



"Poverty with Dignity"

The Missionary Journey of Father Martin Chambers

Welcome & Many Thanks

The journey continues...

- What's been happening in the Parish
- Update on the building works
- What are the Projects
- Visitors to Nueva Prosperina
- Co-operative commences
- Thank you from the bottom of my heart
- May you find peace and joy in your hearts this Christmas & New Year

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Once again the sun is shining down on a hot and sticky shanty town on the outskirts of Guayaquil, Ecuador where I am working on the Missions. And it is from here that I send my Christmas and New Year greetings to you all - supporters of this missionary work. I have been amazed over the past year and a half how people are involved in and excited about the work that is going on here. And, since I know that many in Scotland simply cannot take up missionary work, I am glad to take up the work for you and be your man on the Missions. This "Poverty with Dignity" Newsletter will bring you up-to-date with all that it going on here

and will also show people how to get more involved in the work.

I recently came across a greetings card, which had the line 'although we are far apart, you are never far from my heart'. These are the thoughts I have when I think of all the efforts you are making on my behalf and on behalf of the people here. From personal donations to large scale efforts like the Coffee Mornings or the Seamill Hydro Ceilidh in November, they all show your willingness to share what you have with the poor and needy. This is a great inspiration to me to get out and about and see where the needs are and to share your gifts with the people in Nueva Prosperina.

The Building and the Chapel House

At the end of May I moved out of the Chapel House in Canal Ocho where I had been staying with my good friend, Fr. Tom Oates and into my flat within my own Parish of the Most Precious Blood of Christ, Nueva Prosperina. The last time I wrote to you the hillside had been transformed with three retention walls and work had already begun on the Chapel House. Living only two blocks away from the hillside meant that I could visit the work every day and, indeed, any time I was passing. The workers, who mainly come from the mountainous region of Ibarra to the north of Ecuador, are extremely hard working; they work every day except for a half-day on a Sunday. This has meant that wherever they are working, progress is rapid and, if I was away for a couple of days, then I would notice a big change on my return.

myself, the work had to be hurried along a bit since I knew that three priests of the Diocese of Galloway were due out in November. So near the end of the work I felt I was actually living on the worksite since I seemed either to be going for bricks or paint or deciding with the architect on the internal layout of the house. In any case, I moved out of the rented flat and into the Chapel House on the 4th November and I was just happy to be there at last. The house has two bedrooms, an office, sitting room and a kitchen as well as an outhouse and a garden to the front where grass has been laid. There is no downside to the house since I am glad to be here in a permanent base within the Parish but, if there was a slight niggle, it is that I am living right beside a bus station where the buses start up their engines from five in the morning - I am sure I shall get used to that! Having a permanent base means that people now know where I live and am hopefully more accessible. I have come to serve the poor people and only last night a family turned up to ask if I would come and pray over their son who had lost his life in a street battle in another part of the city. Being visible and available is part of the ministry of every priest.

When I came back from Scotland only the inside walls of the Chapel House were up but slowly and surely the roof was assembled on site, then put on, the brick work was completed, an outhouse was added to the original plans before the inside work of tiling and painting could be completed. Apart from the fact that I wanted into the house



Cheers! Building of the chapel house is completed



"if you know of any company willing to help, please get in touch with me"



Visits to the older people

Building The Parish Church

So if I have finished building the Chapel House on the hillside then what is next, you may ask. In bulldozer fashion, and knowing that my years here are in fact short, I would have liked to continue the steamroller of moving from the building of retention walls to the building of the chapel house and straight onto the building of the Parish Church at the top of the hill. But it is not easy or simple! Firstly I have taken advice and sought quotes from two architects as to what kind of Parish Church they could/would build on a steep hillside. They are still in the process of getting the quotes to me and it looks like I will have a clear choice between an elegant and single tier building and a cheaper quote,

which provides a Church above and meeting rooms with a hall below. The other major obstacle I have is that I do not have the money - major problem! So I am waiting from some person or group to come up with the cash. To build the Parish Church/Hall will cost in the region of £75,000 and, at the moment, I have no cash destined for that purpose. I am aware that this is a massive amount to ask of anyone and my hope is that several companies will be able to come up with small amounts to help us on our way. Please, if you know of any company willing to help, please get in touch with me by e-mail or contact my sister, Claire at any of the addresses shown on the back page of this newsletter.

