

## LATIN AMERICA PROGRAM REPORT

The Latin America Program was initiated in our diocese as the result of a request from the Holy See in 1960. John Paul II, The Pope at the time alerted the Church to the plight of the Catholic faithful in several of the Latin American countries. He appealed to the generosity of the North American Churches to allocate personnel and financial aid to the work of the Church in Latin America.

Early in his episcopate our Bishop, His Excellency William E. Power responded to that request. After a period of consultation in the Diocese a committee was put in place and the first four volunteers for the program were selected. It was decided that our contribution would not be to take on parish ministry but, because of our history on social issues that our contribution should be along the lines of community development, adult education, cooperatives, credit unions, literacy courses and such areas of endeavor.

The first volunteers (four priests) spent a period of preparation at The Coady International Institute in Antigonish and then went on to Mexico for language training. Such was the beginning of our twenty year commitment in Honduras. Over those twenty years thirteen Diocesan Priests and one lay volunteer provided ministry to the people of Honduras.

In 1966 we assumed the responsibility of a parish in the city of Tegucigalpa. The parish was abandoned and included a large number of rural villages. Along with this parish ministry we continued our social involvement. Cooperatives and Credit Unions were established around the Country, literacy courses provided for adults, funding was secured

from agencies to facilitate the building of schools, community centers, and churches. Assistance and guidance was provided getting wells dug and electricity into areas of the parish. A Credit Union which began as a savings club in our parish hall has now grown into what is now regarded as the largest and most successful Credit Union in Latin America.

In January of 1982 Bishop Power advised Archbishop Santos that our diocese could no longer provide personnel to his people. Our last two serving priests returned to the Diocese in July of that same year. This however was not the end of our commitment to the people of Honduras. Bishop Power assured them that we would continue to assist the Archdiocese in Honduras in some fashion other than providing them with priests. At that time a Latin America Committee was put in place. Its role was to continue our relationship and to provide funding for projects sent to them for approval. That Committee is still in place and an annual collection is taken up each year during the month of June.

Another group in our Diocese comprised of parishioners of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Sydney River has been actively supporting the people over the past sixteen years. This group under the guidance of Fr. Norman MacPhee and Wanda Fedora is supporting and funding several major projects. Both have visited Honduras over the past several years. The group works with a very dynamic and charismatic Carmelite Nun by the name of Sor. Marie de Jesus del Cid. This woman's vision and efforts on behalf of the poor and underprivileged has some refer to her as Mother Teresa of Honduras. The first project involved the purchase of an abandoned factory which was renovated and turned into an orphanage/school. Young girls are taken in and are educated and given life skills under the direction of the Carmelite nuns. Another project is

the building of a complete village on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa. A total of 100 sturdy homes have been constructed for poor families as well as a community center, a church and a market. A remarkable success story!

A few years ago the Cardinal Archbishop of Honduras (Oscar Rodriguez M.) visited the parish where I assist when in Florida. That parish has a twin parish in Honduras. Speaking at a fundraising gala he praised and thanked the parishes who assist the poor in Latin America. During his speech he used the Diocese of Antigonish as an example. Lofty praise from the closest confidant of Pope Francis. He also made mention of the fact that our parish (Holy Family) has now been divided into four separate parishes and that it has produced four priest who work in his Diocese. Of course, what was done and what we still do is done not to garner praise but simply remembering that the Church is never more Christlike than when she is a missionary church. The great Peruvian theologian Fr.Gustavo Gutierrez in his book "Theology of Liberation" observes that "A Church without a missionary outreach is a Church without a soul...."The avowed agnostic Malcolm Muggeridge who became a Catholic made a similar observation when speaking about Mother Teresa's work with the poor. His words: "She showed me Christianity in action and the power of love through our caring and compassionate attitude and actions towards the poor and most marginalized....."

The present pandemic that we are suffering through is certainly a reminder of the inherent responsibilities that bind us together. In some ways it has brought out the worst in some but the best in many. Hopefully, it will be a clarion call and reminder to each one of us that we are truly our brother's keeper. A reminder to us that we are truly blessed when we reach out to those less fortunate than ourselves, ever mindful

of the words of Jesus: " When you did it for these the less fortunate, you did it for me...."

*Respectfully submitted by,*

*Norman J. MacPhee*

*Rev. Norman J. MacPhee*