



Vincentian Solidarity Office

October 2008 Bulletin

Comments from the Director

Dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with us!

The VSO recently awarded five more VSF Micro-Project Grants with monies from the Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF). These included a VSF Micro-Project Grant for: (1) the Province of Ethiopia to support a food distribution program for elderly women in Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Nekemte; (2) the Argentina Mission of the Province of Slovenia for repairs and improvements to the Jardín San Carlos Social Service Center at the Parroquia Virgen de la Medalla Milagrosa in San Carlos de Bariloche; (3) the Kenya Mission of the USA Midwest Province to finance the Emmaus Program for ongoing formation and education of clergy from all the dioceses of Kenya; (4) the Province of Hungary to outfit the province's houses with new computer equipment; and (5) the Province of Argentina to purchase fuel for pastoral vehicles to visit 35 remote communities of the Parroquia Ntra. Señora de Fátima and Parroquia Santa Lucía in Corrientes. The VSO has now awarded a total of 55 VSF Micro-Project Grants through the generosity of confreres contributing to the VSF.

As we conclude Ordinary Time in the Liturgical Calendar, we hear Gospel stories of Jesus confounding the Pharisees and Sadducees with an alternative vision of God's order. These readings are most pertinent for current circumstances where greed and fear wreak havoc with the finances of the industrialized world. Sadly, turmoil in the economies of wealthy nations compounds suffering of people in developing nations. In these times, let us pray more intently for the just economies ordained by God and deepen our commitment to solidarity with the poor.

Fraternally in St. Vincent,

Brother Peter A. Campbell, C.M.

A Boat in Tenaru

One of the works of our International Mission in the Solomon Islands is Good Shepherd Parish in Tenaru. Father Ivica Gregurec, C.M. serves as the parish priest. For some time Father Ivica struggled to bring pastoral services to residents of three of the Gela Islands in the parish because he lacked access to a boat. Approximately 250 impoverished parishioners live on these dispersed and underdeveloped islands.

With the support of the International Mission, Father Ivica applied to the VSO and obtained a VSF Micro-Project Grant to purchase a 21-foot long, fiberglass boat and a Yamaha outboard motor for Good Shepherd Parish. Father Ivica now uses the boat, named the "Salve Regina," to transport himself and the parish pastoral team to the islands, regularly bringing pastoral services to their inhabitants.



Fr. Ivica Gregurec, C.M. and pastoral assistants of Good Shepherd Parish ride the "Salve Regina"

Support for a Farm Coop in Talamanca

One of the key works of the Vice-Province of Costa Rica is the Parroquia Santiago Apóstol de Talamanca, located in the Talamanca region in far southern Costa Rica. The parishioners include 13,000 members of the Bribri and Cabécare indigenous groups. Most parishioners are very poor, and survive by subsistence

farming. The parish territory is grossly underdeveloped, and only recently obtained limited roads, electrical power, and communication systems. Residents struggle with numerous social problems. In response, the parish sponsors a health dispensary, a hunger relief program, advocacy for indigenous rights and basic services, and a formation program for community leaders.

In 2005 wide-scale flooding of several rivers after a prolonged period of heavy rains aggravated the poverty in the territory of the Parroquia Santiago Apóstol de Talamanca. The flooding ravaged many family farms. The devastating impact of the flooding, and an ongoing challenge to fund parish operations motivated the leadership of the Parroquia Santiago Apóstol de Talamanca to establish a farm cooperative for local residents. The farm cooperative began in 2007 with 20 members including Father William Benavides Araya, C.M., the pastor of the Parroquia Santiago Apóstol de Talamanca. The cooperative initially cultivated five hectares of land owned by the parish and five hectares of land provided by the government for use by residents. The cooperative grows plantains, and processes them into plantain chips for sale at regional markets and restaurants.



The new food processing center and tractor at the Parroquia Santiago Apóstol de Talamanca

The cooperative has proven successful in assisting residents and moving the parish toward financial self-sufficiency. Residents who are members of the cooperative earn income from the crops they grow on their portion of the cooperative land, from their work in the food processing operation, and from their share of the net income from selling the processed and packaged plantain chips. The Parroquia Santiago

Apóstol de Talamanca earns income from the crops harvested from its five hectares of parish land.

Because of this initial success, the Parroquia Santiago Apóstol de Talamanca sought to increase the productivity of the farm cooperative, double the amount of land farmed, and recruit more residents to become members. Expanding the cooperative and increasing its productivity, however, required a tractor to mechanize the farming which was being done manually, a new food processing center to replace the makeshift shelter that housed the plantain processing operation, and acquisition of commercial grade equipment for making and packaging plantain chips.

Through the Vice-Province of Costa Rica, the Parroquia Santiago Apóstol de Talamanca sought the service of the VSO to obtain the resources it needed to expand and improve its farm cooperative. The VSO assisted the parish in obtaining a grant from the German Embassy in Costa Rica to construct a new food processing building, a grant from the Loyola Foundation to purchase a 4-wheel drive tractor and plow, and a grant from the Raskob Foundation to purchase new cooking, packaging and storage equipment. The VSO matched all three grants with funds from the VSF to complete the financing of the expansion and improvement of the farm cooperative.

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Our goal: To assist the poorer provinces, vice-provinces, and missions of the Congregation of the Mission with obtaining funds for their works and needs.

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