



"Poverty with Dignity"

The Missionary Journey of Father Martin Chambers

The journey continues...

- A few projects just about ready to begin.
- Official opening of the Church on 10th June 2007.
- New build of Medical Centre and Nursery.
- School exams and graduations.
- Two youth groups and another one just about to take off.
- Alipio - a friend of mine.
- Five brides, 4 grooms...

Welcome

It is a pleasure once more to give you an insight into life here on the Missions. When I sat down to begin writing this newsletter, I thought that, since it was only a few months since I last wrote, there would be not much to report, but as ever I looked back to before Christmas and loads has happened - as one wise priest said to me recently: "It might be hard at times on the Missions, but it's never boring"! There are also a few projects just about ready to begin therefore a few pleas for help. I hope you enjoy this offering of life in Nueva Prosperina, Guayaquil.

The Building of the Parish Church

I am very happy to report that this particular building project is well on schedule and should be complete well ahead of the date of the official opening on 10th June this year. Every day I visit the site and every day there is something new: a colour scheme to choose, a stained glass window to adjust, a wall to be plastered, a fence to be erected. What has amazed me is that since the start in mid-March of last year, there has been slow and steady progress. I have never really seen anyone slacking - not that I have much experience of building sites. I do actually feel that the workers have put themselves into the whole project, whether it has been the making on-site of the Church benches or the making of a large mosaic of the Risen Christ filling the whole of the outer back wall (a wall which dominates the whole sector).

Yes, everything seems to be well on schedule for the official opening on Sunday, 10th June - that date was chosen since it is the feast of Corpus Christi (the Parish feast day). I have set up a group to organise the events throughout the whole parish; and then, on the day itself, there will be a street party very much in the Latin American style. The Archbishop of Guayaquil has agreed to do the honours and two priest friends from Scotland, Bishop Ian Murray and Fr. Donald MacKay (my rector and vice-rector from seminary days), will be present also. Of course, if anyone else wishes to join in the festivities, they would be made most welcome: as my sister always says "Mi casa es tu casa."



Me on top of the Church roof – don't tell my Mum!

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Medical Centre & Nursery

Okay, you would think that with one major building project nearing completion, it would be time to take a break. However, the needs (especially of children) in this sprawling shanty parish of over 70,000 are immense. So we have decided to aim for an expansion of the Medical Centre and the Nursery, which are at present squeezed within the parish school complex. The Nursery started three years ago with a roll of 70, but the authorities came last year and told us that we would not legally operate with unless we halved the number. Providing a new Nursery on the land beside my house, would mean we could

give the children a play area and also double the capacity. Doubling the capacity is what we hope to achieve with the building of a Medical Centre; at present medicines and treatment are dispensed out of a two-roomed building also within the school complex. If we were able to move to another site, then we could triple the amount of attention that is given. At the moment around 50 patients are seen every morning (mainly children but also the elderly) by one doctor. In a new building the number could increase and we could have more doctors.



Medical Centre & Nursery Continued

"I pray that your generosity will continue to allow these poor people to get the best start possible in life"

Of course a by-product of these two new builds would be that the school would have more room for their much needed extra classrooms.

I am fully aware that all of this is only possible because people from back

home, as well as in other parts of the world, have been very generous towards the Missions here. So far much has been achieved; I pray that your generosity will continue to allow these poor people to get the best start possible in life and also get the best medical treatment available.

Our "Holy Family of Nazareth" Parish School



Local kids outside front door of Church

At present the school is on its long holiday during the months of February and March. I am not sure, but I think this time might have been chosen to coincide with the rainy and muddy season - otherwise the children would be arriving at school each morning covered in muck. Since the last edition of the newsletter, we have moved to the final exam period and the school graduations. Exams the world over produce nerves and our parish school is no different - some pupils being allowed (by Ecuadorian law) to re-sit exams so that they move on a year once the schools restarts after the holidays. All over Ecuador the month of January brings with it the school graduation for children finishing primary education. We had our proud graduation ceremony in the shiny-bright chapel - a certain change from the previous years when we had to make do with a dusty, rocky playground. For me it was also an emotional moment to realise that some of these poor children would not have been able to graduate (or study at all) had it not been for the generosity of my Scots friends - you have made a real difference to these people's lives.

families and friends to come in and view their work. It is a great experience to see the children so enthusiastic about their education and even speaking so clearly in public about how to do maths or how to make things in science class.



