

Parish of St. Joseph the Worker

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Dear

In my letters I try to share with you my personal experiences of being here in Ecuador, on the mission. You might ask if I have anything of interest to write after being confined for a month within the four walls of a building which offered accommodation and little else. In fact there are many things I could write about but this is the first time I have had the experience of almost total insomnia. I would be awake night and day quite unlike the worker I met who said that his life was to sleep at night and to relax during the day! The peculiar thing is that I would be quite alert during the day as if after a good night's sleep. I have read so many books; from the History of Britain, to slavery in Chad, to being an informer within the IRA to the highest and deepest levels of contemporary spirituality. I, who once prided myself of being asleep within one minute of hitting the pillow, found more minutes in the day than I would care to count. I hope it is an experience that I am leaving behind now that I have moved back to the parish.

I mentioned in my last letter that I was living next to the Sanctuary of the Divine Child. On the 25th of every month they have pilgrimages to the Church, thousands upon thousands. Below is a photo I took of the sanctuary.



THE CATECHETICAL SEASON STARTS

Courses for the catechists are on going. I attend to three a week at present. In the picture we see the "sending" or official designation. During the principal Sunday Mass all the catechists are present and they are presented with a Bible (which they bring along); a lighted candle, a short prayer which all say together after they sign a statement, "My contract with God" which highlights the responsibilities they undertake. It all looks and is quite solemn but full of joy and hope.



I hope that the two sticks are not too obvious!

HEALTH BULLETIN

I am glad to report that the operation seems to have been a success. The different bits and pieces seem to have stayed in place. I am pain free as regards the original source but there will be a few weeks or more before I will be able to walk without crutches or sticks. At the same time I am happy to think that I am making progress though I am following a demanding physio drill. It will take time. It does not hinder me too much though I cannot walk on the uneven so called streets around here so I am confined inside 98% of the time.

NURSERIES OR EDUCATIONAL CENTRES FOR INFANTS.

We try to make nurseries centres where the children are mentally stimulated so as to be able to begin their schooling. The results are encouraging. There is an impoverished private school nearby where the five year olds in the nursery are as advanced as the eight year olds in that school. I have five such centres which the government promised to support. Finally it had only money for one! As a result of my operation family helped me with £3,000; Michael Campbell of W. Kilbride with another £2,000 and a famous recent bingo in Barra with another £1,500 (Ronnie and Mary Pat added an undisclosed sum). There were also donations from a list of people, a school in Glasgow and another in Kilmarnock and so I will soon be in a position to open another two of the Centres. Teachers have to be paid (Just £100 a month each), equipment has to be bought, water (bought from tankers, electricity (stolen from the main supply going to the city) and we are on the road. I hope to open these and get a contract from the government to support us from next year's budget. It would be impossible to keep fund raising to keep them going next year. Last week after six masses the collection only came to £29! That is the reality and so you can see that progress is possible in the parish because of the support you give the parish. It is as simple as that. It is your donations that keep the wheels moving in this part of the world. My thanks.

Simon McMillan

With undisguised delight my niece, Alana, hugged her latest piping trophy as Jig's Competition winner but, as her eyes ran through the list of previous winners, the name of Simon appeared and serious reflection replaced her ample smile. I am sure that many other young people share her sentiments.

The youths in Uist, on the Isles and elsewhere (with no reference to Simon) face a fearsome challenge as they forge a future for themselves. Human folly can steer them to fateful choices, even to the destruction of life; yet human wisdom enables them to learn from their mistakes and can open up a wiser and happier future. Let us pray that this tragedy enables them to see this truth.

I am sure that Simon's family was hoping against hope that the torment they have gone through would not have ended this way. Yet, the finding of the body is an invitation to them to realize that "life is changed and not ended" and that the day will come when the family will once again be united in God's glorious kingdom.

This sad event will, at the same time, be a lasting tribute to the strength of family and community life on the island.

The circumstances surrounding the event, I repeat, are a call to the youth to rethink their values regarding drink, sex and the imposed youth culture of our day – a challenge which youths, parents and schools should not ignore. Let us all pray that from a lengthy and sad tragedy good will eventually emerge.

I was writing this at 3 a.m. and I saw a fat sancudo (big sister of a mosquito) finding take-off difficult. I clobbered it only to find blood scattered all over the table. Good Scottish shed on foreign fields!

God bless,

Fr Colin

I am back to my old address (05) and not (09)

