

REGION II NEWS

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Dioceses of Region II

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Archdiocese of Toronto

My trip to Guatemala – January 2009

By Deacon Bert Cambre

Last week I returned to Guatemala to visit Alvaro Ramazzini Imeri, Bishop of San Marcos to continue helping him with the restoration of the Permanent Diaconate in his diocese. A member of Caritas picked me up from the airport and we travelled directly to San Marcos. As we drove along the mountainous road, I could not help but admire the striking natural beauty of the scenery. We passed by Lake Atitlan, the deepest lake in Central America and one of the most beautiful lakes in the world. It is surrounded on its southern side by three volcanoes, one of them visibly active.

The social climate is a different story. Bishop Ramazzini raised his prophetic voice to point out the oppression, exploitation and misery of the people in his diocese. He spoke up for the better treatment of the environment by the Marlin gold mine owned by the Canadian corporation GoldCorp Inc. He also demanded justice for the workers of the coffee plantation "Finca Las Delicias" (The Delights Farm), where many em-

ployees were left without land and without work.

In Guatemala, standing for service and greater quality of life to the poor means confronting the establishment, those unjust structures that generate death. Consequently Bishop Ramazzini has received death threats. So much so, the government has placed bodyguards always at his side, but he still maintains a hectic rhythm of activity visiting parishes and the marginalized. On one occasion when he left without his bodyguard, his mother was in fear until his return.

I visited the workers that had been in Las Delicias. After a seven-year struggle, they finally own small tracts of land and a hut where they have established the "Consejo Comunitario de Desarrollo" (Community Development Council) in Finca El Desengaño (The Disillusion Farm) I learned about it and became interested in an education project the Franciscan Sisters of the Assumption are developing. Through providing sewing classes to women, the sisters are creating alternative incomes for their families.

The causes of the terror in Guatemala go back to the U.S.-organized overthrow of the democratic government of Jacobo

Arbenz in 1954 and are rooted in decisions made by those in power in the 1970's and 1980's. Currently, the law is not respected. Recently, a UN commission concluded impunity for criminal behaviour is extremely high. Out of 100 crimes, only 3 are taken to justice. Such corruption creates a climate of fear and it led me to reflect how much easier it is for us to live out our faith here in Canada.

We have much to be thankful for and many causes to support and pray for. In his book *Death and Resurrection*, Fernando Bermudez recounts an incredible story about the suffering of Christians in Guatemala and how they became martyrs for their faith. There were five men, Lucas, Justo, Angel, Domingo, and Juan, who gave their lives to deliver their communities from death. They were Amerindian catechists in El Quiché, persons much admired and loved by their communities. They took up the challenge to engage in activity toward social change. They proclaimed the Word of God by setting up training and consciousness-raising courses promoting and generating cooperatives.

Government agents saw in these five persons a threat to "national security." It happened during the first months of General Rios Montt's administration. One day members of the Army appeared and convoked the entire population of the villages of Santa Cruz El Quiche, municipality of Chesiz. The captain read out the names of these five brothers of ours. They were called up front, and the captain addressed the assembled villagers in the following terms:

"These men are subversives. They have to die. Otherwise they'll infect others. But we won't kill them. The members of their families will. So here are your orders. Choose members of these men's families--their fathers, brothers, sons, uncles--and have them take care of killing these five with machetes. Each family member so chosen must arm himself with a machete and kill his guilty relative. Tomorrow we'll be back--to see how well this order has been executed. If it has not been executed, we'll be back with soldiers and helicop-

ters to bomb every one of your villages. We'll wipe you out. That is all we have to say."

The captain finished, and a deathly silence fell on the assembly. The people looked at one another in terror. No one spoke. Only an anguished silence prevailed. The officer and the soldiers got into their trucks and left.

Then the people split into groups of twenty-five or thirty to discuss what was to be done with these five persons they all loved so much. The response of all the groups was unanimous, of course. "We won't do it." But when the five catechists took the floor, they stated firmly, "Brothers and sisters, go ahead and carry out the order. It is better for us to die than for thousands to die."

