

The Mission CONNECTION



Newsletter of the Capuchin Overseas Missions Association

January 2012

Chepo, Panama Celebrates 25 Years of Capuchin Presence



Fr. John Celichowski

Recently, the people of Chepo, Panama celebrated twenty-five years of dedicated ministry by the Capuchin friars. For the first twenty of those years, the Detroit-based Province of St. Joseph sent friars to Panama to serve the parishes and people in the Chepo district. For the past five years, this responsibility has shifted to the friars of the Vice Province of St. Felix, which includes Costa Rica and Nicaragua as well as Panama.

The celebration featured a Saturday afternoon tribute in song, dance and personal testimony to what God had done through the ministry of the friars and with the people of Chepo over the past quarter century. On Sunday, an overflow crowd joined José Domingo Ulloa, Archbishop of Panama, in thanking the Capuchins for their work and in recommitting themselves to work together to share the gospel of Jesus throughout the region. Archbishop Ulloa gave special recognition to Fr. Kevin (Francisco) Heagerty, who was part of the original group of friars who came to Chepo in 1986 and was celebrating his 50th anniversary of presbyteral ordination.



There are four Capuchins from the Province of St. Joseph who continue to minister in Panama. In addition to Fr. Kevin, Fr. Andre Weller has been working in Chepo since 1991, Fr. Wally (Pablo) Kasuboski has been working in Tortí Alto Bayano since 1988, and Fr. Jozef Timmers serves at Parroquia San Pio in Tocumen (a suburb of Panama City) and is also on the Vice Provincial Council.

There were daily rain showers; but they were no match for the light and warmth that emanated from San Cristóbal Parish in Chepo that weekend!

—*John Celichowski, OFM Cap.,
Provincial Minister*



Dear Friends,

I wish you a Blessed and Happy New Year. I hope that you had a wonderful Christmas filled with many blessings of family and friends to share with.

It is nearly six months now since I have returned to the Mission Office as Director after an absence of more than thirteen years. When my provincial superiors asked if I would consider this position again, I was a bit hesitant as I believed much had changed during the 13 years. After these several months, I realize the basics remain the same: Supporting the life and ministry of our Capuchin brothers in many other countries of the world. This is truly a worthwhile ministry and I am enjoying it.

I also saw many familiar names in the Missions mail we receive! For me, that was a wonderful sign of how faithful you have been as we continue to be your missionary brothers who bring God's word to so many who are less fortunate. For those who are new in sharing this ministry, I'm sure I will come to know many of you in the years ahead. With your support, we can continue spreading the Gospel, in the spirit of St. Francis, in foreign lands.

Last and very important, I want to thank Fr. Campion Baer for his years serving in this office. He did a wonderful job and we wish him well as he continues his teaching ministry at St. Lawrence Seminary High School.

God's blessings to you !

Brother Larry

From Seminary to the Mission Field

Capuchin friar Wilbert Lanser never thought of serving in the mission field until he was introduced to a missionary while studying at the seminary. Father Wilbert has now been in Nicaragua for 36 years and can't imagine being anywhere else.

"This is a different life," Father Wilbert explains. "I think the work we do in Nicaragua is for the good of the people...and our own good as well."



A parish member with Fr. Wilbert.

"Nicaragua is a hard place to live.

There's limited electricity and safe water is a problem. There's a purified system, however the people can't afford the electricity to use it. But the people...ah, the people... they are so good. They are so receptive."



Father Wilbert travels 5-6 days a week. His parishes are two hours apart. Two parish members come to guide him to their church. The three will travel on horse, mule, or will

walk. After Mass, two new guides arrive to travel to the next parish. On Sundays, Father Wilbert celebrates Mass from his 'home' church located in Muelle de Los Bueyes, a rural parish ministering to several thousand people. There's no day off.

When asked what has changed in the last 36 years, Father Wilbert explains "it's the people. They are more aware of Catholic life. They are more educated and more firm in their faith. The lay workers have offered themselves. I have offered myself. I like to think it's made a difference."



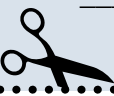


Dear Brother Larry,

I have enclosed \$ _____ in the envelope provided in this newsletter to further the Capuchin Overseas 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

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



Br. Larry Shares that You Can Now Donate to the Capuchin Missions On-Line!

To donate on-line to the Capuchin Missions' effort, please go to www.TheCapuchins.org/missions

There you will see many opportunities to support our friars in the mission field.

