



"Poverty with Dignity"

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

The journey continues....

Your generous donations has supported:

- **The continued operation of the Soup Kitchen.**
- **Purchase of much needed equipment for the new school - desks; blackboard; storage cupboards and other equipment.**
- **Your generosity has bowled me over.**

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Welcome

Hi once again from sunny Ecuador where my work on the Missions continues to throw up daily challenges and many unexpected surprises. I hope that, through this newsletter, you will be able to have a further insight into my work here in one of the poorest suburbs of Guayaquil.

Since writing before Christmas I have been asked to provide a monthly column for the Scottish Catholic Observer and I have entitled that column "Poverty with

Dignity" following on from a story I heard where a charity worker here realised that he would never be able to eliminate totally the desperate poverty he saw, but felt that if he was able to help the poor live their life of poverty with a little bit of dignity, then he would have done a great job. I choose to call this newsletter by the same title and hope that you also will be able to share in the journey of our poor people towards a dignified life.

Our Parish School

The Parish School, called 'The Holy Family of Nazareth' continues to take a lot of my attention. Last year the roll was around 400 and this coming school year, which starts in April we will have around 500.

One of the great things that has happened since I last wrote is the first phase of the building process has been completed. Through the generosity of a donor from the U.S.A., three classrooms and a toilet block has been built. This is the first phase of a three or four-phase project eventually housing at least ten classrooms along with administration blocks. I was amazed that the building was completed so quickly on schedule and within budget - I shall be using that architect and building team for other projects, I think. At the moment the schools are on a long winter holiday, but when they resume in April, these three classroom blocks will be in full use. The next phase will then be the building of an infant wing with separate play area for the very youngest children.

Through the generosity of people to our Charity Account, I have been able to buy new desks, blackboards, storage cupboards and other equipment for each classroom.

One of the very exciting things that happened before Christmas came in the form of a phone call early one Saturday morning. A group of nuns had heard of our school and the needs of the teachers and kids and wanted to explore the possibility of coming in to run the school. It was one of the moments where my heart was jumping with excitement - people wanting to come and help in the work of the Mission (although, with respect to the Columban Sisters in Stevenston who provided St. John's with great service, I never thought I would be so excited about the arrival of nuns).

Over several weeks, and with various meetings between the nuns, the Archbishop and the present staff of the school, we discussed the whole possibility and, at the beginning of February, the nuns agreed to come and live in the Parish and run the school. This is a great step forward and will help establish the school in terms of discipline and curriculum.



An Ecuadorian wedding!





"Every time a person arrives at the school, they are surrounded by an enthusiastic welcome from the kids!"

Our Parish School (contd.)

I enjoy my contact with the school, the kids and the staff. Every time a person arrives at the school, they are surrounded by an enthusiastic welcome from the kids - I am no different and I love to go from class to class, praying with the kids and singing the odd song - although 'Rise and Shine' doesn't readily translate to Spanish!!! I meet with the teachers once a fortnight to do a session of prayer and faith reflection,

which for us all has been very productive. And just last week we took a staff trip to a beach about two hours out of the city. It was a tremendous experience for the staff who give so much for a mere wage (most teachers receive around £60 a month) and also a chance to escape from the clammy sticky weather of our Nueva Prosperina suburb.

Soup Kitchen



Some children having a splashing time!

The Soup Kitchen, which is supported through generous donations from Scotland, operates in one of the straw classrooms. I try and have lunch there at least once a week and the food that they serve up is excellent. Normally there is a plate of home-made soup with plenty of vegetables; this is followed by a main course of rice and chicken or sausage along with a cup of home-made juice. It amazes me that such good food can be produced in such cramped surroundings. I hope to be able to ask the architect who is building the new classrooms to also add a further classroom that will serve as a purpose-built Soup Kitchen.



School building works... and hopefully a further classroom that will serve as a Soup Kitchen.



Christmas & The New Year

Since last writing in December, of course, I have experienced my first Christmas away from home. I have to say that it was another challenging time for me, but there was so much going on around that time, that keeping going was the order of the day for the new missionary priest.

At the beginning of Advent we had our Confirmation and First Communion celebrations. The catechesis for these Sacraments runs from April through to December and the Sacramental celebrations normally take place in Advent. In my Parish we had arranged for the local

Dean to come and perform the Confirmation Mass, but at the last minute, the Archbishop phoned up and said he was coming. I was slightly embarrassed at welcoming our tall, Spanish Archbishop of Guayaquil to our humble pre-fabricated Parish Chapel, but he relished the opportunity once more of being amongst the poorest of the poor in his Archdiocese. There were over sixty children from all the neighbouring parishes being confirmed and with lively music it was a very joyful celebration. A week later we had our own parish First Communions and once again the Churches were packed and there were smiles all over the children's faces.

Christmas day itself is very much a low-key affair compared with what

happens back home. Firstly, the families do not have the money to spend on big presents and hearty meals. And, secondly, the tradition here in Ecuador, as it is in all of Latin America, is to celebrate Christmas Eve with a family celebration and then have the 25th as a relaxing day for visiting. New Year is something similar in the sense that they celebrate on Hogmanay, but very little on the 1st January. For several weeks before the end of December, you can see people buying large paper-mache dolls of politicians or cartoon characters, these they will fill with fireworks and set them off at the stroke of midnight on the 31st of December. This year at "the bells", I was with one of our Parish families and the noise in the streets and in the suburb was just incredible. Everyone around me was taking it all as normal but every time a firework went off, I was diving for cover, the noise was so loud!



