



# "Poverty with Dignity"

## The Missionary Journey of Father Martin Chambers

### Welcome

#### The journey continues...

- What's been happening in the Parish.
- Holy Week & Easter.
- Update on the Parish School.
- Meet with the Archbishop on the 25<sup>th</sup> August.
- Fence is erected for the Church land.
- Panoramic views of the Parish from my rented flat.

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Hi once again from sunny Ecuador where my work on the Missions continues to throw up daily challenges and many, unexpected surprises. Actually when I say 'sunny', I have to temper that by saying also that it has been rather 'chilly' – several weeks over the past few months in Guayaquil it has been overcast and the temperature even dipped to about 28 degrees! In any case, during July, I was in Scotland to visit my family and friends, and also to

make Church appeals for the St. James' Society, but now I have returned to Ecuador for my second missionary year with renewed vigour to be your missionary contact amongst God's poor in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

This Newsletter will bring you up-to-date with all that has been going on since Easter – when I last wrote to you all - in my Parish of the 'Most Precious Blood of Christ' in Nueva Prosperina, Guayaquil.

### Holy Week & Easter

Although it seems such a long way back, I think it is worth reporting what went on in our Parish during my first Holy Week in South America. I had prepared myself and the various chapels of the Parish, for the celebrations in the best way I could. And I knew that they are well capable of putting their own touch on the celebrations. This they did right from the start. For when I turned up on Palm Sunday at the San Ignacio chapel, the youth group presented me with a donkey to use on the procession. Although I am a shy and retiring kind of person (aye right!), I got over my embarrassment and went by donkey through the streets of the town. Actually, after I got over the shock of being on the donkey, it turned out to be a real faith-filled experience, for we sang hymns all along the way and stopped every so often to pray for the people of our town - the poor, the lonely and those suffering from alcohol and drugs.



On Good Friday, as well as the Commemoration of the Passion, another of our youth groups acted out the Stations of the Cross - right up the main street of Nueva Prosperina. The procession lasted about three hours with a crowd of several hundred and the young people throwing themselves into acting out the Stations. By the time we were ready to celebrate the Easter Vigil in the main chapel of the Parish, we had celebrated the Triduum holy days throughout the whole Parish, and for me, the most impressive fact was that people were willing to travel to different chapels to attend each of the services. As you know, the Easter Vigil begins in darkness, but God was obviously in good humour that night, for just as we were about to begin, there was a power cut in the whole area. We began in darkness, but spent the whole Mass with some keen electricians hanging from the rafters trying to get the electricity going again. Actually power returned just as we were moving to the end of the celebration. Let there be light!



*"youth group acted out the Stations of the Cross - right up the Main Street."*



*"the introduction of the school uniform, both for pupils and for staff - very smart."*



*Children wearing the new school uniform*



*Fr. Martin's Birthday celebrations*



When I last wrote to you, we had just secured the land for building a Church, house and hall. This had taken many months of quiet negotiation with the local 'gangster' lawyer. Once it was secured, we were able to move forward in the building project. And things have tended to move very quickly since then.

The first thing we had to do was fence in the land so that the City Council could come along and declare it ours. I managed to muster a group of around thirty men, women and children from the Parish, who, on a sunny April Saturday, worked all day and can be very proud of the work they did in fencing in the land.



## Our Parish School

The new school year, which runs from April to December, began shortly after Easter. We began with three new classrooms to replace three straw ones. The difference is incredible - both for teaching and for learning! In the new airy classrooms, teachers have more room to move around for teaching and pupils are much more receptive for learning. I can categorically affirm this as true - since this year I am the School's music teacher!!! You might ask yourself what I know about music and what I know about teaching but, having looked at my own teachers from when I was a pupil, I think the main tool is to stay one step ahead of the pupils. And, as far as singing goes, we have already done that Spanish classic 'My Dixie Darlin'!

One of the other differences to the school this academic year has been the introduction of the school uniform, both for pupils and for staff - very smart. This, along with the new classrooms, has brought a new

air of dignity to a school, which is slowly gaining renown and respectability in the whole area. I had mentioned in a previous newsletter about the prospect of nuns coming to administer the school - so far only one nun has come, but I am assured two others will come once we have somewhere for them to stay and set up a convent.

As far as the future is concerned, August 25<sup>th</sup> is a key date. This is the date when I will meet with our Archbishop and Padre Sereno, his secret donor from the U.S.A. Padre Sereno has donated largely for school projects in other parts of Ecuador. He has already helped in the construction of the first three classrooms and I hope he will provide money to help us move forward to complete the school building.

## Building all over the place



*Workmen building the platforms*

Of course, being a shanty area with little rules to guide the community, our fence was cut down during the first night in one corner. Some of our helpers that day, suspecting that local neighbours had cut down the fence, wanted to go and have a fight, but I felt that, whoever had done it, had probably done it so that the water trucks could get nearer to their houses. I wasn't going to start a war with my neighbours - they needed water and I needed peace.

After that day I spent a few weeks with various architects pouring over plans for the land, but in the end, I went with the architect who had already built the three classrooms - on time and within budget. The first major project, before even a house could be built, was to prepare the hilly land by constructing three platforms with large retention walls. Work started in mid-May and I was able to visit the work site most days and see the work in progress. I was amazed once again how quickly the work was moving along and how professionally they all seemed to be. Of course, any visitor from Scotland would notice that the methods used are very traditional, but the end result is impressive and means that we have three platforms on the land - one for the building of the Parish Church; one for the chapel house; and for the lowest platform for building some parish meeting rooms. Once the platforms were complete in mid-June,

## Building all over the place (contd.)

we were immediately able to move one of our Chapels from inside the school complex onto the lowest platform - this was done easily since the building is pre-fabricated and could be taken down in one day and rebuilt the next. On the last Sunday in June we were able to celebrate our first Mass in the newly located chapel - there was a real sense in the community that night, that, in a few months, we had come a long, long way!

