family had to wait outside. You would not believe what I saw - what was a supposed hospital: the waiting area inside the front door had no seats with people (myself included) sitting on the floor waiting and hoping to be attended; there were people in the midst of operations being left on metal beds while other 'more urgent' cases were attended to: and, of course, there

Living with Poverty (continued)

was the constant swinging of the entrance doors, as emergency cases came in (often followed by police escorts) people whose arms, heads and legs were dripping in blood. This was not a hospital, I thought, but a disaster zone.

Of course I was there to see Georgina, my friend, but I couldn't get in to see her as the doctors were working on other patients in the squashed-up ward. Eventually, after three hours of waiting, I was allowed in and was able to say some prayers over Georgina; she did not respond and I knew this was the last time I would see her. I could not help thinking that

Fund-raising

I am very conscious of the privilege it is for me to live in these poor areas, not because I like living in dirty muddy areas, but because it brings me into contact with a people full of hope. It also allows me to see close up how generous the people of Scotland and England are to people in missionary areas who are in real need. Your generosity over two years has been astounding and has allowed us to advance to where we are today. The following projects have achieved with your financial help:

- acquire land for the Church and chapel house;
- acquire land for the school;
- build the chapel house;
- build the Church;
- build the hall;
- build the classrooms
- pay many school fees;
- build a soup kitchen;
- provide a daily meal for 150 of the most needy kids;
- help the old and infirm with housing;
- support catechetical programmes;
- and many more projects.

So, I would like to thank you all for your extreme generosity. And I would like to thank my immediate family and friends for being such a source of strength to me and an encouragement. They do a load of work behind the scenes.

However, can I take this opportunity to remind you of two events that are taking place in Scotland in the near future at which I will be present:

I had seen here: Georgina living in poverty and dying in poverty.

I give you these four small stories to show that behind all the projects there are real people with real poor stories to tell. That is the reason why I am here as a missionary: not just to give financial and material help where I can (with your help) but simply to walk with people, share their poor stories and indeed, learn from their simplicity, honesty and dignity.



Claire & Francis visiting various communities



Outside Bamboo School Huts



Inside school bamboo huts



Soup Kitchen



With my dogs - 'Scottie & Lucky'

"I give you these four stories to show that behind all the projects there are real people with real poor stories to tell."



On Eucharistic Walk

Cheques made payable
to Fr. Martin Chambers

My e-mail address:
mhartino2004@yahoo.co.uk

Martin Chambers
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Parish Fiesta

All is not doom and gloom out here on the Missions - far from it! And, since it is a Latin American country, we know how to enjoy ourselves, even if there are not the abundant resources of elsewhere.

One such event that I was able to start last year and continued this year is our Parish Fiesta. Since our Parish is dedicated to the 'Precious Blood of Christ', I have taken as our Fiesta day, the feast of 'Corpus Christi'. However, there was a problem that year as that feast fell on Father's Day, so I was forced to move it into July. We had a great time with loads of events taking place: we had a football competition for the young kids with the now inevitable Jimmy Johnstone Celtic tops as prizes;

Eucharistic Walk through the Sector with yours truly carrying a heavy Monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament all the way for three hours - for me there was a tremendous sense of Christ walking with the poor and needy; Parish Novena where every chapel gathered for nine nights in preparation for the big day; Parish Fiesta itself where we cancelled our Sunday schedule to gather in a nearby retreat centre / park with over 700 people of all ages to pray; celebrate Mass; hear talks; present dances and play on the swings (I took part in ALL activities). This is a great occasion for me to come close to the people and to really share their lives and I thank God for the Fiesta.

World Cup

You'll be aware that one of the big events of recent months has been the football World Cup in Germany. In the wider world, there were not many high expectations for Ecuador, my adopted country. However, there was great excitement here and I even had two Ecuador tops before the event started. So I decided that it would be a good idea to gather the people together in our Parish Chapel, set up a wide screen telly (we projected the match through the telly and computer onto the wall) and watch the game together. Would

you believe it - victory against Poland and then Costa Rica (with some cracking goals!) This meant that we were already through to the second stage before we had even met



Germany! A poor result against the hosts meant that we were then to be pitted against the Auld Enemy - England! Alas for Ecuador it was not to be and, had it not been for one of those brilliant free kicks from David Beckham, we would have gone further.

But for me, the whole event was made marvellous by setting up the chapel as a temporary football stadium, people packed in, food on the go at half time, faces getting painted and crowds going mad at the goals!

And Finally...

Well, this slot in the news is normally reserved for some unusual item. And, for those of you who have known me over many years, you will be aware of the fact that I don't really like dogs. Well, that was until recently when Jose, who looks after the house here, insisted that a godmother of one of his children wanted to give me a gift of a dog. I certainly was hesitant and maybe even fearful. I kept asking Jose if

it was ferocious (which I didn't want) and he kept saying 'yes' (presuming, I think, that I wanted something strong to protect the house). In any case, the fateful day came when I went to pick up the dog - only to find that my donor had given me two dogs!!! Unsure of what the future held, I brought them home and called them 'Scottie' for obvious reasons and 'Lucky' since they were abandoned street dogs. After several weeks, they seem very much at home; and I have to say that I must have got very used to them as I can now be seen late at night walking them through the sector.

Newsletter

If you know of anyone who would wish to receive a copy of the newsletter, please let my sister Claire know:

Claire Diamond
9 Howat Crescent
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Charity Account

If anyone wishes to make a donation to the special projects, you can deposit money into the Charity Account by sending a cheque made payable to Fr. Martin Chambers, to my sister.

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