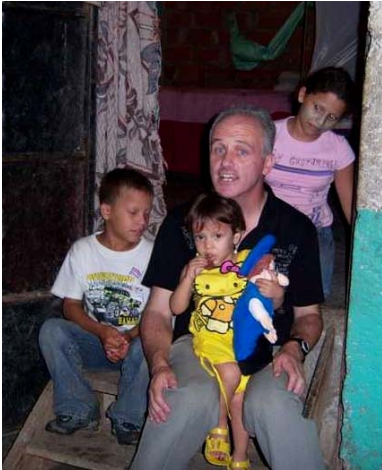




# "Dignity Restored"

*A newsletter from Guayaquil, Ecuador on the Missionary Journey of Fr. Martin Chambers*

*The journey continues....*



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## Inspiring People all Around

The best thing about being out here on the Missions is the people - I can say that without a doubt! To meet people day in and day out who live in abject poverty, but who struggle onwards for their own sake and for that of their families is just a privilege. I could give loads of examples of inspiring people, but let me give you just one ...

Carmen and Edgar are young parents who live with their five children, not far from the Church (just opposite where I had my flat when I first moved to Nueva Prosperina). They are young parents and when you visit their humble house, it is a lively place - three sons and two daughters, the youngest of whom, Lady, is just after celebrating her 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday. They live a poor existence: a very basic house that they are trying to turn from bamboo into a brick house. Their kids are often off school because they, like so many, cannot afford the basic school fees of £5. Both Carmen and Edgar are Parish Catechists and always helpful for whatever is going on in the Church; their son is an altar server.

One problem that the family had to face recently is that Edgar ended up in jail. It wasn't for anything he did himself, but because the taxi firm that he is a driver for had failed to pay its fees and the police choose two workers to make an example of - Edgar was one of them. I visited him in jail, it was a terrible experience and scary; like the hospitals here, the state jails are hovels! In jail the only food they get is that which the family bring in, if your family don't come, you don't get food.

Eventually, through financial help from all sorts of people, he gained his freedom and was released from jail to home. For me, this was an exemplary spirit of the people here - poor, yes, but never with the heads bowed low in shame. In the midst of their poverty, they never stop being enthusiastic for life. If there's ever a plan afoot in the Parish or the community at large, they and their kids are involved. More than anything, they remind me that our plans and projects for the Parish are important, but what is more important is to help the people themselves, restore some of their lost dignity.

## The Big Trip to Scotland

Of course, the big event since I last wrote, was our very enjoyable and successful exchange trip to Scotland. And I want to start off by thanking so many people in St. John's Parish, Stevenston, Ayrshire and in Lanarkshire, who came together to give our Ecuadorian friends 'the trip of a lifetime'. Everywhere we went people gave of their time, their talents as well as their possessions, so that the young people would not want for anything. Our *strong team* - Adela, Freddy, Carol, Flor, Sonia, Lucy, Isabel, Manuel, Andres, Jose Carlos and Andres, enjoyed the community project at Eglinton Park,

Kilwinning, the budding scheme at St. Matthew's Academy in Saltcoats, the concerts, the school visits and the Masses. But more than anything, they enjoyed just being with some newfound Scots friends. You made them truly welcome and they will never forget your great kindness. Of course, for me, it wasn't just the trip it was the process of getting to know them beforehand. I had to visit their families, organise various get-to-know-you events, and make a trip to Quito to obtain our UK

entry visas. We also made a video, which we showed in Scotland, showing what life is like in Nueva Prosperina. Here are some of the classic phrases that I will never forget:





## The Big Trip to Scotland (cont'd)

*Manuel proclaimed on the day he was chosen to go to Scotland - "I could never go, I'm scared of flying"... He forgot his passport and thanks to KLM he got on the flight the next day. He flew across the world on his own - well done Manuel!*

**Manuel:** *"Yes, we're poor, but being poor doesn't mean hanging your head in shame, it's about going forward with hope."*

