

# The Mission CONNECTION



Newsletter of the Capuchin Overseas Missions Association

Winter 2015

## Apostolic Vicariate of Bluefield Nicaragua Begins its Second Century of Service to its People

On December 1st, 2013, the Catholic community of eastern Nicaragua gathered together in the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Rosary in Bluefields to celebrate its 100 years. Led by Pablo Ervin Schmitz, the Apostolic Vicar and his auxiliary bishop, David Albin Zywiec, they praised and gave thanks to God for the blessings received and asked for guidance to face the challenges that lay ahead.



*Bishops David and Paul*

The vicariate is large, about the size of West Virginia. Its population is approximately 950,000; over 70 % are Catholic. There are only 17 mission parishes and nearly all have parish schools. Much of the population is rural, formed into basic Christian communities, served by Delegates of the Word when a priest is not available to celebrate the Eucharist. There are more than 1,100 of these basic communities. At the present time the vicariate

has about thirty priests. Several are Capuchins, others are on loan from various places, while fifteen are vicariate natives. Fortunately there are twenty-two major seminarians.

On December 2nd, the two bishops went to Managua, the capital of the country for the centennial celebra-



*Bluefield Cathedral and bell tower*

tion by the entire Nicaraguan Catholic Church. The Vatican decree a century earlier had established the ecclesiastical province of Managua, with the appointment of an archbishop to head the Nicaraguan church. Prior to this, the principal diocese was Leon. Managua's suffragan dioceses

now include Esteli, Granada, Jinotega, Juigalpa, Leon en Nicaragua and Matagalpa. The eastern half of the country was not established as a diocese. Rather, it became the Apostolic Vicariate of Bluefields. An Apostolic Vicariate means that it is mission territory and needs to develop religiously, economically

and in the number of personal to become a diocese. It is usually provisional though it may last for a century or more. The hope & intent is that the number of Catholics in the region will eventually increase and the local church will develop enough to establish a diocese.

According to the practice



of the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, the territory was entrusted to the care and jurisdiction of a specific missionary institute. The Congregation singled out the Capuchins. The Capuchin superiors in Rome chose the Spanish Capuchin Catalanian province of Barcelona. It was granted the Jus commissionis with its corresponding obligation that the Province provide personnel and financial support for the Apostolic Vicariate along with the right to nominate a friar to serve as Apostolic Vicar. One of its members, Augustin Barnaus y Serra, who had been the Apostolic Vicar of Agana, Guam, was chosen on May 9, 1913 and transferred to the Apostolic Vicariate of Bluefields Nicaragua. He arrived in that swampy Caribbean coast city in November 1914 and was greeted with much hostility.

Although the city had an intense commercial activity, there were few Catholics in the region. The entire vicariate had about 30,000 inhabitants. Most of the Spanish speaking natives lived in the "Mining Triangle" of Siuna, Rosita and



*Procession to Cathedral*

Bonanza. The Miskitos, with their own language, lived along the Rio Coco River, which forms the border between Nicaragua and Honduras. Throughout the vicariate, rivers formed the principle means of communication, since there were few roads. Even at the present time there is no direct highway connection from the west coast to Bluefields.

The city itself bears the name of a Dutch soldier of fortune, Abraham Blauveldt, one of the number of European pirates hostile to Spain. The first black Africans appeared when a Portuguese vessel transporting slaves was shipwrecked in 1641. In 1730, English colonists began to arrive and about a century later, the Moravian Church was installed. The native Miskito Indi-

ans yielded sovereignty to the British in 1740. The British Protectorate lasted until 1796, when England recognized the sovereignty of Spain. However, in 1860, by an agreement between the British and American governments (Nicaragua did not have a part to play), the Miskito Reserve was created, under the protection of the British crown. It was only in 1894 that the Nicaraguan government incorporated the Miskito Reserve into its territory.

