



Vincentian Solidarity Office

March 2007 Bulletin

Comments from the VSO Administrator

Dear Confreres,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with us!

In February of 2007 the VSO funded four VSF Micro-Project Grant Applications with monies from the Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF). The VSO awarded VSF micro-project grants to: the Vice-Province of Costa Rica for the formation of pastoral agents at the Parroquia Santiago Apóstol in Talamanca; the Province of Cuba to complete a stockroom for the “Casa de Abuelos San Francisco” and restore the sacristy of the Iglesia San Francisco de Asís in Santiago de Cuba; the Province of Northern India to furnish the seminary chapel at Aquinas College in Gopalpur-on-sea; and the Province of Ethiopia for a kindergarten feeding program at the Abba Gebremichael Catholic School in Mekelle. I am most grateful for the generosity of confreres contributing to the VSF that made these micro-projects possible!

This Lent I have been reflecting on the Church’s call for us to fast. Fasting is a privilege for those of us who have plenty – and one that should help us understand that for hundreds of millions of others, going without enough to eat is a deprivation that offends God’s Kingdom and order. This bulletin describes two VSO supported projects undertaken by confreres that address hunger – hunger for food and the good news of the Gospel.

Fraternally in St. Vincent,

Brother Peter A. Campbell, C.M.

Feeding the Children of Humanata

The Republic of Bolivia has abundant natural resources including large reserves of natural gas and minerals. Sadly, Bolivia also claims one of the lowest per capita incomes of any nation in South America. Nearly two-thirds of Bolivians live in poverty. For

decades Bolivia’s economy has suffered great instability including hyperinflation, stagnant growth, and the lack of an effective infrastructure for development. The reasons for these economic problems are complex, but largely related to Bolivia’s political turmoil over the last 40 years that has included several military coups, corruption, and an internal struggle over the country’s illegal coca crop.

Sadly, it is children – the most vulnerable members of society – who especially suffer in such troubled political economies. In Bolivia, where many families survive by subsistence farming on the harsh terrain of the Andes Mountains, 8% of children up to the age of 5 are underweight (according to the United Nations 2006 Human Development Report). For this reason, the confreres of the International Mission of El Alto created a day care and feeding program for children called the “Guarderías San Francisco” at the Parroquia San Francisco in Humanata.



Children of the “Guarderías San Francisco”

Humanata is located in a mountainous area 238 kilometers northwest of Bolivia’s capital city, La Paz, near the Peruvian border. The Parroquia San Francisco serves the local rural population of approximately 7,700 people who live mostly on a diet of potatoes and rice. In 2003 the parish established 5 day care centers to address the malnutrition of pre-

school children residing in Humanata and surrounding communities. The parish has continuously struggled to fund the operations of the day care centers that provide 75 young children with a nutritionally balanced breakfast, midday meal, and afternoon snack every day. The parish recently planned to expand the program to also provide nutritional support for children up to 12 years of age. The VSO was able to match a grant from Cooperación Vicenciana para el Desarrollo – Acción Misionera Vicenciana de España (COVIDE-AMVE) with monies from the VSF to support the operations and expansion of the “Guarderías San Francisco” feeding program. This funding will pay for food, stipends for cooks and day care workers, and the utilities of the 5 day care centers for a period of one year.

A Boat for Tucuuruí

Confreres of the Fortaleza Province staff the sole Catholic Parish of the City of Tucuuruí: the Paróquia São José. Tucuuruí is located on the Tocantins River in the Amazon region of northeastern Brazil. Its people suffer extensive poverty. Malnutrition, unwed pregnancies, and illiteracy are extensive in the region. The World Bank recently reported that the infant mortality rate of the Tucuuruí area is six times greater than in the United States.

Some of the poorest people in the Tucuuruí region live on the shores and the many islands of the Tucuuruí Reservoir. The reservoir was created in 1984 as part of a hydroelectric project that mostly provides electricity for an industrial complex in the distant and larger City of Belém. The reservoir flooded over 1,000 square miles and displaced 14,000 people when it was created. The hydroelectric project also drew thousands of poor immigrants from the rural interior seeking work. The displacement and overwhelming immigration are key causes of Tucuuruí’s high poverty.

The City of Tucuuruí has been slow to address the problems of its impoverished residents. In response, the Paróquia São José has become one of the most important providers of social services in the region. The parish sponsors a day care and feeding program for 1,300 children, nutrition and health education for families, adult skills training and literacy classes, maternity support for poor pregnant women, and advocates with civil authorities on behalf of residents for civil rights, schooling, and basic services.



The refurbished boat of the Paróquia São José

The Paróquia São José has long desired to bring its pastoral and social services to the residents of the Tucuuruí Reservoir. Most of these residents, however, can only be reached by boat. The Fortaleza Province requested the assistance of the VSO to purchase a boat for the confreres and pastoral team of the Paróquia São José. The VSO was able to obtain a grant from Stichting Porticus, and with matching funds from the VSF, financed the purchasing and refurbishing of a used, 12-meter long boat for the parish that can hold 10 adults and substantial supplies.

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

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