At the same time as that building work on the land was taking place, I was involved in another building project - the Soup Kitchen! Although we had been providing 100 or so meals a day for the needy kids of the Parish, it was in a straw classroom. I made a quick calculation and realised that, with money donated by you in Scotland, we could build a completely new Soup Kitchen. We had to suspend the daily Soup Kitchen for six weeks while the building was in progress, but at the start of June we had a new Soup Kitchen in which, to be proud. It sits

within the school grounds, looks like one of the newly-built classrooms, but inside is definitely a Soup Kitchen with new tables and chairs and a kitchen area set apart with a large industrial cooker. What makes me especially happy about the Soup Kitchen, is that it has been built exclusively with money donated from people back home. Thank you!

As we speak, the third building project is taking shape - the chapel house. It will occupy the second platform on the Church land and should be completed by mid-September. According to the architect's plans, it will have two bedrooms and an office but, more excitingly for me, running water - depending of course on whether we have a good electricity supply to pump the water into the house! Having a permanent house within the Parish and at the centre of the community will not only be a sign that I am here to stay, but will be an opportunity for me to move onwards.



*The fence being erected for the Church land.*



*'L' driver in the hot seat!*



## My Temporary Flat

When it became clear that we could begin work putting in platforms on the Church land, I knew that it was time to move into the Parish. From the moment I had arrived in Guayaquil last August, I had been staying in Tom Oates' Parish house about five miles away. Tom is brilliant and was very supportive from the first day and was a great source of humour in the midst of some bizarre goings-on in our respective parishes. However, as time marched on, I knew that I needed to rent a house within my own Parish community so that I could be nearer the people. Moreover, I could more closely monitor the progress of the construction work. It took a while to find a suitable place. I was shown various shops that I could sleep in and also a few places with mud floors. Eventually I chose a third-floor flat that has panoramic views over the Parish and has its own running water. The flat itself was only completed in April and I had to ask the owners to fit windows



*Panoramic view from my rented flat*

(not all that common in the area) to prevent mosquitos etc. There have been various problems since I moved in: scraping my car on the very tight garage door; and trying to get a regular water supply from my very own tank (I suspect 'my' water is going all over the block of flats and missing out my flat where it should be); but, all in all, I am glad to be living there within the Parish as it brings me closer to the people I am serving.



*Time out!  
A rest from all the building works.*

*“ I knew that I needed to rent a house within my own Parish community so that I could be nearer the people”*





# The Life of a Priest



With all these various activities going on, it would be wrong to think that most of my life here on the Missions is any different from the lives of priests the world over. Every weekend I have six chapels to get around – Mass on Friday night, one on Saturday, and four on Sunday. As well as that, I have two weekday Masses at the larger Mass centres as well as a school Mass each Thursday. And, of course, I have a monthly Mass at our 'Divino Nino' chapel (something like

the devotion to the Child of Prague'). On top of that, much of my time is taken up with running the First Communion and Confirmation programmes as well as an adult faith programme. We also have two lively youth groups and a Legion of Mary group.

In all of these faith activities I am constantly impressed with the deep faith the people have in the face of great difficulties and poverty.

Cheques made payable to Fr. Martin Chambers

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## Your Generosity

Of course, one of the constant sources of strength for me since being on the Missions is the almost incessant stream of support I receive from back home – family, friends, former parishioners and sometimes even strangers! Your prayers are a daily source of strength for me to get up in God's name and do my best. And your financial support has been astounding. With your help this first year we have:

- built the Soup Kitchen;
- provided daily meals in the Soup Kitchen for 140 needy kids in our Parish;
- enabled 100 kids to attend school who otherwise would not have been able to afford the fees;
- contributed to the building of the first three classrooms in the Parish;
- bought guitars to set up guitar and music classes;
- built three houses for the elderly;
- many other smaller works have been done in your name.

Of course, the work goes on. As well as continuing to support the daily social projects, we need to finish the school building and build a Parish Church. I appeal to you all to continue to support in a very generous way, the people of this extremely poor part of the world. Can I also express my great thanks to all the committees and groups who have got together to organise events in my name - may God bless your generous work!

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

## My Summer Holiday in Scotland

It was absolutely brilliant to be at home with my Mum and Dad, my close family and friends during the month of July – the memories of those days will keep me going for the year ahead. However it wasn't all pleasure as the St. James' Society sends its members home each summer to do a few preaching assignments – I preached in Duntocher, Parkhead and even in the 'Barras' as well as in Our Lady of

Lourdes, East Kilbride, St. John's Stevenston and my home Parish of St. Mary's, Irvine. In all of these Parishes people received me well and were extremely supportive of the work that I am doing. I look forward to repaying everyone's kindness by dedicating myself in the year ahead.

## And Finally...

The searing heat always plays tricks for the 'Gringo' Scots who work in Guayaquil. I regularly have to change my shirt two or three times a day and two showers a day is not irregular. However, the heat played its funniest trick two days after our Easter Vigil celebration. Having spent \$40 on a very large and ornate Paschal Candle, I arrived back at the chapel two days

later for evening Mass to see that the great candle had completely melted in the heat of the chapel. We'll just have to find other ways to show that the light of Christ burns brightly.