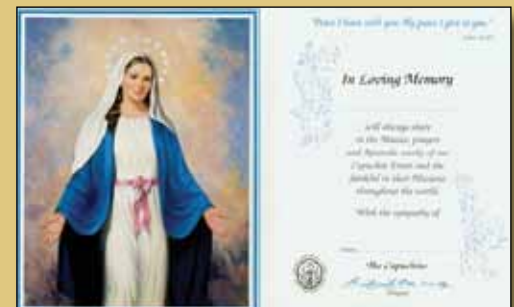
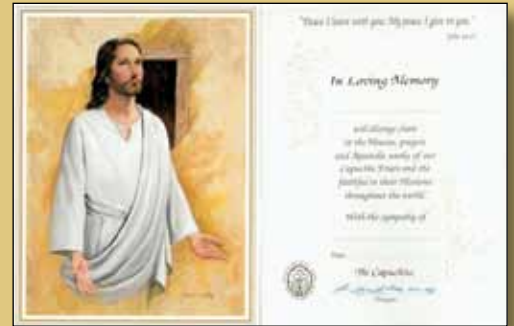


Click on the Click & Pledge icon and you can donate quickly and securely. There is an area to note if your donation is a memorial or honorarium and to also add the name of the honoree.

Request a card from the Capuchin Memorial Mass Association. The spiritual gift of enrolling a loved one in the Association is ideal for:

- A remembrance of a deceased loved one
- An expression of sympathy
- The celebration of a special occasion

The folders, cards, and certificates can be ordered on-line or by viewing the selection on-line and then mailing in the downloadable order form.



Friar Fix-It – Brother Isidore

Capuchin friar Isidore Herriges has left his mark in Nicaragua. A skilled builder, Br. Isidore has built schools, clinics and chapels. Often times his buildings are built far into the rural areas, accessible by a very poor road, if there is a road at all.

“We would only erect a building if the people wanted it,” Brother Isidore explains. “The people needed to be part of the building. They would cut down trees, strip logs, gather sand. Their labor needed to be evident so the building would truly be theirs. We friars don’t want to impose ourselves on the people.”

Years later, Brother Isidore continues to get slaps on the back from those who labored by his side.

“The people have tremendous pride. They are very willing.”

Brother Isidore now splits his time between Nicaragua and Wisconsin...but his heart is always with Missions.

“The rainy season brings 200 inches of rain between May to December,” he explains. “It’s too hard to build during the monsoon season so I return to Wisconsin and gather items to be shipped to Nicaragua.”

Items are shipped in a 40 foot container and contain items for the Missions, clinics, and schools. Typically a container’s contents include medical supplies, school supplies, clothing, and some furniture.

“Anything worthwhile, we’ll pack and send. The people of Nicaragua are very, very poor. We have US parishes and organizations gathering items for Nicaragua. The items are sent in the name of our Nicaraguan Bishop, Capuchin friar Paul Schmitz. They are unloaded in Managua and then transported to the rural areas. There is a lot of corruption, but we get the items where they are needed most.”



Brother Isidore readies a shipment to Nicaragua.

**Call Brother Larry to
learn how you can help
the people of Nicaragua.
313.579.2100, ext. 185**

Chepo Celebrates 25 Years of Capuchin Presence



Youth of Chepo, dressed as friars, give a presentation. The picture is of San Cristobal (St. Christopher), patron of the parish.



Friars who have served in Chepo, join their brothers from the Vice Province of St. Felix, in a presentation at the Saturday celebration.



The Archbishop of Panama poses with concelebrants at the 25th Anniversary Mass. Fr. Kevin Heagerty (L-front row), celebrated his 50th anniversary of his ordination as a priest.



Br. Mauricio, Vice Provincial Secretary (L), and Br. Mario, Vice Provincial Minister, (R), pose with Br. John and their plaques commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the Capuchin presence in Chepo.



The children of Chepo present a traditional Panamanian dance at the Saturday celebration.



The older youth of Chepo present another folkloric dance.

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Friar 'farmer' Fr. Kevin

Capuchin friar Kevin Heagerty has served in Central America's mission field for 25 years. When he arrived, there were 27 churches. Today, there are more than 100!

"The Catholic faith is engrained into the culture," Father Kevin explains. "The church is very alive. The Panamanian people are very religious. They want a church in order to gather every Sunday. There is a true sense of community. When I enter a church to celebrate Mass, I can feel the enthusiasm. It's very joyful."

And although one often reads about the high standard of living in Panama City, it hasn't filtered down to the rural areas.

"The people continue to struggle for the basic human needs," Capuchin friar Kevin continues. "My mission trips can be a month long. I go from church to church...on horseback; by boat; I walk. There's nothing typical in my day except prayer. That's my constant. Most of my work is spent planting seeds of the Good News. Being a missionary is being a good farmer. I plant. I nurture. I tend. It's all about evangelizing. People are hungry for the Word."

Under Father Kevin's watch, a Lay Leader program has been formed. The Delegates of the Word keep the worshipping community functioning in spite of not having a priest regularly present.

"The lay leaders are the backbone of the church," Father Kevin exclaims. "They are very faithful."



Fr. Kevin Heagerty