

Missionary Commitment in Cortes (Honduras)

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I. The Province of Zaragoza takes on a missionary commitment in Honduras

In September, 1989, the Province of Zaragoza assumed the pastoral care of the parish of Puerto Cortés (Department of Cortés, Honduras). In this way the Province responded to the longed for commitment of the Provincial Assemblies: to minister in a concrete mission area in some part of a country on the path to development.

The Province of Zaragoza established itself in Honduras at the request of Bishop Jaime Brufau, C.M., bishop of San Pedro Sula and the Provincial of the Province of Barcelona which until that time supported the parish of Puerto Cortés.

The people of Puerto consider Father Jaime Nadal, C.M. (a missionary from the Province of Barcelona) as the founder of the parish even though previously the parish had been juridically established. Father Jaime Nadal carried out the construction of the old church — a model of solid construction even now — and the different phases of the school building which resulted in the present building. His work was continued by various confreres, also from the Province of Barcelona and here we mention in a special way Father Antonio Quetglas, C.M., and Father Antonio Cárcel, C.M.

The first missionaries from the Province of Zaragoza who established themselves in Puerto Cortés in October 1989 were: Fathers Raphael Hernández, superior and pastor, José Luis Echarte and Angel Echaide. They were later joined by Father Javier Iurrtia and Father Jesús Eguaras. Later, in accord with the ordinary organization of the local communities of the Province, many other missionaries shared and alternated in accepting different responsibilities as is the custom among us.

In 1993 the missionaries were joined by a new team of missionaries who ministered in Cuyamel (also in the Department of Cortés). Later, in 1998, a new house was formed and this area was

established as an independent parish on February 27, 2005 (parish of Santiago Apóstol [parish of Saint James the Apostle]) but formed one community with the missionaries in Puerto Cortés.

The Provincial Assembly of 2003 established: *We shall maintain the missionary team and elaborate an evangelization plan for the whole mission.* With this in mind the missionaries of the Province of Zaragoza held several community reflection meetings focusing on the meaning of their evangelizing presence. The Provincial Council dedicated several sessions to the study of their proposals which were gathered together in a document titled: *The Evangelizing Plan of the Missionaries of the Province of Zaragoza in Honduras.*

II. The Evangelization Plan of the missionaries of the province of Zaragoza in Honduras

This plan, which has as its starting point the social, cultural and religious reality of Honduras and is in accord with the guidelines of the Church in Latin America, the *Ratio Missionum* of the Congregation and Lines of Action of the Province, attempts to establish common criteria for the evangelizing activity of the missionaries, criteria that are in accord with the Diocesan Pastoral Plan and which also recognize the fact that the missionaries are members of the Congregation of Mission, followers of Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor.

Using this plan as a starting point, the missionaries of the Province of Zaragoza in Honduras draw up annual plans and programs together with the Visitor on the occasion of his visit to the mission.

The plan has a general objective: to encourage the proclamation of the Good News in each one of the parishes in Honduras that has been entrusted to our care so that people can encounter the living Jesus and thus are able to explain their faith; to encourage the establishment of ecclesial communities that are true homes and schools of communion, committed to the vision of charity that results in an effective solidarity with those people who are most poor and in the style of Saint Vincent de Paul.

This plan has five specific objectives from which arise lines of action and activity. The specific objectives are:

1. Strengthen the evangelizing dimension of our presence and action and of each one of the communities and groups and different lay ministers (catechists, leaders of the assembly, etc.) in such a way that all effectively promote an encounter with the person of the living Jesus.

2. Encourage the integral education (basic education and faith education) within the community, groups, programs and ecclesial institutions and provide for the specific formation (specialized formation, theological and Vincentian formation) of the pastoral ministers and those responsible for our works and projects.
3. Promote attitudes and structures of communion through the creation and consolidation of ecclesial communities, the collaboration and witness of the unity of the laity, consecrated men and women, pastoral ministers, missionaries, the diocesan and universal church and responsible participation in the community, parish and diocesan councils and assemblies.
4. Cultivate in the communities a commitment with those who are most poor, promote the development of an organized social pastoral ministry, respect for family and social values, specifically the inviolable value of human life and the dignity of the person, solidarity and the transformative power of work, and ministering on behalf of the most disadvantaged so that they become architects of their own development.
5. Help people express their faith in festive community celebrations that involves the participation of different lay ministers and the integration of local cultural elements in such a way that these elements are evangelized and able to produce fruits of unity and solidarity.