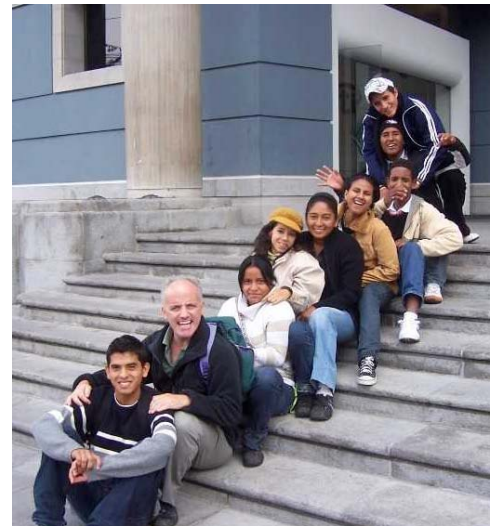
**Sonia:** *"I want to go to Uni as a way of saying thanks to my parents for all they have sacrificed for me in my secondary education."*

I can honestly say that, if it has been a privilege to walk with our poor brothers and sisters these last few years in Ecuador, it was an even more intense privilege to share the hope and fears of these young people during the tremendous days we were in Scotland.

Of course, at the very start of the trip, there was one big surreal moment... the one that comes to mind concerns Manuel on the day of our departure from Guayaquil heading to Scotland. By this stage, we had all got to know one another and had prepared so much together. The big day arrived, and we were all up at 4am in the new Parish hall to have breakfast and say our farewells. Manuel wasn't there, so we had to go to his house and find out what the problem was. He eventually arrived in a rush saying that he had an argument with

some family member. But in any case, he was there and ready to go... not quite. With 40 minutes to go in the airport, he approached me to say that in the rush, he had left a bag back home, which had his passport in it. What????? I calmly told him that if he could get his passport, he could come with us. If he couldn't, he wouldn't travel. Sadly he never made it.... But thanks to KLM they managed to get him on the flight the next day. So, for the guy who proclaimed to me on the day he was chosen that he could never go because he was scared of flying, he flew across the other side of the world, and negotiated his way around unknown airports, all on his own. Well done Manuel!

Once again, thanks to everyone who gave so generously to make our dream come true!



## School Building

For the last few months the school has resembled a building site, but, hey, for all its 5 years existence, it has been like that. Since last October when Ian, Michael and Jamie were out, the architect's team has been working day in and day out. The first plan was to build 6 new classrooms at the far end of the school on a 2-storey building. However, half way through the project, we received two great donations, one from 2 Hands Charity and the other from the Rope Foundation. These allowed us to continue with the project and to add 2 more classrooms. And, in the end, we built 8 new classrooms, 2 new toilet blocks

(if you remember the leaky toilets from last year), a staff room and a new office.

So, it was with great pride last week that we inaugurated the new school building (school year runs from April - January). The actual date of the inauguration coincided with the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school and it was amazing to think how much we had advanced in those years: in building, yes, because we have 17 brick classrooms and no bamboo huts; but also, in numbers, for we started with 350 and now have 750 going all the way to the Scottish equivalent of 4<sup>th</sup> year of secondary education. There was a Scottish flag flying beside the Ecuadorian flag and it

was terrific to remember all the great sacrifices people have made back home so that our kids here can get education, which surely is their way to a better life.

And so, you may ask, what are our plans for the school. Well, over the next 2 years, we will take in more pupils allowing the school to run to the end of secondary education - this will mean at least 3 new classrooms, but also, perhaps, more space for the likes of a computer base etc. The playground, outside the new building is only dirt, so that needs to be made safe and clean. Finally, since we have moved the Soup Kitchen into a temporary building as we needed the classrooms this year, we will need to build something more permanent, therefore, there's plenty to be done here!



## One Building Site Closes & Another Opens

People have been so generous back home and so enthusiastic to help our poorer Ecuadorian friends that we have, this month, been able to start building 2 small chapels in outlying areas of the Parish. To give you an idea, the Church in our Parish is really the only community organisation. So, our bamboo chapels have really become what we would call community centres. This time, as well as making safe and secure these 2 chapels, we are adding on some rooms that can be used for Catechism or for whatever community activity. For those who have been here, the 2 areas that are getting new chapels are Maestro and la Paz - these are the 2 poorest areas where the kids come to Sunday Mass with no shoes and where even their 'Sunday best' is a torn t-shirt. I love going to these areas as much as I can, just to keep myself grounded and I hope that these buildings



*Children from the Nursery*

will do something for the spirit of the community to help lift themselves out of poverty.

The building of these 2 chapels, which starts now and will last until June.