The people began to weep. The members of the men's families were speechless. It was about four in the morning when the march to the cemetery began. The whole population of the villages took part, men, women, and children. The five condemned men headed the great procession. All was quiet, except for the sound of people weeping. They were experiencing first hand the sorrow of Good Friday.

When they arrived at the cemetery, they dug five graves and formed a large circle. The five catechists took their places in the center. One of them prayed the Our Father. All the people prayed it with him. Another, *"We're going to die, but don't worry, we're going to be with God. It's all right to kill us. If we're not killed, our children, our wives, our relatives, and the whole population of these villages will die. Go ahead and kill us."*

Another said, *"Don't worry about our death. We've done nothing wrong. We'll see you in heaven."*

Another said, *"I only want to ask you one favour. Help my children."* The fifth tried to speak too but could not. The tension, sorrow, and anguish were too much. He could only fall to his knees and pray silently. The mothers of some of them like Mary at the foot of the cross, kept close by their sides.

The terrible moment of crucifixion arrived. The relatives of the five drew their machetes.

The five catechists felt the pain and anguish of death in their bodies. The executioners felt it in

their souls. The 5 bodies were in pieces, and their blood covered the earth, mingled with the tears of the witnesses. All were weeping, some fainted. Here was a mountain of suffering. One of those present went out of his mind.

Their act accomplished, the people wrapped the five bodies in plastic and buried them. Then they returned home in silence.

On the following day, those charged with informing the Army that its order had been carried out did so. The military authorities were satisfied. The witness who recounted these events added, "We remember them with holy reverence, because it is thanks to them that we are alive today."

There are hundreds of martyrs from Guatemala and all Central America of which this is but a tiny example. The peace agreements signed on December 29, 1996 for a "firm and lasting" peace brought some respite in the violence. However the climate of lawlessness and fear persists.

Today the poor of Latin America and the Amerindians of Guatemala are seeking to free themselves from the oppression they have continually suffered since the time of the conquistadores.

I also visited Fr. Erik Gruloos in the parish of San Miguel Ixtahuacan and we went to see the mine, the Marlin project, and take some pictures. This is a Canadian (GoldCorp Inc.) gold mine. The Guatemalan Ministry of Energy and Mines granted a license to Glamis Gold in November 2003 to engage in open-pit cyanide leach gold mining in San Marcos, the Marlin Project. The license was granted in violation of the State's obligation to seek the consent of the affected Mayan communities under ILO Convention 169. The Government did not even attempt to fulfill this obligation. Goldcorp and its shareholders are taking advantage of this legal vacuum.

The consequences of this violation are very serious. Before Goldcorp's arrival, the Mayan communities now affected by gold mining operations were already weakened by chronic poverty and the legacy of the internal armed conflict. The Western Highlands was a region gripped by terror in the 1980s.

Goldcorp effectively took advantage of this weakness and has robbed the affected communities of the opportunity, slowly, at their own pace and through their own mechanisms, to heal the social fabric, strengthen indigenous organization and leadership, and direct their own future, on their own terms. This is the spirit of the 1996 Peace Accords and international law on indigenous rights. In violation of the letter and spirit of these agreements, Goldcorp offers individual contracts (for jobs and land) in place of collective decision-making, privatized social assistance in place of public and collective ownership of the development process.

The environmental, health, social, and cultural impacts of the Marlin Project were never properly explained, considered or understood locally before Goldcorp's predecessor, Glamis Gold Inc., was given an exploitation license in November 2003. There is high-risk in cyanide leach mining.

The result has been a legal and human rights abyss in which it is impossible to adequately assess and respond to the risks posed by the Marlin Project.

Families and communities are divided. Poor householders, men and women living hand to mouth, face prosecutorial action initiated by Goldcorp. Acts of intimidation and violence and the heavy presence of police and military trigger fears from the recent past of internal armed conflict.