To promote the work of evangelization, numerous groups of missionaries from the Province (together with missionaries from other Provinces and even other Congregations) have made their presence felt on three occasions: in 1991 during *La Santa Misión* (the holy mission) promoted by bishop Brufau in preparation for the fifth centenary of the beginning of the evangelization of the continent; in 2003 in the preparatory *Misión* on the occasion of the establishment of the new parish in Cuyamel; in 2006 during *La Santa Misión* on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Bishop Angel Garachana's ministry as bishop. The most visible fruit of these extraordinary missionary activities (in our parishes and in the Diocese as a whole) was the establishment of a large number of ecclesial communities. It is impressive to witness the participation of so many Catholics and their growing commitment. Such growth in the number of ecclesial communities presents us with a great challenge and so it becomes necessary to accompany the members of these communities and offer them on-going formation.

III. Community life in the mission

From the time of their arrival in Honduras, the missionaries formed a community of life, prayer, apostolate and spirit. The day begins with an hour of community prayer. Meals are also eaten together.

Work is organized in such a way that one day a week (usually Monday) everyone comes together: to share time together, play sports, lunch with the confreres from the Province of Barcelona in San Pedro Sula, participate in formation meetings and community discernment, and celebrate family feast days.

During the week, the missionaries live in community in two houses. Each day one of the missionaries travels to the mountains and returns some time the following day. Then another missionary departs in the same way. Thus there is always a community and community life.

This way of living and working certainly increases the consumption of fuel but also assures the community dimension of our missionary life.

Each year the community dedicates several sessions to evaluation, reflection and planning with the Visitor on the occasion of his annual visit to the Mission. This visit of the Provincial sustains a sense of belonging to the Province and reminds us of our mutual obligations.

For the Province, a mission orientation is a destiny that forms part of its ordinary organization (even though obviously this requires a positive predisposition to the mission and certain physical and health characteristics).

The missionaries are aware that they are destined for the mission for a specific time and indeed one of the riches of the mission consists in the fact that some members go and others return from the mission thus making the ministry more fruitful. Each year some one goes and comes, an experience that makes the Province more and more missionary oriented.

IV. The promotion of vocations and lay ministers

From the beginning the missionaries have cultivated the promotion of vocations. In November, 2002 the Etapa de Acogida (the phase of welcoming or receiving), as it is called here, was established in Puerto Cortés. This phase provides candidates with a time for vocational discernment and they are able to become involved in the life of the community of the Congregation. The candidates for the Congregation are accompanied by Father José

Luis Induráin who is assisted by other members of the community. The candidates rise each morning and travel to the Catholic University of San Pedro Sula where they study psychology. The afternoon is dedicated to personal study, participation in the pastoral work of the parish and progressive integration into the life of the community.

The candidates for the Congregation initiate this phase after having participated in meetings and gatherings and after having been accompanied by one of the missionaries. They must have completed the studies that will enable them to enter the university.

The mission is a shared commitment with other pastoral ministers. The collaboration of four Daughters of Charity from the Central American Province, a Sister from North America, the commitment of one hundred ten Leaders of the Word and catechists, the participation of some lay ministers and volunteers, social pastoral ministers and members of apostolic groups (among others, the Marian Youth Groups and the International Association of Charity) are insufficient to respond to the Christian communities that day by day are growing. As a result the missionaries dedicate their efforts to the promotion and the formation of Leaders of the Word, catechists, and those leaders responsible for the ecclesial communities.

Lay missionaries from Honduras and other communities in Spain also collaborate in the works of the mission: some for a short period of time and others for a more prolonged stay. The province signs an agreement with each one of these volunteers and mutual obligations are outlined.

Because general access to education is decisive for human promotion and empowering people for ministry, the missionaries support children, adolescents, and young women and men with limited resources so that they can continue their primary and secondary education. The **education assistance program** supports more than 200 children and young people and helps them cover transportation, registration and school supply costs.

V. The parish of Puerto Cortés and its works

The **parish of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús** in Puerto Cortés has a population of about 100,000 inhabitants who live in seventy-six centers (urban and rural). As a result of the *Santa Misión* more than three hundred ecclesial communities have been established.

The missionaries travel weekly to each one of the neighborhoods in the city of Puerto Cortés. The communities beyond the reach of

our radio transmission and the rural communities are visited either bi-weekly or monthly.

During recent years the missionaries have consolidated a significant number of **social works**.

