



"Dignity Restored"

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

The journey continues....



Welcome



For the last time, hi from a sunny and sticky Guayaquil. I say 'for the last time' because, with this newsletter, I am announcing that, now that I have concluded five years on the missions, my bishop has asked me to return home to Galloway Diocese. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time here in what has become my Latin American home. It is with very mixed feelings that I will board the plane in August for Scotland. This newsletter, therefore, is a report of what has been happening since I last wrote in March, but also a wee look back over the five years and a reflection on your generosity towards the projects here and what that has achieved.

Visitors & Work

One of the great features of the last months has been the amount of visitors from Scotland. Once I had returned from some fabulous days in Scotland celebrating the Golden Wedding of my parents, I had an almost continual procession of visitors from March until July. The interesting thing about these visitors has been their keenness to do some work while here. Duncan from East Kilbride celebrated his 50th birthday by breaking his back labouring at the school. Paul, my cousin, added to his educational C.V. by helping the English classes at the school. Then my HCPT friends, Clare and Stuart, Dave and Jen, got their arms, elbows and foreheads dirty by painting one of the school walls. After that, one of our

keen fundraisers, Joe Bradley came out with his pal Gerry and both worked down at the school - Joe in the music classes and Gerry in the Soup Kitchen. Into June came my niece Elise and her pal, Rachel - both of whom worked each day in the school teaching English and chatting with the young people at break time. And finally came my good friends, Andy and Christine, with their kids, Gerard and Christine, along with their friend, Johnny. The two Christines worked in the Nursery leading the toddlers in their activities while the men-folk took sports classes down at the school. As ever I loved having all these visitors out: with the work, they left a bit of their heart in Nueva Prosperina and the community here loved having them in their midst.

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School Finished & Other Projects

Throughout almost all of my time here on the missions, our Parish School has played an important part of my life. And it has been amazing to see the transformation of the school from the nine bamboo huts of 2004 to the 23 brick-built classrooms of 2009. In April we completed the last three classrooms to make sure that for years to come, there are decent classrooms for all levels from Kinder (pre-primary) right through to sixth year of secondary. It really is a fine school and a great testament to people's generosity back home that has allowed all of this to be built. On top of this, one of the things that make me very happy is to know

that the quality of teaching has improved as much as the fabric of the building. When I came at first, the children were squashed into row upon row of bamboo classrooms; but now, with the larger classes, there is scope for developing the style of teaching.

The building of three classrooms was not the only construction work that has taken place recently. We had to rebuild the outer wall of Maestro Chapel. As you remember, this was a chapel that was built last June, but unfortunately the rains were so heavy this year that the outer wall buckled so badly that it was in danger of falling onto the house next





School Finished... (continued)



door. So we managed to rebuild it completely and put in strengthening metal rods to make sure that it is able to withstand further landslides in years to come.

Sadly we were not able to press ahead with the building of the Medical Centre that I talked about in the previous newsletter. The economic crisis means that we will have to wait for further funds and hope that the housing charity that will run it will be able to oversee the building of it as well.

As I have said on so many occasions, none of the building over the last five years (school, Chapels, Parish Church etc) would have been possible without people back home working really hard to raise the funds. I am eternally grateful for that generous spirit. One of our catechists recently told me *"tell the people of Scotland thanks for all their buildings. They are terrific - for what they actually do is restore our pride and give us a lost dignity."*



So what will happen to the Charity now?



As I approach departure date, many Scots have been asking me what will happen to the fundraising and the charity. Will it collapse? I hope not. Yes, we have been able to do a lot through our charity events but there is still a lot to do for our poor brothers and sisters. Surely we won't abandon our friends now? In particular, I think there are three projects we can aim at for fundraising:

- raising around £500 a month to feed 100 children in our Soup Kitchen;
- raising funds for the school fees of many of the poorest children who cannot afford to go to school;
- helping to get the Medical Centre built and running.

Of course one thing that could happen is that funds dry up, but, on the other hand, more funds could start to come in as I start to tell as many people about the great needs in this and many shantys worldwide. Prepare yourselves for a new fundraising onslaught from 'yours truly'.



Holy Week & Easter

Of course, the biggest week of the Church's year is always celebrated well here in Ecuador. And in our own Parish this year we had two high spots. The first was the Good Friday procession all the way up from the city ring road to the Parish Church. As in other years, it took the form of an acted-out Stations of the Cross with the young people of the Parish taking the lead. However, this year we had Victor playing the part of Jesus. He is already involved in so many community groups for acting; and, as a result, played the part of Jesus with deep enthusiasm. I have to say I was moved to tears when I thought what the death of Jesus truly means - he brought it all to life. The second main event was the all-night Easter Vigil. It was the second year in a row we had celebrated this way and I was expecting the same numbers, but so many people turned up we had to go back into the main Church. We started at 11pm with 600 people and, while a lot of people tapered off as a result of sleep, we finished with over 300. There was a lot of enthusiastic singing to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection, acted our readings and a prayerful Offertory Procession. Those celebrations are a testament to the great faith of the people here.



Parish Fiesta

Our big event of the year is the Parish Fiesta and all the celebrations that go along with it. This year we were able to celebrate with greater numbers than in past years and with better organisation. All of the events took place in June.

The event to kick off the celebrations was the Parish Novena. It took place in the Parish Church and each night we invited a guest speaker to lead us. They all elaborated the theme that we are *'Missionary Disciples according to the mind of Jesus Christ who came that we might have life'*. And I was amazed how touched I was as I listened to each of the speakers. A great way to start the Parish celebrations.