Many Christians are coming to realize that their faith in Christ obliges them to make a commitment to liberation, and so they organize resistance groups, moved by their faith, which has committed them, in love, to their brothers and sisters. They struggle with determination to change the prevailing system of death, in the hope that one day there will be land, work, bread, housing, health, and education for all--that all may have life in abundance, as Jesus wished (John 10: 10).

Bishop Ramazini's dedication to these causes despite that his life is at risk is an inspiration to me and to all that we can make a difference together through our faith and determination.

Diocese of Rochester

Welcome to the 2009 Convocation of Permanent Deacons of Region II

By Deacon Dan Hurley

We extend warm greetings from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, New York and invite you to the Convocation of Permanent Deacons of Region II this coming summer (July 31-August 2) at the beautiful RIT Inn and Conference Center. The theme of this year's Deacon Convocation is "Be Still and Know that I am God – Diaconal Spirituality for the 21st Century."

We are blessed to have the following nationally and regionally known presenters:

Father Bill Sheehan, OMI – Father Bill has broad experience in pastoral ministry, lay ministry and marriage counseling. He has ministered to clergy in the Archdiocese of Miami and has served as Formation Director, Novice Director and Provincial of the Oblates of Eastern America. Since 1983 Father Sheehan has been involved with Contemplative Outreach, founded by Fr. Thomas Keating. Father Bill brings a wealth of spirituality and knowledge to share with us this summer.

Sister Therese Dush, CA – Sister Therese is the founder and general director of the Bethany Retreat Center in Frenchville, Pennsylvania. Sister has extensive experience in Contemplative Prayer, the Ignatian Exercises, as well as Spiritual Direction. Sister is a member of the Diaconal Spiritual Formation Team of the Diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania.

Sr. Nancy Hawkins, IHM, Ph.D – Sister Nancy is an Associate Professor of Theological Studies at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry. Dr. Hawkins offers courses in theol-

ogy, spirituality and Catholic Social Teaching. She has an interest in the relevance of mystics to spirituality in the 21st century.

Father Richard Hunt, S.J. – Father Hunt is the pastor of the Catholic Campus Parish at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT – our host site!) Father Richard's many interests include both Western and Eastern spirituality, meditation, pastoral counseling and retreats.

Deacon George and Paula Welch – Deacon George is the Catholic Chaplain at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira, New York. Deacon Welch was ordained with the first class of deacons for the Diocese of Rochester in 1982. He is currently coordinating the Southern Tier Chapter of New York's Contemplative Outreach and offers classes in the Liturgy of the Hours and Lectio Divina for the Diocese of Rochester's Diaconal Formation Program. Paula is a professor emeritus at Mansfield (Pennsylvania) University, an iconographer and quilter. She and George just celebrated forty years of matrimony and are daily participants in centering prayer.

We know that you will be inspired, moved, refreshed and renewed by each of our presenters.

We are grateful to our Bishop, Most Reverend Matthew H. Clark, for his presence with us on Saturday afternoon for Holy Mass. We will also have a variety of different prayer experiences throughout the weekend. Entertainment has been planned for Saturday evening after dinner. Departure is scheduled for noon on Sunday in order to afford you time to return home at your leisure.

Please place us on your calendar for July 31 – August 2, 2009! A mailing with on-line registra-

tion capability and other information will be to you very shortly. Please notice that we are also offering attendees a chance to stay with Deacon Couples in their Rochester area homes, thus keeping costs even lower, along with affording all of us an opportunity to share diaconal experiences across Diocese lines! This housing opportunity is available on a first come/first served basis.

For immediate questions or comments, please

feel free to contact either the Chair of this year's Convocation Planning Committee - Deacon Dan Hurley (dhurley@dor.org or 1.585.319.8205) or the Director of Deacon Personnel for the Diocese of Rochester – Deacon David Palma at (palma@dor.org or 1.800.388.7177 ext 1237)

Welcome to the Diocese of Rochester, New York ... We look forward to your time with us!