Lining up in mud for ceremony



Me with the graduates

Another happy event just after Christmas was the School Art Week. During this week each year-group takes turns on each day of the week to set up stalls in the school yard displaying their work, inviting their

In general, I love going down to the school. When I first arrived, I thought the school might be a bind and take up too much of my time (the parish being much larger than just the school) and yet over the years I have come to realise that in the school I have an opening to almost 600 children and therefore so many families. The school has truly been a blessing for me. And so I ask once again, could you think about sponsoring a child for the coming academic year? You would be giving the children a chance, not just of a good education, but also, further down the line, a chance to lift themselves out of their poverty.

Each child has to pay \$10 to enrol and then follow that up each month with a fee of \$8; and, if you add in the school books and sometimes school uniform that they cannot afford, sponsoring the entire education of a child for a whole year comes to \$130 (around £75). This could be paid in its entirety or in monthly instalments. And, if you wished, you could even sponsor a named child.

means that we are able to have two youth groups in two distinct chapels - the main Chapel of 'Sangre de Cristo' as well as 'San Ignacio' - with the possibility of a third being established soon. Each of these has met with varying success; they meet, yes, but I am not so sure that they actually review the material they are supposed to. You see, different from youth groups back home, the groups here are set up so that the young people can reflect on and share life values. So one week they will be talking about 'justice', the next about 'trust' and then about 'friendship'. There is also ample

Youth Groups

Another of the great blessings of working here is that there are so many young people taking part in the activities around the school and the Church. Since it is a shanty town, where people have simply invaded the land over recent years, the population is very young. This

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opportunity for the young people to get involved in activities, for example their enthusiastic visit to the Orphanages during the Christmas period giving out various presents that they had gathered from their family and friends.

To make the groups a little better organised, I set up a 'Youth Leaders Course', the idea being that I felt these young people were intelligent and experienced enough to lead the groups themselves without having an adult having to watch over them. From each of the two youth groups I selected four leaders

On the Other Hand

Just in case you were beginning to think that everything in our shanty area is all sweetness and light amongst our young folk, we also have our fair share of problems. It is an area with no basic services; therefore, it does not have a resident police force. This means that unlawfulness becomes a way of life. Drugs, alcohol and vengeance-killings are all far too common in our lives here and I have been called out on too numerous occasions to say prayers at the side of a young person whose life has ended all too quickly. One of the interesting pastoral customs in regard to funerals here is that they rarely end up in Church (I have only had one Funeral Mass in Church in all the time I have been here). Mostly I will be called out to people's houses to say prayers for the young or old person who has died. It is obviously always a sad occasion, but, when it is mixed with abject poverty, it makes the grief so much more bitter - at least for me.

Recently I had to attend to the death of a good friend of mine, Alipio. Alipio was 71 when he died and lived right beside one of our chapels.

"A Wedding in the Offing"

One of the peculiar aspects of life on the coast of Ecuador is that not many people get married. I am not talking about Church wedding; I simply mean that not even civil weddings are common. I think the people are scared of the commitment factor. It is an aspect of life that the priests of St. James made me aware of since coming here. And as here. And as if to prove a point, I had only celebrated 6 weddings in the first 2 years of being here. Imagine then my surprise when I was told by one of the catechists (once again San Ignacio Chapel) that there were 5 couples

and they worked over 8 Saturdays using various themes that they felt could be useful in their own groups. At the end, they were officially installed and recognised as leaders in their own Chapels. At the moment they are organising a 'Youth Day' for all the young people of the parish. It promises to be a roaring success.

I thank God that I have met these young people who once again have restored my enthusiasm for such work and my confidence in young people.

