



# Vincentian Solidarity Office

## March 2009 Bulletin

### Comments from the Director

Dear Confreres,

May the desert open our hearts!

On January 1, 2009 I began my service as the Director of the Vincentian Solidarity Office (VSO). I have many thoughts concerning my new responsibilities. Foremost, I ask you to join me in thanking Brother Peter Campbell, C.M. for his highly productive tenure (lasting nearly seven years) as the first director of the VSO. Confreres and the people they serve in many provinces, vice-provinces and missions have benefited greatly from Brother Peter's hard work.

Secondly, I ask you to pray that God guide me in my new apostolate. The VSO faces significant challenges in obtaining funding for the needs and works of our confreres serving in developing regions. Monies are becoming scarce in the deepening, global fiscal crisis, while the needs of the poor grow larger. The Superior General and his Council also recently expanded the objectives of the VSO. I list these objectives below:

1. To secure funding for VSO projects benefiting the needs and works of the poorer provinces, vice-provinces and missions of the Congregation of the Mission.
2. To distribute grants from the Vincentian Solidarity Fund for micro-projects of the poorer provinces, vice-provinces and missions of the Congregation of the Mission.
3. To raise the funds to fulfill the obligations of the Patrimony Fund Project of the Congregation of the Mission.
4. To obtain money for other needs of the Congregation of the Mission as directed by the Superior General and his Council.

The VSO cannot accomplish these objectives without the collaboration of confreres and other people around

the world. For this reason, I will always welcome suggestions concerning the work of the VSO.

I will also always welcome contributions to the Vincentian Solidarity Fund (VSF)! Because of the generosity of confreres contributing to the VSF, I can report that the VSO recently awarded two more VSF Micro-Project grants. These include micro-project grants for (1) the Province of China for pews and other items for the new church, St. Joseph Parish, in Taidong Hsien, Taiwan, and (2) the Honduran Mission of the Province of Zaragoza to purchase 4 computers, software, wire, headsets, and furniture for the Radio Luz Cortés of the Parroquia Sagrado Corazón de Jesús in Puerto Cortés, Honduras.

I wish you a prayerful and peaceful Lent.

Fraternally in St. Vincent,

Father Miles Heinen, C.M.

### A Gymnasium in San Carlos de Bariloche

The people of the Parroquia Virgen de la Medalla Milagrosa—a parish of the Argentine Mission of the Slovenian Province—know well the meaning of “loving God by the sweat of one's brow and strength of one's arm.” Under the leadership of their founding pastor Father Branko Jan, C.M., the parishioners built



*The new gymnasium under construction by the Parroquia Virgen de la Medalla Milagrosa*

their church, rectory, and parish hall within a five-year period (1989-1993) with limited funding and largely through their own labor.

The Parroquia Virgen de la Medalla Milagrosa includes 22 barrios of the City of San Carlos de Bariloche in far southern Argentina. Many of the 24,000 residents of the barrios are poor. Most work in low-paying seasonal jobs for the local tourist industry. Disparity between rich and poor is great in the city. The lack of services, housing, and infrastructure in the 22 barrios of the parish stands in bold contrast with the gleaming business center of the city.

After building the church, rectory and parish hall, the parishioners of the Parroquia Virgen de la Medalla Milagrosa turned their efforts toward the problems of poverty in the parish. The parishioners recognized a great need for recreational facilities for the residents of the barrios. Winters are severe and long in the city. Residents and children in the barrios spend much of the winter crowded in little houses—causing family discord and stress. Lacking opportunity for alternative activities, youth have formed six delinquent gangs within the parish territory.

To address these issues, the Parroquia Virgen de la Medalla Milagrosa decided to construct a recreation center to serve the residents of the barrios on a 2-hectare lot located 3 blocks from the parish church. The City of San Carlos de Bariloche owned the lot, but failed to maintain it. The lot was cluttered with garbage and was the site of frequent gang violence. The components of parish plans to create the “Centro Recreativo y Deportivo” included: an outside park with trees; a 1,743 square-meter gymnasium; and a 294 square-meter community hall to house smaller activities and generate income for the operations and maintenance of the center.

The parishioners did not let their meager finances stand in the way. They convinced the city to donate the land for the project. Father Branko convinced a commercial orchard located 440 kilometers away from the city to donate its excess apple crop to the parish. For years parishioners traveled to the orchard to gather the fruit to sell to residents in San Carlos de Bariloche. The significant proceeds from the apple sales provided early capital to start the construction. Father Branko and the parishioners also obtained donations of building materials and the services of an engineer, architect and other technicians. Father

Branko and his parishioners also donated thousands of hours of their own labor to the project.



*Children recreate inside the new gymnasium*

Progress on the project encouraged donations from local businesses in Argentina. The Argentine Mission then requested the assistance of the VSO in obtaining monies to finish the construction of the gymnasium. The VSO obtained two grants from Stichting Porticus, which it matched with monies from the VSF, to help the parish complete the gymnasium. The gymnasium opened for use by local residents on September 8, 2008. Numerous families and children now visit the gymnasium and recreation center daily. Growing rental income from organized groups using the facilities promises to soon make the operations of the gymnasium and recreation center self-supporting.

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**Our goal:** To assist the Congregation of the Mission with obtaining funds for its evangelization and service of the poor.

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