



# Restoring Dignity

SC037458



*A newsletter about the Missions from Fr. Martin Chambers*

## Bienvenidos

Welcome to this Christmas Newsletter which keeps you up to date with everything that has been going on lately in the Martin Chambers Ecuador Trust charity.

In this edition we look at how the Trust has been helping our friends in Ecuador, both in Guayaquil where we help our friends in Sagrada Familia and also in Portoviejo, the earthquake zone to the north of the country.

As we approach the Feast of Christmas when families gather around and share their resources, let us gather around our needy friends in Ecuador and tell them, through our support, how much we value them and how much we care for them.

## Paul VI Centre for Disabled

Last June I travelled to Ecuador alongside the Bradley family: Dad, Joe, and daughters: Ciara and Aiofe. A further inspirational moment in the June visit was when we came to the city of Portoviejo and our host, Gustavo, showed us around the Paul VI Centre for the Disabled. This is a small centre in size, but reaps great benefits for the children who attend. While we were there, Dylan, a young boy with Downs Syndrome was on the physiotherapy table while other children were riding on horses. The animal therapy that they give in the Centre is very impressive, something, which I have also seen at home in Scotland: disabled children who can hardly support themselves upright in a chair, are able, through animal therapy, to improve their posture and therefore move around much better when they return home. There is also therapy with other animals, like dogs, as well as occupational therapy. It is a small local charity that runs this Centre but it provides a much-needed source of strength for poor families who can hardly put food on their family table let alone provide for a disabled child.



## Christmas Presents for Ecuador

Are you thinking about helping the poorest at Christmas time? Why not think of helping the children at Sagrada Familia School? Here are two ways the Trust helps them:

- **By PAYING THE SCHOOL FEES:** The Head Teacher knows the personal circumstances of each pupil and this allows the Trust to offer to pay the school fees of the poorest children. Otherwise the children would stay at home and would not be offered the chance to develop in life, to be educated and eventually to find work.
- **By RUNNING THE SOUP KITCHEN:** Each day between 80 and 90 children come to the Soup Kitchen because their families cannot afford to feed them. At the Kitchen they are given a plate of home-made soup, a glass of fresh fruit juice and then a plate of rice and beans. This fills their stomach but it also means that when they come to class they are able to concentrate on the work before them. The money needed to run the Soup Kitchen comes entirely from your donations.

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**CAN YOU HELP FEED AND EDUCATE A CHILD FOR 2019?**





## Visiting the Earthquake Zone

For a week we stayed in a chapel house in the town of Cojimies, way up in the north west of Ecuador. My first impressions of the area was that it was still - two years on from the earthquake in 2016 - abandoned! Even the chapel house had been left un-lived in for weeks. We spent a couple of hours cleaning up before putting our bags on the floor.



Of course, the reason for us visiting that area was to help build two houses for families who had been devastated by the earthquake. The first family we helped was that of Nieves who had been living with her daughter, Maria, in a ramshackle dwelling which really was simply plastic walls cobbled together. They had been living in that way for two years since the earthquake. The replacement house that the Trust was able to provide for them is made of MDF walls and a tin roof - this is pure luxury compared to what they had before and now stands out from the extreme poverty around. It consists of a sitting room and 2 small bedrooms and is now high up from the ground to allow them to enclose the bottom area in years to come so that they can have even more space for their family to grow and thrive.

We helped build a similar house for Rafael who lived near the beach at Pedernales, the town at the epicentre of the earthquake. By the time we arrived at his house, he had already got the structure up with the help of his own family so we set about painting the house with him.

Both families were very grateful that we were able to help them and extremely grateful to the Trust for giving them a house for years to come. Like so many families they had lost everything in the earthquake: the simple houses that they had lived in for years were gone, and after the earthquake there was no government aid. What we experienced in our visit to the earthquake zone was that family after family had been left abandoned - abandoned by the local community, by government and in some instances by the church. The help that the Trust gives to such families is invaluable - it restores the dignity and hope that they had lost.