His house was really a bamboo room that was leaning to one side (it only had room for a bed and a Chair). And so, with the help of my friend, Andy Hand, who visited two years ago, a proper house was bought for him. He lived there until he became ill last November when he was taken to the Luiz Vernaza Hospital in the city centre. I have mentioned that hospital before as a few of the parishioners have ended up there. It is the 'hospital of the poor' and has only the most basic of equipment and, in some cases, none. I visited Alipio there on a couple of occasions but was glad to see him returning home in January. He looked to be making a slow recovery. I visited him one night after Friday Mass, there he was lying on the wooden floor of his house with a thin mattress under him and a sheet above him. When I heard the next day that he had died, I couldn't believe it, and I thought to myself that he had been born poor, had lived a poor man's life and had died poor. Of course, with thousands of people in the shanty, Alipio's story is sadly repeated too often...

preparing for marriage. Wow! It was decided that we would have a joint celebration in their own Chapel and the date was set for the 6th January. I met with the couples during their preparation talks as well as individually and all seemed very enthusiastic to the task. On the day of the ceremony, I had set the start time for 9am, knowing that being typical Ecuadorians, they would not be on time. So on the morning of the weddings, I busied myself, amongst the flowers and hairdos, to get the Mass ready.



Some of the young people



Patients waiting outside the small Medical Centre



Nursery workers with the kids



Oso – the puppy

"Imagine then my surprise when I was told by one of the Catechists that there were five couples preparing for marriage"



And about 9.30am I decided, since we were all there, that it was time to start. Brides to the door please! Ladies and gentlemen, please be upstanding etc... WAIT!!! I had a quick head count while at the back of the Church to find that we have 5 brides, but ONLY 4 GROOMS. When I enquired where the missing groom was, I was told that he was on his way from the nightshift and that he would arrive any minute now. And true enough, there he was, getting off the bus from the nightshift. A quick change of clothes and he was ready at



the front. Of course that wasn't the only funny moment. When it came to the actual wedding vows, as is my custom, I got the couples to repeat the vows - unfortunately when I told the groom to repeat "and I promise to be faithful", he professed his undying INFIDELITY!!! After a chorus of laughter, we rectified the situation and the wedding proceeded and ended without further incident.

Cheques made payable to The Martin Chambers Ecuador Trust

My e-mail address:
Mhartino2004@yahoo.co.uk

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

The First Communion Day

I know that living on the other side of the world, things are different: even the Church year (in regards to receiving the Sacraments) is back-to-front from what it would be in Scotland. What I mean, is that we celebrate Confirmation and First Communion in December with a preparation year stretching back from April through to the big day itself. For Confirmation this year, we joined up with a couple of other Parishes and had the Bishop come out to a neighbouring Parish for the Mass. Since we have almost 150 children preparing in 5 different Chapels for their First Communion, I decided that we should have one celebration Mass and, although it was only in mid-construction, that the Mass should be in the Parish Church. So we cleared

the floor, put in as many of the home-made benches as possible and filled the Church up with over 700 family and friends. And it made for terrifically joyful Mass with everyone participating in the Liturgy and the singing. I look forward to having more of them once the Church is completed. It was also a good preparation to see how we should organise the Parish Church Inauguration in June!

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.il2.com

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, 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 ask for one through Claire, my sister. **Many thanks for your generosity in giving.**

And Finally

So, it's becoming a bit of a story this part of the newsletter. I seem to talk about nothing other than the dogs! Well, as promised, in the last bulletin, I have another dog! Pablo Ruiz, the architect who built the school, had promised a pup from his last litter. He came up with the goods just in time for Christmas; I suspect that he wants to keep in with me for possible further work. After an initial hesitation the dog's name is 'Oso' (bear) and he is a pedigree Gold Retriever. He is full of life and has become a great pal for Chiquita who had been on her own for several months. The only problem is that I now have two very enthusiastic dogs to take for a walk every night - so, as far as my parishioners are concerned it's a case of 'Gringo gets taken for draggies'. Having said that, it is a good opportunity to meet the folk as I go around the streets, even at night -time.

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 The Martin Chambers Ecuador Trust, to my sister.

Contact Details

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

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

You can also contact me by e-mail:
mhartino2004@yahoo.co.uk

Can you help with donations for the Church?

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