A small group of friars joined the bishop. The vicariate had no native priests or seminarians. Their ministry centered around the Bluefields area. When Bishop Barnaus died in 1930, another Catalan Capuchin, Juan Sola y Farrell succeeded him. From 1936 to 1939, a civil war devastated Spain. Further missionaries and financial aid proved impossible. In response to the Catalan request, the jus commissionis with its corresponding obligation to provide personnel and financial support along with the right to nominate friars to serve as Apostolic Vicar was transferred to the Calvary/Detroit



*Children Present Offertory Gift*



*Overflow Crowd*



*Conditions of the people when friars arrived in 1938*

Capuchin Province of St. Joseph in October, 1938. Two groups of American priests arrived the following year, including Matthew Niedhammer, who became bishop in 1943 after Bishop Sola had resigned and returned to Spain.

As more missionaries arrived, the ministry spread to the Miskitos, the mining triangle and the Rama region. Salvador Schlaefer was named bishop (1970 – 1993) upon the death of Matthew in 1970. Responding to the needs of the people, in addition to establishing chapels and forming faith communities, both bishops were deeply concerned with better health facilities and educational opportunities for the children. Political unrest, fiscal crisis, a Sandinista uprising and civil warfare, followed by C.I.A. contra attacks, several earthquakes and tropical storms were some of the obstacles that faced the friars in carrying out their ministry.

The present bishop, Paul Schmitz of Fond du Lac, faced new challenges. The population was greatly increasing with new communities being formed in the



*Bishop Matthew Niedhammer*



*Bishop Salvador Schlaefer, right*

Caribbean lowlands. Leaders, the Delegados de la Palabra had to be found and instructed

in their role. New clinics are being built not only to train volunteers to assist as midwives and nurses, but also to combat the introduction of AIDS. In cooperation with the government, rural schools are provided for over 14,000 children to give them an elementary education. These schools are open to all. The teachers are paid by the government and the operating costs by the Vicariate.

An apostolic vicariate is mission territory under the jurisdiction of the Propagation of Faith. As noted earlier, when it has the personnel and financial ability to support itself, it is named a diocese, no longer mission land but rather a part of the local church. This is the goal of every vicariate. Several factors give an indication that this may soon be the story of Bluefields. Recently, the Province of St. Joseph and the Vicariate agreed that Calvary province could not and would not be obliged to send more personnel. However, it would continue its financial support until the territory became a diocese.

As mentioned earlier, the Vicariate now has approximately thirty priests, half of whom are local, in addition to over twenty major seminarians.

The compulsory age for bishops to submit their letter of resignation is seventy-five. Bishop Paul will reach that milestone on December 3, 2018. He and his auxiliary, Bishop David Zywiec, are leading the vicariate in studying its future. Consultation with the apostolic nuncio of Nicaragua, the hierarchy of the metropolitan see of Managua, civil authorities and other knowledgeable persons has resulted in a tentative plan to ask the Holy See to form two dioceses from the vicariate territory, namely the Diocese of Bluefields Nicaragua and a new Diocese of Siuna Nicaragua. Both would be suffragan sees of the Archdiocese of Managua.



*Bishop David Zywiec going on a mission trip*



# ROTARY CLUB HELPS FR. WALLY'S WATER PROJECT



*The volunteers as they left Panama in 2014*

Many of you are familiar with the water projects of Fr. Wally (Pablo) Kasuboski, a Capuchin missionary. Since arriving in Panama in 1988, he has been serving the spiritual and temporal needs of his mission parish of 2,500 square miles and 30,000 people in more than 40 villages.

Together with his people whom he taught to be carpenters, welders, drivers and masons, schools, churches and bridges were built. He also helped them improve and maintain the few local roads in the region.

He recognized that too many people were dying of cholera and dysentery because of the lack of safe water. Local wells offered only putrid, tainted



waters while that drawn from rivers was contaminated. During the past 25 years, he has helped the locals set up four water projects to deliver safe water directly to various villages from streams high in the mountains. Despite their poverty, the recipients assessed themselves for funds and also contributed their labor to make the projects possible. However, most of the financial cost had to come from assistance in the U.S.A., much through your contributions to the Capuchin Mission as well as from his relatives and friends in his home town of Ripon, Wisconsin

Volunteers from both the Ripon area and Ripon College not only have helped financially but also a considerable number spend each January in Panama working with Fr. Wally. This direct contact enabled some who are members of the Ripon Rotary Club







successfully to propose the adoption of the clean water project as one of its goals. They next obtained the support of the Panamanian Rotary Club. More recently Rotary International has identified clean water as one of its priorities for international service and has awarded a grant of \$14,000.