## Visiting the Nuns @ Playa Prieta

Another inspirational moment of the visit was when we visited the small town of Playa Prieta, which had also been at the epicentre of the 2016 earthquake. The reason I wanted to make a second visit there was because that was where a nun from Derry, Sr. Clare Crockett, had died on that fateful night in April 2016 while teaching guitar class. Her story had touched many people and I also was inspired to see what had become of the school and church where she had lived and died. When I had visited in late 2016 (seven months after the earthquake) there was still rubble lying everywhere - nothing had been moved. Now the schoolyard had been totally cleared with new classrooms and a new convent built. On the site, where the old school had fallen in the earthquake, there was a new chapel where the nuns celebrate daily Mass.

The chapel has a capacity for around 40 people, so it was not too big.

I had already been asked by the nuns to celebrate Mass there so was prepared for an emotional moment. However, in the actual celebration of the Mass, I was struck that on this very site where Sister Clare and 5 others had died, there we were Celebrating the Resurrection of Christ. Death and Resurrection side by side! At various points during the liturgy I had to stop myself because of the emotion of the moment - only to be pushed over an emotional edge by the Ecuadorian nuns' rendition - in perfect English - of 'Our Lady of Knock, Queen of Ireland' a personal favourite of Sr. Clare.

While we were in the earthquake zone at Playa Prieta, we heard of a documentary, which had been

made of the life of Sr. Clare. It is called "All of Nothing" and can now be watched through You Tube. It documents the story of Sr. Clare from her youthful days in Derry, through (by her own admission) her 'wild days' to the moment when she gave her life in the earthquake. You will hear her talking about her own vocation and also hear her family members and other nuns talking about her inspirational life. I would encourage you to watch it and be inspired; it will be a worthwhile use of an hour and a half!



# Nueva Prosperina & Sagrada Familia School



Of course, one of the highlights for myself and the Bradley family in our June trip was when we visited Sagrada Familia school in Nueva Prosperina. This is the school that has been at the centre of the community there for 15 years since it was inaugurated in 2003. It stands within a community that is totally impoverished and is therefore a beacon of hope to desperately poor families who simply cannot afford to educate their children.

## What can the Trust now do?

The Trust can continue to help the victims of the earthquake by sending funds through CARITAS PORTOVIEJO. There is still so much left to be done: families still live without adequate housing, families who lack urgent medical care and where, in many areas, schools have been razed to the ground leaving them without education. Can you help with donations?



We found ourselves at the centre of a week-long Fiesta to celebrate the school's coming of age. The custom in Latin America is to celebrate a person's 'coming of age' at the age of 15 (rather than 18 or 21 as it is in Scotland). During our visit, we visited all the classrooms in the primary and in secondary school. We took part in school Masses, teachers' retreats and in some sports programme. Joe was especially adept in teaching P.E. to the young children.



If you wish to make a donation, I believe that it will take a whole generation before people will be able to return to the lives they had before the earthquake. They were poor before - now they are even poorer!

The 15<sup>th</sup> Birthday of the school gave Adela Villacres, the Headteacher in all those years, a chance to look back on what has been. Since 2003 the school roll has moved from the 250 at the start to 500 pupils. Back then Sagrada Familia was only a primary school but now has secondary education on offer. The school has moved from 9 cramped bamboo huts to 25 brick-built classrooms. There is now a covered concrete patio which allows P.E. and school assemblies to take place even during the searing heat. There is a school chapel with a capacity for 120 pupils. The school boasts a dedicated staff, committed not just in educational terms but also in the way they give themselves to the poor and disadvantaged children who come to the school. One small example of the way that the staff go above and beyond the call of duty was the way in which Adela, the Head Teacher and her husband gave up the comfort of their own home to stay with us while we camped down in the classrooms during our visit. We were mightily impressed by this generosity.



