



"Poverty with Dignity"

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

The journey continues....



Welcome

As the end of the Scottish summer holidays approaches and the sun tan wears off, greetings from a daily hot and humid Guayaquil and our shanty parish of Nueva Prosperina. Can I start off by saying a huge word of **'thanks'** to all of you who have been so generous with your time, your energies and your cash. What you have given has truly been of benefit to the people of this poor area; they will never forget the generosity of so many Scots!

When I started this missionary journey over three years ago, I never imagined that there would have been so many projects on the go and I never thought that I would be so strongly supported by so many people. What you read in this newsletter is the fruits of your kindness and your hard work in so many charity nights. As we around these parts say **"Muchisimas gracias"**!



Opening of the Parish Church

10th June 2007 is a day I will never forget - the day we opened our Parish Church of the **"Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ"**. After a relatively short period of fourteen months and the hard slog of our architect and his team of workers, Bishop Anibal Nietos Guerra, Auxiliary Bishop of Guayaquil, opened the two-storey building. He was assisted in the Consecration of the Church by our own Bishop Ian Murray of Argyll and the Isles who had traveled out from Scotland along with Canon Donald MacKay, to take part in the celebrations. It was a fantastic day and a superb celebration, which included many interesting features that you don't normally have in every Mass: the formal handing-over, in front of a locked Church, of the Parish keys; the cutting of the ribbon, done by David, one of our disabled parishioners; the sprinkling of the walls and people with Holy Water; the Prayer of Consecration; the lighting of many candles around the altar and the anointing of the altar with oil of Chrism. On top of that, there were unique flags of Ecuador and Scotland, symbolising the unique bond that now exists between the people of our two countries.

The Church building is of two storeys with the main Church being accessed through a decorative park area from the main street. It has an outside grotto, inside seating for 550 (some of whom will sit in the choir loft), a separate Blessed Sacrament altar, and yet there is still a sense of spaciousness. One of my difficulties in the first few days and Masses after the inauguration was me thinking of it no longer being a building site; but that feeling has passed with the pleasant sight of so many people coming to each Mass. In the steep incline of the hillside we have a lower floor which houses a large hall suitable for Parish meetings and parties, plus seven meeting rooms, a Parish office and some toilets.

Since the day of opening, we have been using all parts to great effect and this has been a real pleasure to see that the building actually does fulfil a great need within the Parish and the wider community. There are two community groups using the halls several days during the week: the Parish youth group meets every Sunday and we have split our Saturday Catechism classes due to numbers and room availability.

In this Issue:

Welcome	1
Opening of the Parish Church	1
Fiesta Time	2
So, What's Next, Padrecito?	2
"Mi Casa es tu Casa"	2
'Shining Star'	3
Our Parish School	3
Soup Kitchen	3
And we are always expanding	4
And Finally...	4





Opening of the Parish Church

Bishop Anibal Nietos Guerra, Auxilliary Bishop of Guayaquil opened the 2-storey building, with Bishop Ian Murray of Argyll and the Isles and Fr. Donald MacKay taking part in our celebrations.



First steps for nursery build

Apart from these regular uses we have also had two grand occasions: firstly a large baptism ceremony with 62 people (young and old) being baptised; a week later a large wedding for 4 couples who had been preparing through our Marriage Programme. Since these were the 'first' we went downstairs to the halls afterwards for celebration cake and party.

Fiesta Time

In preparation for the Parish Inauguration, we had several events. The first of these was our Parish Novena, which I had written based on the Pope's recent letter on the Eucharist. Each night there were groups meeting in each of the eight chapels, praying together, singing and reflecting on the Scriptures. Most nights I managed to join each group and was amazed at the depth of their reflections and prayer. Constantly I am reminded that the less material goods people have, the larger their hearts are for giving. On the final night of the Novena we had a Parish Reconciliation Service along the same lines as so many services held throughout Scotland.

A few days later we had our Parish 'Eucharistic Walk' where, with the Blessed Sacrament in my hands (which were pretty sore by the end of the walk) I walked with the parishioners from one end of the Parish to the other, visiting the chapels on the way and having a short service in each. As we made our

way through the streets, past bamboo home after bamboo home, I was reminded that God walks amongst his poor people, and He is truly present here.