- **School and Institute Sagrado Corazón de Jesús:** is responsible for kindergarten and the primary education of 335 students and the secondary education of 531 students. There are 46 professors, 7 administrators and service personnel. The school is integrated into the Iberian-American Confederation of Catholic Education.
- **Center of Integration and Professional Formation for Youth, Fredrick Ozanam:** this center serves 100 young people in four specialties: automobile mechanics, electricity, refrigeration, and welding. A young teaching staff (average age being twenty-five) dedicate themselves to promoting young people at risk. A department of pedagogical resources provides for the formation of these young people in the area of values. This same formation is also provided for their parents and families.
- **Maestro en casa (Teachers at home):** through radio, the parish supports two groups of adults in their education, facilitating the installation of equipment and personal support for more than six hundred persons. Government formation programs for adults need institutions, like parishes, in order to achieve their goals.
- **Home for children:** receives thirty street children or children at risk and provides housing in two homes: San Ramón and San Martín. A team of eight teachers under the leadership of a Daughter of Charity accompanies the children in their process of integration and formation.
- **Nursing home:** receives twenty-nine persons (six women and twenty-three men) who are cared for by a group of workers under the leadership of a Daughter of Charity. Another Daughter is responsible for the kitchen. In order to be admitted into the home the individual has to show that he/she has no family.
- **Parish Medical Clinic:** assists an average of fifty persons daily: medical, clinical analysis, pharmacy. Those who come to the Clinic have previously participated in a formation session on health and hygiene which is accompanied with a simple reflection on the life of faith. A Daughter of Charity is responsible for this work.
- **Workshops for the promotion of women:** volunteers from the International Association of Charity coordinate different workshops in the area of sewing, baking and beauty care.

- **Office of Social Ministry:** functions every day with the collaboration of social and solidarity ministers from each community. They receive people, study their more urgent needs and plan the most adequate response. They also coordinate the educational process for those in prison so that they can obtain their primary and/or high school diplomas.

Radio Luz Cortés functions together with our social works: this radio station is becoming more autonomous in its programming and brings the life of the parish, as well as formation programs, to every corner of the parish community. A new transmitter will extend the reach of the station to the area of Cuyamel.

VI. The parish of Cuyamel and its works

The parish **Santiago Apóstol** consists of 63 communities situated between the city of Omoa and the Guatemalan border. It has a population of about 35,000 inhabitants. More than half the communities are located in the mountains and the only access to these communities is by foot. The missionaries visit these communities four times a year and follow an exact schedule. These visits occur during the time when the rains do not wash out the roads. Depending on the terrain it can take from two to five hours to reach these communities (and about the same number of hours to return home). It is easier to travel to the 25 communities that are located on the sides of the highway especially now that the work for leveling and laying asphalt has been completed.

The formation of the Leaders of the Word constitutes one of the most important works. These leaders are responsible for gathering the community together each week and for the community outreach programs. Each of these leaders travels from his/her village on a monthly basis and comes to the center for a day of formation, meetings, and community building.

The solidarity ministers and groups discover the more urgent needs of each village or neighborhood in order to resolve these problems and coordinate different projects and programs that focus on promotion and assistance with the Social Action Office. Monthly assemblies provide common criteria for action and above all, provide a parish identity in the midst of reality where there are situations of extreme need.

The program **teachers at home** makes it possible for 140 young people who were unable to complete their studies to do so at home through the use of the radio. Each Saturday they come to the parish for personalized assistance from the professors.

A number of **social works** have also been developed in Cuyamel. In conjunction with Medicus Mundo Bizkaia a series of projects have been initiated, projects that now depend on the parish:

- **Parish Medical Clinic:** attends to 40 people daily and makes available pharmacy services.
- **Optician:** offers eye examination and glasses.
- **Poultry farms:** in the center one thousand egg-laying chickens are raised on a permanent basis and two thousand chickens for consumption. The slaughterhouse and the elaboration of concentrated fodder complete the program. Seventy women in the villages, after having learned the technical aspects of the business, have established eleven poultry farms and are able to dispose of the income as they see fit.
- Assistance is provided to **midwives and health care personnel** in those villages where there is no medical or nursing service.
- **Latrines:** 596 latrines have been constructed in 21 communities. There are plans for projects that will open wells for garbage disposal and provide a network for the transportation of water.
- **Schools:** construction or rehabilitation of schools so that there is a school in every village.
- **Crops:** program of distribution of fruit trees so that these might be planted in the villages and contribute to better nutrition.
- **Workshops in sewing and cooking** for young women and men who do not have the economic resources but who desire to enter the labor market.
- Support to the **development projects in the rural area:** agricultural formation, providing running water, construction and reconstruction of houses, reconstruction of roads.