## Holy Week & Easter

With the participation of so many people now in our Parish Church and Chapels, Holy Week was always going to be special. We got off to a flying start on Palm Sunday with a procession through San Ignacio sector with me on a donkey. Yip, I was a wee bit nervous as the donkey kept jolting to one side and then the other. However, after a wee while, I managed to calm the donkey down and we did the whole procession: hymns, readings and prayers before Mass began. Later in the week, there was youth conference for the 3 days of the Triduum, as well as the Holy Thursday 'Washing of the Feet' Mass and the Good Friday procession. The Youth Group acted out the Stations of the Cross. But, for me, the highlight of the week was the all-night Easter Vigil. We started at midnight and went all the way through till 7am with the participation of 300 or more

Parishioners. We had the Easter bonfire complete with fireworks, followed by the procession with the Paschal candle. I had split up the whole Mass and had each Chapel and community acting out readings and prepared reflections.

What amazed me throughout is the lively faith and the enthusiasm of everybody in wanting to share their faith with those around us. Even after the whole thing was finished, when most people were heading home for a well-earned rest, there was a tight group that didn't want to leave the Church, they simply wanted to sing and sing and sing!



*We got off to a flying start on Palm Sunday, with a procession through San Ignacio sector with me on a donkey!*

## Heavy Rains

This year, the 'rainy season' has been particularly bad. It was almost uncanny that on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January this year, the rain started and there was torrential rain every day until after Easter. Whole streets were wiped away. One of our Parish Catechists, Leonor, had the back end of her house washed away in the

rain, thankfully no-one was hurt, but she definitely will need help in getting her basic house back into decent shape. Throughout the country, many communities were devastated. The worst story I heard was from one of our own Priests, Liam Reilly, who works up in a remote mountain community and was

on daily duty to help the needy. One day he pulled a 72 year old man out of the mud - he had died in a landslide. And, since there was no police for miles, the community got together and gave him a dignified funeral and send-off. Thankfully, the rains have stopped and the government and local organisations can only now start to repair the damage.



Cheques made  
payable to the Martin  
Chamber Ecuador  
Trust

My e-mail address:  
[Mhartino2004@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Mhartino2004@yahoo.co.uk)

Martin Chambers  
Casilla 09 - 01 - 5825  
GUAYAQUIL  
Ecuador  
South America



## Soup Kitchen

Since we are just starting up the new school year, it also means we are starting the Soup Kitchen. This is a great service that we can provide due to the generosity of so many people back home. Each day, we give a meal to 150 poorest children at our school, these are kids who, with their parents looking out for work, would be going home to an empty house and an empty stomach. They receive a bowl of home-made soup, a plate rice and beans and a cup of fruit juice.

This year we needed to move the Soup Kitchen to another room (we needed to use that area for a classroom) but it still will be able to serve the needs of the kids and their Priest who eats there at least once a week.

Thanks for your great kindness in helping the poor get a daily meal!

## Thank-You

As I go through my missionary journey here, I realise that we have been able to do a lot of good work that will benefit the community here for many years to come. You have been great in generosity and for this I thank you deeply. You help kids get an education; you build a sports facility; you built a school and some Chapels; you provide food for our Soup Kitchen and for the needy that come to the door; and you helped in a great way with the Scotland trip.

You are instruments of God's love to the poor and needy!

## Internet

You can keep up to date with all my goings-on by logging into my website:

[www.ecuadortrust.il2.com](http://www.ecuadortrust.il2.com).



## And Finally...

### 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  
IRVINE  
KA12 0LQ

### 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.

### Contact Details

I can receive post at a local P.O. Box:

Martin Chambers  
Casilla 09-01-5825  
GUAYAQUIL  
Ecuador

You can also contact me by e-mail:  
[mhartino2004@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mhartino2004@yahoo.co.uk)

Well, I can tell you happily that our new football pitch called 'Parque Paraiso' has now been inaugurated. Ever since I have been here, the people who run the community sand pitch beside our Parish school have been asking for help in doing it up. In my early days here, there were no funds available, but, with help this year from the Celtic Charity Fund, added to donations from friends and family, we were able to get the funds together to lay a concrete all-weather pitch. There were problems in the construction process because of the rains, but eventually it was opened with the participation of the whole community in March. That day I did a blessing and played in the first football game, unfortunately, I think I caused one goal in our side's defeat. However, 3 weeks later I redeemed myself by being part of our Parish's victorious team that won the first inter-

parish 5-a-side competition!

Any time I now pass the pitch there are always people playing on it. And, that is the fantastic thing - the community pitch used by all, young and old!