Christmas & The New Year (contd.)

This whole experience was another moment in which I was being gradually introduced to the culture and in which the people were taking me into their hearts and families. By all of these

experiences, I am beginning to feel very much at peace and at home here.

Looking Ahead - Building

When I arrived in Guayaquil in August, I was appointed as Parish Priest to Nueva Prosperina and the newly-named Parish of the "Most Precious Blood of Christ". Unfortunately, I didn't have a house but was told that the land destined for the building of a parish house and Church was approved by the City Council. So, with the help of thirty parishioners, we set about clearing the land. However, the local overlord turned up to tell us that, in his eyes, the land belonged to him. Immediately I had to stall plans to build. That was back in September and, since then, through quiet Scottish diplomacy at the City Council, the help and advice of Fr. Tom Oates and a few quiet and personal words with the overlord himself, we are now in a position to move forward with the building programme.

At the moment, a land survey has just been completed and this means that work in preparing the land for construction can go ahead. The land that we have is on a steep incline and there will have to be several retention walls and platforms put in before work can begin. I hope that the first building to be put up will be a house, so that I can reside within the Parish; then after that, a temporary chapel so that we can celebrate Mass before (perhaps in a year or two when money comes through) the Church itself can be built. All of this, of course, will cost a lot of money and I am in the process of writing to several foundations and wealthy people to see about funding. Which brings me nicely on to....?



Lessons from Fr. Martin Chambers



Clap, clap - clap your hands!



Some young people from the Parish



Visit to the Orphanage!

Fundraising

I have been totally bowled over by the generosity of my friends and family back home in Scotland and beyond. Almost daily my sister, Claire, is receiving cheques and donations from people all over Scotland and beyond – people just glad to be able to share in this missionary journey that I am undertaking. The big events are spectacular, like the Ceilidh at the Seamill Hydro in September, the

Abseil in March, but equally amazing are the donations from people I haven't seen in years or have never known and the small donations from small children (we recently received £10 and £20 from two eight-year old girls).

Please continue to be generous, I, for my part, will undertake to use the funds to the best effect for this Parish and it's community. Over the next few months funding will be needed for:

"I have been totally bowled over by the generosity of my friends and family back home in Scotland and beyond!"



Fundraising (contd.)

- Building a purpose-built Soup Kitchen.
- Providing meals for the needy children.
- Providing adequate housing and health care for the elderly.
- Building a multi-purpose facility where Parish and Community groups can meet.
- Extending the Health Centre on the Parish property.
- Building a Sports Facility beside the school.

This is before we even start talking about the building of a Parish Church and house. The list goes on and on... I am truly grateful for all your generosity and, on behalf of the people here who will benefit, a

sincere word of thanks to one and all who have supported. I have been truly blessed by being here amongst the poor and needy people and I hope that you, by your generosity, are sharing in those blessings.

Cheques made payable to Fr. Martin Chambers

Reverse Charity

Of course here we all are trying to help the people in Nueva Prosperina who are amongst the poorest people. Yet, just before Christmas, I was bowled over by a couple of incidents from our Parish Youth Group - who excelled in charity. They got themselves together and raised money from a Bingo and Concert. And with that money, they did two things:

They made visits round orphanages to deliver hot chocolate and biscuits as a Christmas gift; and then with the money left over they bought food to distribute to the needy in our area! I was completely bowled over by their enthusiasm and generosity as we walked round the parish distributing the food parcels. This was the poor helping the really poor! A real image of the Gospel in Action!

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Sincere Thanks

Can I just finish by saying how thankful I am for the total support people have been showing to me and to the people of Nueva Prosperina. Your generosity knows no bounds and I hope to be able to repay your kindness by helping the people put down lasting roots for prosperity in their own community. God bless all your kindnesses.

Newsletter

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

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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, Claire Diamond - address on envelope. Thank you! You can contact me by e-mail at mhartino2004@yahoo.co.uk

And Finally...

This is something that many people in Scotland over the years have wanted to do but never got round to...

There I was one Sunday, preparing for the fourth of my Sunday Masses. There were about fifty people in the Chapel at that time and I had just finished running over the hymns with them. People young and old were making their way into the Church. Since it was another sweltering day, I had asked one of the little girls to go and buy me a bottle of water. While at the door drinking the water, a middle-aged man walked out of the Chapel with

my guitar in his hand. Along with the Catechists who were inside the Chapel, I immediately asked myself - what he was doing. And when one of the Catechists called out what he was doing, the man's response was to turn round and smash my guitar in front of our eyes on the mud street. Now many people over the years in Scotland had wanted to silence my singing and guitar playing, but this man managed to do it in one foul swoop! Actually the man was under the influence and has made recompense of his folly - so Gracias, Senor!

The other major incident that has happened recently was the arrival of the 'rainy season' coupled with an electrical power cut in our street for ten days. As Fr. Tom Oates, with whom I am staying, says: "This has been the longest camping trip I have been on!" For a long power cut and the rainy season means that you are walking about and driving about in sheer mud, that you come home covered in the stuff but that you find that at home there is no running water to wash or clean up! So for the past ten days we have been living as if we were on a campsite in deepest Ayrshire. Now I know why I had to work so hard as a member of the 6th Ayrshire Pack of the Sea Scouts!