Co-operative up and running

I don't know where the idea came from but when I came back from Scotland in the summer I was determined to offer the poor people a concrete solution to some of their financial difficulties. I looked around the various schemes and decided that a good idea would be a co-operative loan scheme operated through the school. I spoke to the various parents groups at the school and we offered anyone who has any kind of small business to take part in the scheme. Basically we give a grant of \$50 to be paid back over eight weeks. I was aware that this was in fact only a drop in the ocean but we had to start somewhere. And the results have been amazing, we are now at the end of the eight-week cycle and are in a position to offer - for those who have kept their side of the agreement by paying up on

time - \$80 for the next session. We have small grocery shops, hairdressing salons as well as street sellers of lemonade and slippers. Of course, we do not just throw money to the people; we ask them to get involved in weekly talks on family life and business management. And, although what we give out in loans may be considered in Scotland to be very little, we have sixty families involved in the scheme and the changes are incredible. I have visited a few of the families - we actually have a family liaison officer for the scheme - and I have seen at first hand that, with the loan money, they have been able to increase their stock and therefore make their small shop more appealing. All of this money has come from donations back home but there is the possibility that SCIAF in the near future will help with some

Funding for the scheme. And finally and more recently there was the proud visit of three Galloway priests - former Bishop of the Diocese, Maurice Taylor along with Frs. Jack MaGee and Archie Brown. They have just left after six very busy days in which we celebrated Mass and had a fiesta in each of the six chapels around the Parish - it was a very busy schedule and I am sure they must be resting somewhere in a darkened room!

I have loved every minute of these visits and each person has added something to my life and indeed the lives of our friendly parishioners here. If anyone is considering coming out please let me know and I shall do my best to put you up. Please feel very welcome because as my sister, Claire, always says, 'Mi casa es tu casa - my house is your house'.



What are the Projects?

I always like to keep you up-to-date with how your donations have been spent and here are some of the items that have been bought with your money since August:

• Monthly school fees for 100 kids	-	\$350
• Monthly food for Soup Kitchen	-	\$600
• Co-operative Scheme (60 families)	-	\$3,000
• Building of retention walls	-	\$35,000
• Rebuilding a house	-	\$400
• Seat for an old lady	-	\$75
• Transferring the temporary chapel	-	\$900



What's going on at the Parish

Our parish school is a jewel in the crown of the Parish - although there are over 420 kids crammed into straw huts and there would be many reasons for complaint, the staff, kids and their families are simply glad to have the opportunity to be there. And, with the help of donations back home and from other sources there have been great advances in the school. One of the big events in the recent life of the school was the visit of Fr. Sereno, an Italian Franciscan working in the United States. He has been a friend of the Archbishop of the Diocese for many years and has collaborated with him on many social projects. And so he visited the school at the end of August to see the first stage of the building of the school - three brick-built classrooms to replace straw ones and also to make a further donation from his American foundation. We are very lucky and blessed as he was so impressed with the work going on

that he left enough money to build a further three classrooms, an office and a chapel that can be used as an assembly hall. There was a catch, however, in that I, with the help of donations from back home, had to come up with money to put a septic tank and water tank so that the toilet block could soon be up and running. This was on top of the money we had come up with for clearing the land and building the Soup Kitchen so I feel this next phase has been a team effort from many parts. The next phase has, therefore, started but, if you went into the school today, you would see something that Health & Safety would not allow back home - 450 kids being taught in what, to all intents and purposes, is a building site. Yet it is only for a short while as within two months we will have a further three brick-built classrooms (we will need twelve in total) and a school chapel to be proud of.



Young people and one not so young taking part in school lessons in the straw hut accommodation.

A further development at the school concerns the nuns who were due to be coming out and running the school. Events hit the buffers when I returned from Scotland to find that the money promised to build the nuns a chapel house had not materialised at all - I've decided to go with what we have. All in all, we are still a happy and loving community at the Parish School - the kids coming from extremely poor backgrounds are given a chance to learn new models of behaviour and new ways of loving. I love the atmosphere and the activity in the school.