This year's workers are engaged in completing the over 15 foot high dam. The future of

the project may be the construction of a micro hydroelectric power plan, to provide electricity for the people. Such a venture will require more hands-on labor and financial assistance from you, members of the Capuchin Mission Association, the Rotary Club and other benefactors.



*Fr. Wally loves all his volunteers!*



*Some people who will now have clean water. Two tribes of Indians are included in the district that the project will serve.*



## ARTICLE BY CAMELIA GREANEY, MEMBER OF OUR EUCHARISTIC MISSION BAND



*Fr Kalist Tesha and Camelia Greaney*



*Seminary Chapel*

A journey must begin with a single step. For me this single step did not stop. Instead, it continued and took me halfway around the world. Where did I go? To Tanzania!

In May, 2014, I traveled to East Africa with Fr. Peter Asantebwana of Moshi Tanzania. The provincial of the Capuchin Province of Tanzania invited us to visit the Capuchin Seminary High School in Maua, Tanzania. I

was interested to learn the needs of the Capuchins in Africa who are preparing young men for the priesthood. Also the trip would give me a chance to observe the country.

At times the roads leading to the seminary were almost impassible. The clay covered roads were lined with deep, wet slippery ruts. Little children walking to school and women carrying heavy loads on their heads were fascinating sights. The seminary

grounds were breathtaking, with a peacefulness that seemed to be heaven sent. The Capuchin Rector, Fr. Kalist Tesha greeted us and took us into the chapel where the seminarians were gathered to pray the Angelus. The chapel was decorated with a refined yet festive appearance, a somewhat different look than ours.

We then entered the sacristy. Fr. Kalist mentioned the need for new vestments. He showed me their limited supply, many worn from

Dear Brother Larry,

I have enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ in the envelope provided in this newsletter to further the Capuchin Missions to serve the poor and needy. My name and address are on the reverse side of this mail-in response.

I prefer to charge my gift to my credit card: Visa  Mastercard  Am Express  Discover

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Card Number*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Exp. date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*signature*

- Please send me a copy of the latest brochure of cards and certificates for the living and deceased
- Please send me additional information about including the Capuchin Missions of the Capuchin Province of St. Joseph in my estate plans.

The prayers of the entire Capuchin Order are joined with yours as we pray for your special intentions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
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*Seminary Chapel*

long-term usage. My thoughts turned to my work as a volunteer at the Eucharistic Mission Band located adjacent to the Capuchin Monastery & Solanus Center in Detroit. For nearly a century, the group has been creating vestments for missionary priests throughout the world. Why not do the same for Fr. Kalist!

It was an honor for me to carry out that resolution. When I returned to Detroit I requested materials to make four vestments, white, red,



*Fr. Kalist & Fr. Peter*

green, and purple. Fr. Kalist recently received them and expressed his gratitude to all who were involved in making this gift possible.

If you are interested in ordering a vestment for a priest here or in the missions, contact the Eucharistic

Band at 313-579-2100, ext 138, on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 until 2:00 for more details. If you wish to contact Fr. Kalist Tesha concerning his needs for educational material, tuition for future priest and updating of the facilities, please E-mail him at [kalistesha@gmail.com](mailto:kalistesha@gmail.com).

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## PLEASE REMEMBER



Bishop Peter Baptist Ishigami, Capuchin bishop in Okinawa, died on October 25. Born on December 1, 1920, he was a seminarian when drafted into the Japanese Army during World War II. When the first Calvary province missionaries entered his country in 1947, he greeted them and gave much assistance. In 1949, he came to America and joined the Capuchins. After his ordination as a priest in 1952 at Marathon WI, he returned to his homeland. He became the first native bishop of Naha, Japan, in 1972. May he rest in peace.



*Fr. Ted Niehaus*

*Fr. Loren Miller*

With request for prayers for Fr. Ted who died of brain cancer on November 19, 2014. Also for Fr. Loren who is very ill. Note that both have spent many years as missionaries in Nicaragua.