On the day of the Opening



Eucharistic Walk

"So, What's Next, Padrecito?"

This is what the people were asking me almost as soon as the Parish Church was inaugurated. And, although it may have been good to have a wee rest from so much dust and bricks, needs must. And the building programme continued! After 3 weeks rest, the architect and his team turned up to start work on the Nursery, which is being built on the lower platform

beside my house. Basically the Nursery, which presently operates out of a large room in the Parish school is too small for the children's needs and also takes up valuable space from the school itself. By moving it up the street, we gain space for two more classrooms in the school, and, more importantly, are able to offer the Nursery more than double the space. This, of course, means they will be able to double their numbers when the project is completed in 3 months time.

"Mi Casa es tu Casa"

This phrase is widely used throughout the Spanish-speaking world and means that in any house there will be a welcome at the door. While here in this poor area, I have been very happy to welcome as many people who wish to come out and visit. Recently, I have had 3 groups of friends who, like all guests, have added

something to the community here. First came Tracy Milligan (HCPT Lourdes friend) and her friend Suzanne Bunnis who, helped paint and redecorate the school classrooms in preparation for the new school year. Then a few weeks later came Gabriel Langford (from Galloway Diocese) and his friend Edmund who were doing a gap-year project; they were able to help with a group of American students who had come down

We received £12,500 from the Allan & Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust (half the amount required to build the nursery). Can you help with the balance?

I love visiting the Nursery and seeing the kids and leaders at least once a week; it is a case of joining in with their songs and artwork, and in some cases meal times. They too come from some of the poorest homes (no running water, lack of food and clothes, parents are out during the day desperately looking for work), so this Nursery is clearly going to benefit the poorest of the poor.

to build a community centre at our Divino Nino Chapel. I was also able to welcome Bishop Ian Murray and Canon Donald MacKay who became an essential part of the celebrations around the Inauguration Mass. I love having guests out and it is tremendous to see them with our parishioners, who often invite them to visit their homes. These visits allow them to see at first hand how they cope with poverty. I will be happy to open doors further at 'Hotel Nueva Prosperina'

'Shining Star'

It is always great to see how the visitors from home are able to mix so well with the locals, often becoming firm friends. One such friend that was acquired among our visitors (in particular Tracy and Suzanne who painted the school classrooms) was the new janitor at our Parish School, Anibal. I have known Anibal as a Parish Catechist for the 3 years that I have been here, but recently I found out that he had lost his job at a local factory. I knew that he was struggling to pay for the education and medical needs of his 2 young children. So, it was fortunate that at that time we were looking for a new school janitor - he got the job. He lives near the school with his family in a cramped dwelling place that they call home. Anibal, as a young 20 year-old fitted the bill for the job of janitor perfectly. He is a happy, contented, hard-working young man. He is not untypical of many young people

here who raise families of their own at an early age, but without financial support behind them. Hopefully this job will give him the stability he needs for himself and his family.

One of the other facets to Anibal's life is that he is very involved in the work of our Parish as a catechist. Each week he prepares the First Communion Class in our Parish hall and encourages the children at our weekly catechism Mass. He pushed the bounds of enthusiasm and involvement in Parish activities even further during Holy Week when he played the part of Jesus in our acted-out Stations of the Cross on Good Friday. I am privileged to know so many people here who, like Anibal, do not let their poverty get in the way of living their faith and enjoying life to the full.



Inside the Bamboo huts



Anibal, the School Janitor



The kids dancing at the street Party after the Mass

Our Parish School

Our school, set up a year before I arrived, has expanded year on year, as a result of great demand for education. In 2003 the school roll was 350, with children fitting into 8 classrooms. Since then we have expanded steadily in terms of teachers and buildings. We now have over 600 pupils in 14 classrooms. We offer primary education and secondary up to 3rd year. Up until this year, our school day ran from 7.20am to 12.30pm, however one of our innovations this year was to open up the school in the afternoon. The reason is simple: there are many children in our area that go out each morning to work and earn a living for their desperately poor families. We knew about this situation (it is all around us) and knew that these children and their families, depending on

the Children's jobs, could not afford school fees. So, we decided to open up our school, at reduced capacity and cost in the afternoon. Two weeks after the main school started in the New Year, we opened up our afternoon primary school to around 80 pupils.