VII. The Social Action and Evangelization Funds

In order to assist the different projects that have arisen in the mission and in order to support the missionaries in their works and given the fact that these projects are unable to sustain themselves, the Social Action and Evangelization Fund has been established. It functions with an annual budget that is presented by the missionary community and is approved by the Provincial and his council.

The Social Action and Evangelization Fund is nurtured by contributions from the Province of Zaragoza, and donations and subsidies obtained through presenting these projects to other entities for financing.

The parishes entrusted to the missionaries of the Congregation of the Mission of the Province of Zaragoza and their different social works are able to obtain co-financing through the Social Action and Evangelization Fund. The management of the projects co-financed through the Social Action and Evangelization Fund are managed by the administrative councils of each work. The administrator of the Social Action and Evangelization Fund forms part of the council of each one of the social works that is co-financed.

Each parish and each social work does its own accounting, thus everyone becomes co-responsible in the management of the project and in moving these projects toward self-sufficiency, toward generating their own funds, and seeking support in their own country and presenting these projects to other outside entities for financing.

VIII. El Puente de Fraternidad (The Bridge of Brotherhood)

Each year in our communities here in Spain we celebrate the Campaign for Honduras, also known as El Puente de Fraternidad. El Puente de Fraternidad does not simply move in one direction (economic assistance for the missionaries and their projects). The life of the missionaries and the Christian communities that they serve is an invitation that urges us to live our lives from the perspective of those who are most poor, from the perspective of effective solidarity and in this way we are able to energize our communities and groups with the fresh air of the Good News that is embraced with simplicity and docility.

Aware of the fact that the solidarity of our communities in Spain with our missionaries in Honduras cannot be reduced to economic assistance during the days of the campaign, Puente de Fraternidad attempts to sustain the missionary commitment through formation, information and action by each one of the groups and communities in our parishes, in our centers, and in the Vincentian Family. In all of these same groups we seek to foster volunteers who will serve as missionaries and promote interest for the missions and for the projects of the missionaries.

The human dignity of all persons and all people, the quality of a truly human life for all people and the achievement of conditions of sustained and lasting development - all of these demand something more than alms, no matter how generous, from our communities in Spain and the people and the groups that we pastorally accompany. They demand from us a style of life and a way of thinking that is consistent. This is the greatest challenge that our mission in Hondu-

ras places before our communities in Spain and that El Puente de Fraternidad continually reminds us about.

Therefore, both there in Honduras and here in Spain, our mission in Honduras is a grace filled event for the Province of Zaragoza.

IX. Through the Paths of Hope

Recently the Episcopal Conference of Honduras addressed a Pastoral Letter to government officials, political parties and members of the civil society. This letter is titled: *Through the Paths of Hope*. After analyzing the reality *that pains us and questions us* and pointing out the ethical criteria upon which *a just and peaceful society* must be established, the bishops propose priorities on which all must focus: eradicate poverty, encourage a social economy, resolve the question of land reform, provide better health services for all people, consolidate democracy, transform the Justice system, eradicate corruption, guarantee the security of the citizens, protect and rationalize the use of natural resources, strengthen the national identity, act on behalf of a culture of responsibility. These priorities not only illustrate the reality that the people of Honduras live but also indicate a direction in order to open paths of hope.

The diverse works that our missionaries encourage and which we, as a community, support and feel are our own works—all these works must be viewed from the perspective of opening paths of hope.

While these works have a wide scope, they are not the fundamental concern of our missionaries. Their true concern, that which constitutes their passion and desire, that which claims their hearts and consumes their energy is the gospel, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, encouraging the communities, celebrating their faith, the formation of pastoral ministers and groups, drawing near to people who year after year become more numerous and each day become settled over an area that is more vast and more difficult to travel to.

On the occasion of the twelfth anniversary of his being named to minister in this diocese, the bishop of San Pedro Sula described his service to the Diocese and used the symbols of word, home and bread. These same symbols express the life of our companions in the mission of Cortés, Honduras.

- Word: embraced in prayer, lived in community, strengthened in formation, shared in catechesis and preaching, expressed in welcoming others, especially those persons who are most poor.
- Home: a community of followers of Jesus Christ, living as friends who care for one another and who are open to receive

other brothers and sisters so that they can multiply themselves in ecclesial communities built on the unity and participation of everyone.

- Bread: shared in fraternal gatherings and distributed in so many works and services on behalf of our sisters and brothers and their development. The Eucharistic bread is lived and celebrated, shared and presided over for the good of our sisters and brothers.

As proposed by the General Conference of the Latin American Bishops in Aparecido, our missionaries in Honduras and our entire Province want to be *disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that in him our people might have life.*

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