Region II Convocation—Rochester, NY

Region II Directors Meeting

Region II Directors Minutes of September 29 -30, 2008 Meeting At Christ the King Seminary, Buffalo, New York

Present: Deacon Bert Cambre; Deacon Nick & Teresa Cherri; Deacon Greg Feary; Deacon Ted May; Deacon George Newman; Deacon David Palma; Rev. Jay Seymour; Deacon John & Susan Vallely

Deacon May made some opening remarks about the absence of the Directors from the dioceses that did not come; in particular about Les Distin, whose wife Lucy, we should keep in our prayers, as she had suffered a serious fall and could not be left alone.

Deacon May, having returned from an NADD Board Meeting held in Columbus, Ohio, on September 12-13, made remarks about the following highlighted items:

The Directors' Institute – It will be held again starting with a session at the April Chicago Convention. It is for veterans as well as new directors, especially for those who are starting new programs or are experiencing new challenges such as a new bishop.

The program is broken down into 1) Inquiry, 2) Aspirancy, 3) Candidacy and 4) Post Ordination.

Approximate costs include the 5 days at the Pontifical College Josephinum with room and board for \$2,100.00. Add to this your travel there, plus the NADD Conventions before and after the 5 day program.

A better explanation of the content of the Institute was asked for. Deacon May will obtain it and send it to the Directors.

The April 2009 Convention – It will be held at the Holiday Inn Chicago Mart Plaza on April 22-25. The Board will meet prior to the Convention. The location is within walking distance of many attractions so there will be no organized tours available. From the airport, you will be able to take the rapid transit and walk from a nearby station. The theme is still being developed.

Implementation of the National Directory – A survey is being conducted about the use of the National Directory. Input from all the dioceses is requested as to whether a diocese is following it, and if so, what is most difficult to implement. If it is not being used, then input is requested as to what the basis of the diocesan program is.

Assignment of deacons – Here again, input is requested about how deacons are assigned in the diocese. Questions asked relate to whether a deacon is in his home parish, the length of assignment, distance factors in play and whether the bishop's needs are being met.

The Summit – A short discussion about the April 2008 Summit was held. All agreed that NADD should continue in the discussions with the other organizations.

Resolutions – The NADD Board noted that all members may submit resolutions for the Board to place before the membership at the Convention Business meeting.

Name Change – In as much as there is discussion in the NADD Board about a name change due to many Canadian members, Deacon Bert Cambre made the motion – That Region II supports the idea of changing the NADD Name to North American Association of Diaconate Directors and have NADD research the possibility of doing so. Deacon

John Vallely seconded the motion, and all agreed.

The next order of business was to elect a new Region Rep. Deacon John Vallely nominated Deacon Bert Cambre, and Deacon George Newman seconded the nomination. Deacon Cambre was elected by a voice vote and will take office at the April NADD Board Meeting at the Convention in Chicago.

Deacon Ted May nominated Deacon Dave Palma to be an alternate to Deacon Cambre. Deacon Cambre seconded the nomination and Deacon Palma was elected by a voice vote. (NOTE: - In subsequent communication with the NADD Executive Board, it was pointed out that the NADD Constitution does not provide for an alternate Region Rep. This subject will have to be taken up by Deacon Cambre with the Board.)

Deacon Dave Palma gave a report about the Region Convocation which is to take place in Rochester July 31 – August 2, 2009. It is to take place in a hotel that the Rochester Institute of Technology owns. The entire convocation, including sessions, lodging and meals will take place in the one building. There will be an option for staying in nearby hotels or in the homes with local deacon couples. The theme of spirituality was welcomed by all. Deacon Palma requested mailing labels be sent to him by December.

Deacon Palma also requested articles for the Spring Newsletter.

As part of the Region II Meeting, a presentation was made about International Diaconate Center (IDC). Present to speak to us were Deacon Rob Mascini, from the Netherlands, who is President of the IDC, and Deacon Enzo Petrolino, who is President of the Italian Diaconate and a member of the IDC. Deacon Mascini spoke about the history of the IDC, its present operation, and invited all to join the organization.