When I visit the school, whether it is morning or afternoons – they are so full of life. Having said that, one of the continuing problems in the school is that around half of the pupils are still being educated in bamboo huts. Since I am one of the music teachers (they obviously take anybody), I can tell you that these bamboo huts are good neither for teaching or learning. It is essential that we finish the school building project by adding on another 8 classrooms.

Two of these classrooms we will acquire when the Nursery moves up in the autumn to their new building. This means we need to build 6 new classrooms. For me, this will be the major project of this coming year. We all know how important education is for all of us but, when you are faced with an endless cycle of poverty and lack of opportunity, then it becomes an essential tool for the future.

Can you help to finish the parish school off, so that we can help our brothers and sisters to build their future full of hope and promise?

Soup Kitchen

This daily service to our needy children continues to be well received. 150 of the poorest children get a free meal each day: home-made soup, rice with beans or chicken and juice. The ladies who prepare and serve these meals are volunteers and each day they serve up great quality meals. I can testify to that as I eat in the school at least once a week. Of course, the idea of the soup kitchen came from

seeing the children arrive at the school without any breakfast in their bellies, knowing that they will return home without the promise of a meal since their parents are in the city until night-fall, looking for work.

Your generosity has helped to provide this great service to the needs. Can you please continue to pledge some money to provide this daily service for the needy and hungry?

...I knew that these children's families could not afford the school fees. So, we decided to open the school in the afternoons at a reduced cost.



And we are always expanding

In spite of the fact that we have just inaugurated our Parish Church, and having 8 smaller chapels, I have been aware that one area of our Parish was not being served. In Scotland you would expect people to travel to their Parish Church, here the people rely on public transport to get around. This is costly and most cannot afford it, added to that, they are often scared to leave their homes unattended at night. So, I decided to look for an opportunity of getting some land to build a small chapel. I made initial enquiries in this area called 'Reynaldo Quinones' and

was amazed to find that the leader of the sector was offering me, free of charge, a plot the size of a football pitch; I had only been looking for a small plot of land. The community was so enthused about the idea and immediately got together and organised a 'clearing the weeds' event, followed by a couple of bingos. What the long-term future holds for the plot of land, I do not know, but in the short term, we will level the land and put up a bamboo chapel so that we can have somewhere dignified to celebrate our Friday night Mass. At the moment we are out in the open air!



The whole crew hard at work clearing weeds

Cheques made payable to the Martin Chambers Ecuador Trust

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Charity Status

Don't forget that the charity 'The Martin Chambers Ecuador Trust' (Charity Registration No: SC037458) was recently set up and, if you are making a donation,

Web Site

Many of you will be aware that we now have a website up and running, which you can access at any time, thanks to the great work of Martin Kelly from St. John's Parish in Stevenston. The website has all the newsletters and Observer articles as well as other updates on the work here. You can reach the website by logging on to:

www.ecuadortrust.i12.com

you can also take out a Gift Aid Declaration, which means the work here benefits even more. If you need more information, or indeed a Declaration Form, then please apply for one through Claire. Once again many thanks for your generosity in giving.

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



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.

Contact Details

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And Finally...

One of the most recent funny moments concerned the building of the Nursery. For those who have visited us here in Guayaquil, you will know that the area where they are building the Nursery used to house our pre-fabricated chapel. When the Chapel got moved to another area of the Parish, the land was left empty. So naturally, the kids moved in to claim it as a football pitch, probably the best in the area since it was a concrete playing area. Daily I would hear the screams and shouts of a regular football game. I had always told the kids that their football there would be shorted lived; and indeed, I went down to tell them exactly when the building programme would begin. However, on the first day of the building project, with holes already in the concrete, the kids

A face to tug at a thousand heart-strings

turned up with ball in hand; obviously not aware of what was going on. They asked the architect "is Padre Martin extending our football pitch?", quickly followed by: "Those holes you've made, is he putting up proper goals?"



Football Competition