Then we had the Eucharistic Procession as we took the Blessed Sacrament to all of the eight chapels around the Parish. Thankfully we are out of the rainy season and didn't have to negotiate muddy streets but we did have to go up hill and down dale. Throughout it all, Tito was playing the guitar and animating us in our

walking. Then, at each chapel, the catechists would lead us in prayer. It was a four hour walk in total, so not everyone stayed with us the whole journey, but I would say that at any one point we had around 250 people, young and old.

These two events were the preparation for the main event, which was the Parish Fiesta itself which took place on Sunday, 28th June. For this we took over a local retreat centre and led our parishioners in prayer, procession, dance and song. It was a bit of a headache preparing such an event for just over 1,000 people, but we got there and celebrated in style. Talking of style, 'your man' was in the kilt and did a wee small version of the Highland Fling. I enjoyed the day tremendously as everyone was in high spirits and enjoyed the surroundings. Coming from an area where there are no parks, simply to have the freedom of this retreat centre, meant that there was plenty of fresh air for them

to walk and for their kids to play football and enjoy themselves on the swing park. A true Parish Fiesta.



What will I remember most?

With so much financial help from back home, we have been able to do much building in these past five years. I will remember especially the day of the opening of the Parish Church in 2007, not just because it was the end of a massive project, but also because it meant the Church and the Gospel had finally arrived in a very clear way to Nueva Prosperina. I will also remember the various stages of setting up the school, which has made it a healthy oasis away from the cramped housing and home life. I will remember the setting up of our Soup Kitchen and the way those children, who otherwise would go home to an empty house and no meal, receive a healthy meal each day. I will remember the way each of the eight chapels was transformed to give a dignified place to celebrate their Mass as well as meeting rooms, which are used for Church groups and community events also.

But most of all I will remember the people, their simplicity, their warmth towards me and their enthusiasm with so many guests from back home. The people here have become much more than just my parishioners. In so many cases they have become true friends that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. Here are just a few of the faces I will remember:

- **Freddy** with his distinctive gravelling voice who, for me, is Mr. Nueva Prosperina. While in top year at secondary school, he started teaching at one of the local schools and then came along to our school. With determination he taught each day and then went to Uni at night and at weekends. That would have been enough for most people, but not for Freddy, who threw himself into all sorts of Parish activities: leading youth work, giving catechism classes and setting up new chapels.
- **Olga and Jaime** live over the back from the Parish Church. They are well into their 70's and are a real example of a struggle for a dignified life in the face of crippling health care costs. Back home there is so much help from the state. Here Olga and Jaime, and so many old people, have no state care and they have nothing to give themselves. How do they live? How do they get medical care? The answer to those questions is embarrassing 'they don't' they have nothing, they receive nothing and have to live from day to day

relying on handouts from family and food from neighbours.

- **Bismarck** who for me became a symbol of all the help that is needed for children throughout our area. When he was just 5 months old, he was taken to hospital with a hernia - the family could not afford medical care since they had four other children to help. They received help from Scotland, but since then, they have struggled with medical and educational needs. They started out living in a bamboo hut that was leaning to one side; over the years they have been able to change their house with metal pillars and door (Bismarck's dad is a welder). At one point, Bismarck's three sisters lived under the floorboards. People like Bismarck's family are typical of the people in this area. Life is a constant struggle in the face of so many needs.



Thank You

None of this could have been achieved without the help of people back home working so hard. The list of helpers is too exhaustive but I would like to mention two people: my sister, Claire Diamond, and the producer of these Newsletters, Bernadette Anderson. They have done so much and at times I have felt embarrassed at constantly asking them to do things in Scotland for the charity. Between them



Cheques made payable to the
Martin Chambers Ecuador
Trust

Martin's Blog

You can keep up to date with all my goings-on by logging onto my blog...
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Newsletter

Once I get settled back into life in Scotland, I will send out a newsletter so that we can keep up to date with Nueva Prosperina and the continuing work here.

Martin Chambers
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The Final Farewell

And so I come to the final farewell from Nueva Prosperina. What does the future hold? For this Parish there will be a new priest appointed immediately I am away, he is a local Diocesan priest. So I think we can take pride in the fact that we have been able to build up the Parish so quickly and hand it over in just five years. For me, I am looking forward to returning to my family and friends as well as to my Diocese of Galloway. Before I take up an October appointment, I will be preaching for the St. James' Society, then cycling from Lands End to John O'Groats

To raise money for our missionary work here. Then, after that exertion, I will go on a spiritual retreat.

Departure date is set for the 12 August and, although I will shed many tears over my great friends and the fulfilling time I have had here, I know that I am not saying a definite 'Adios (Goodbye forever)' but simply a 'Hasta la Vista (until the next time)'. May God continue to shed his many abundant blessings on our Nueva Prosperina family.



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

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Since my last newsletter I have celebrated by 45th birthday. I had the good fortune that my eldest niece, Elise was out at the time with her pal, Rachel. Ecuadorians love a fiesta so my birthday was only the latest excuse to put on a party. This they did down at the school where there were early morning dances and songs for the birthday boy. Then in the evening some catechists came round to the Parish Hall where

they put on another fiesta. Of course, the big! Tradition here is that each person celebrating a birthday has to 'bite the cake' after blowing out the candles. While biting the cake your head gets shoved into the cake and you end up with cream all over your face. On the day of my birthday and for days after it, as I went from chapel to chapel, my face ended up in many cakes and I was left licking my cheeks for days. They loved the fun of it and I did too!

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 apply for one through Claire. Once again many thanks for your generosity in giving.