Visitors to Nueva Prosperina

Visitors from Scotland, which I and the people here have loved, have punctuated throughout my first year and a half on the Missions. The very first visitors from Scotland were my good friends Andy Hand and Donald McKay who arrived in February and, as well as visiting the various parts of the Parish and city they also helped Alipio, an older parishioner to renew his house and, perhaps more importantly, rescued me out of the mud as my truck slid all the way down a hill narrowly avoiding crashing into a neighbour's house. Next up was Gillian Campbell, a former parishioner from Stevenston and now

herself working on the Missions in China. She was here at the time Pope John Paul II died and, since she is a Spanish teacher, worked several days at the school teaching English. Just before summer I had a flying visit from Johnny Ogilvie, nephew of Fr. Willie McFadden who was on a gap year trip in South America before starting university studies. He was here in the week I moved into the rented flat so he saw it in all its glory. He also got involved in our evangelisation project going round the parish with the loudspeaker and distributing leaflets.



Some children in the new part of the school



Blessed Sacrament procession



Visit from Bishop Maurice Taylor, Frs. Archie Brown & Jack MaGee

“rescued me out of the mud as my truck slid all the way down a hill narrowly avoiding crashing into a neighbour’s house”





Do you only get involved in big projects, Martin?



I am aware that I have so far only told you of the big projects that have been going on but you know my daily life is very similar to what my priestly life was back home. I celebrate daily Mass - at the weekends it can be a bit more hectic - and visit the schools and people's houses as and when they call me. There is a constant stream of people coming to the door. But what I enjoy most is simply getting out and about walking the dusty streets and meeting folk. This is how I really get to know the people and get to know their situations. It is great to simply walk along the street and to have people coming up to you and

making you feel part of their lives. When I was being interviewed and vetted for the Missions ("how did Chambers ever get through a vetting situation?" you might ask), one of the things that kept coming into my mind was that, yes, I might get involved in various large projects but simply to be with the poor people and walk with them would be the greatest experience I could have and the greatest way I could learn from them. That has certainly been the case with me so far and I shall continue to enjoy the daily company of these humble people all around me.

Cheques made payable to Fr. Martin Chambers

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And Finally...

Life for me has always had a funny edge to it and I have always loved to have a laugh and a joke as I go about my priestly life. Back home in Scotland the parishioners in Galloway Diocese got to know when I was joking and having a laugh. I was telling Bishop Taylor last week that it has taken me time but basically I have got the same patter here as I did in Scotland - the only thing is that it has taken a few months to get all my jokes and patter translated into Spanish. Thankfully I think I am there now so I can joke away in Spanish and in English in equal measure.

Needless to say there was a bit of intrigue as I made my way through the shanty streets with my kilt flying from side to side. Since then I have had a few opportunities to wear it and also a few chances to show off a Scots jig - although if anyone can teach me a proper Scots jig, I would be really happy.

Another funny incident happened on the recent visit of the Galloway priests as we made our way from chapel to chapel and Mass to Mass. At the end of one such celebration, I was saying how great it was to have our friends from Scotland with us during the Mass but did they know the name of an even greater friend who was always with us every day? Hoping that they would shout out 'Jesus' they all shouted out 'Father Martin'. Bishop Taylor suggested I should accept their mistake in all humility.

There have been many more funny incidents along the way but they cannot be included in this editorial - I shall have to keep them for the tabloid version to come out later!!!

One of the funny moments for the people here was the day I put on my kilt. I had managed to acquire the traditional Scots garb when I was back home at summer and the visit from Fr. Sereno was the opportunity when I showed my true Scots feelings, culture and indeed, my legs.

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

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

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

A Blessed Christmas & New Year

As I sign off now, I simply want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your support of me in the Missions and for your financial support of the projects. I am fortunate enough to be here but I hope that you all feel part of this missionary journey. Please be

assured that I remember you all each day in my prayers and I ask that you pray for me too.

May you all find peace and joy in your hearts and among your family this Christmas and New Year.