## Reflections on the Recent Visit

Here are some reflections from the June visit:

**Ciara Bradley:** "The housing situation of the families we met in Ecuador was horrendous. It was obvious that some financial assistance would help alleviate some of their suffering. The money required to facilitate this would amount to only a few months' wages for many people in the UK. This is a pretty shocking thing to imagine - particularly when you think about the money, which we waste on pointless, trivial materials things."

**Aoife Bradley:** "Adela, the Head Teacher at Sagrada Familia school and her husband, Washington, were as memorable as any Ecuadorians we met, though this was in a different sense. Their willingness to sacrifice a potentially better quality of life, for the children of Nueva Prosperina is nothing short of inspirational. Their passion for life and for helping others in the most simplest of ways are qualities which we should all aspire to have."



## Reflections from Sagrada Familia:

Here at two reflections from the teachers:

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### Donations:

Please send your donations to me at:

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Cheques should be made payable to the 'Martin Chambers Ecuador Trust.'

If you want someone from the Charity to come and give your group a talk on the Missions, don't be afraid to get in touch by e-mail:

[mhartino2004@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mhartino2004@yahoo.co.uk)  
or by phone at St. Matthew's Church on 01563 533587.



### Newsletter:

If you know of anyone who would wish to receive a copy of this newsletter, please let me know:

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PAOLO FARIAS: "When I started at Sagrada Familia school, I was just out of university but it has been a great place to start my teaching career. My days are filled with laughter and smiles at the same time of working really hard to make sure the pupil's dreams for a better future become reality. This school has exam marks comparable to any in the city. For the Nueva Prosperina community, it has been a beacon of hope."

MARIANA LEDESMA: "I have now been in Sagrada Familia school community for over 10 years and it has been a very happy time in my life. Without doubt there have been personal challenges where I have had to stretch myself professionally. There have also been challenges with the pupils for they have often arrived at the school poor and down-hearted but have been changed by the community and family spirit in our school. I am very happy here."

## And Finally...

After several years of trying and being knocked back, I was finally accepted to run in the London Marathon 2018. This was a mixed blessing because, although I had always wanted to run in London, it meant that I had to endure many months of hard training; made worse because of the hard Scottish winters. I travelled to London for the Marathon on the 22 April supported by an eager band of friends - it was great to have their emotional support. The race itself was tough due to the 26 degrees heat! Five hours is a lot longer than I had anticipated and there were times around the half-way mark that I thought I was going to have to walk the last bit. However, I kept going because of my friends shouting me on along the course and also because of the causes I was supporting. As well as the Ecuador Trust, I was running for the MS Society since my Mum had suffered from MS for over 40 years.

## Projects for 2019

There are two major projects that the Ecuador Trust wants to support in the coming year:

PAUL VI CENTRE FOR DISABLED: The work that is done at this centre is very impressive with its physiotherapy, occupational therapy and therapy through animals. As well as being much loved by the children who use the centre, it is a lifeline for the impoverished parents who do not know how to educate their disabled children. However, the centre could do with two more classrooms so that they can provide for many more children. So the Trust will use some donations already received to help the Paul VI Centre realise their dreams for 2019.

SAGRADA FAMILIA SCHOOL: One of the downsides of the present day setup at this school is that the secondary education has become more popular than the primary. This is because, although there are other primaries in the area, most other secondary schools have pulled out of the shanty town. Sagrada Familia has become a symbol of hope for teenagers who want to advance their education. One of the problems, though, of the secondary sector is that more specialised education is needed as the pupils split into smaller groups for specialised subjects. Therefore, another classroom is needed but, with the cramped space in the school, the only place it can go is on the second floor. So the Trust will use some donations already received to help Sagrada Familia school build that extra classroom in 2019.

All the efforts in running were made worthwhile by the funds that came in. I was overwhelmed with the financial support that people gave and after all donations were received, just under £12,000 was raised being split evenly between the two charities.

