

Mission priest links Rochester with Ecuadoran archdiocese

By Teresa A. Parsons

There is a lot riding on the narrow shoulders of Father Silverio Rueda.

As the Latin American priest crisscrosses the United States by bus and by train, he acts as a lifeline between the hopes and needs of people in the Ecuadoran archdiocese he serves and the members of American congregations that have the power to answer prayers with their dollars.

Dropping a few dollars into the collection basket in response to a mission appeal is for many Americans a generous reflex rather than a carefully considered sacrifice. Few of us need to be convinced of the worthiness of mission work in underdeveloped countries. On the other hand, few of us would seriously consider contributing a month's or even a week's salary toward building a new church in some remote Ecuadoran village.

Father Rueda's job is to cultivate Americans' impulsive generosity while at the same time challenging its limitations.

For six months of every year, he travels throughout the United States, speaking and raising money on behalf of the Archdiocese of Guayaquil, Ecuador. Headed by 75-year-old Archbishop Bernardino Echeverria Ruiz, the archdiocese is Ecuador's largest, serving 2.5 million people.

A once-sleepy provincial capital an hour's drive from Ecuador's Pacific coast, the city of Guayaquil now claims a population of 1.5 million people. During visits to three Rochester parishes earlier this month, Father Rueda described the city's makeup as a series of concentric circles. In the center is a modern business district, surrounded by an area of middle-class homes.

The outskirts of the city are its slums, inhabited by thousands of people drawn by the promise of prosperity from their homes in the barren coastal countryside. "The city is growing so fast that it creates a very big problem," he explained. "Ninety-five percent of the people are Catholic, so they look to the Church, but there are not enough churches, not enough schools for them."

Ecuador's economy is based largely on exports of coffee and bananas, which grow in the country's mountainous northern region. Oil is another major export. But as Father Rueda pointed out, the profits from those industries remain in the hands of a very small upper class.

At the other end of the economic spectrum, 12 percent of the country's population is unemployed, and 11 percent is illiterate. Few of



Michael N. Aydogan

During the past seven years, Father Silverio Rueda has seen more of the United States than most Americans, crisscrossing the country by bus and train to seek parish support for the people of the Archdiocese of Guayaquil, Ecuador.

the villages outside Guayaquil have running water or electricity.

Nearly 65 percent of Ecuador's people are aged 25 or younger, Father Rueda estimated. Although the city of Guayaquil boasts five colleges and universities, very few young people can afford higher education.

Priests are also at a premium in Ecuador because the cost of studying for the priesthood is prohibitive. A native of Columbia, Father Rueda studied for a total of 21 years before he was finally ordained in 1981 to serve the Archdiocese of Guayaquil. Again and again his training was interrupted by a lack of money to continue.

Because priests are few in number compared to the high percentage of Catholics in Ecuador, a single parish may count 20,000 or 30,000 members. Often, a single priest serves several parishes. The everyday teaching work of the Church thus relies heavily on lay people, who serve as catechists.

Faced with the rigors of pastoral work in Ecuador, many of Father Rueda's fellow priests are incredulous when he tries to explain the difficulties of his ministry. To them, half a year of travel in the United States sounds like a dream vacation.

But Father Rueda's schedule is hardly designed for sightseeing. To minimize expenses, he travels mostly by bus or train. The dates and locations in which he may preach are assigned

by the national office for the Propagation of the Faith, which coordinates the activities of mission fund raisers. Often, he may visit a parish in an east-coast city such as Philadelphia one weekend, then head off to a town in Illinois or Texas the following week, only to return to a different Philadelphia parish a week or two later.

The demands of adapting to a strange culture and a foreign language also exact their toll. For Father Rueda, the language barrier remains a particular frustration. Although his English is not difficult to understand, he is a lover of words, both written and spoken. At home in Ecuador, he writes poetry and publishes a column for both the daily newspaper and a Catholic magazine, in addition to directing retreats and teaching high-school and seminary classes. "I feel very limited here because I can't express myself as I would like," he said.

Father Rueda was assigned to mission work almost immediately after his ordination seven years ago. Initially, he worked with a partner, Monsignor Hugo Garcia, who began visiting parishes in the Diocese of Rochester more than 20 years ago. After Monsignor Garcia was stabbed to death in a Mexico City motel four years ago, Father Rueda continued his travels alone.

To date, his natural enthusiasm has remained equal to the task of repeating the same message in parish after parish. "I only get dis-

couraged when people don't pay attention," he said.

His homilies usually describe a profile of the archdiocese and its needs. Father Rueda generally concludes by pointing out that although his listeners and his countrymen may look and speak differently, they are members of the same Body of Christ.

"I try to explain to people how much they have to be grateful to God for, how lucky they are to live in a peaceful, free country," he said. "I find that Americans have many things, but that they are also very generous. Every year, I read about so many problems in the United States . . . and yet every year our collection is more."

Breakfast to benefit family planned for Honeoye school

A breakfast benefit for the family of Bill Zimmer is scheduled for the Manor School Cafeteria, East Street in Honeoye Falls, on Sunday, October 4, from 8 a.m. to noon.

Members of several community organizations in Honeoye Falls have arranged the breakfast to help out with extraordinary medical and therapy costs.

Zimmer was suddenly struck down three years ago with a brain injury, which turned him into a quadriplegic, cognitively impaired. His recovery has been costly and time consuming, involving constant therapy. Confined to a wheelchair, Zimmer is fighting back, and progress has been noted.

The breakfast will provide funds that will enable Zimmer to continue his treatment. The event is open to the public. The cost for adults is \$4, and \$2 for children under 10.

For reservations, call (716)624-2591 or 624-4281.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



EDWIN SULEWSKI
FUNERAL DIRECTOR

How long does grief last?

It is not possible to give an absolute answer to this question. Every individual reacts to loss a bit differently. We can expect intense grief during the first few weeks after a loss. In the following three or four months our feelings of grief may be strong as we encounter many reminders of the death. After that we will begin doing new things for ourselves, yet continue to miss our loved one. We may become frustrated as we attempt to do things the deceased once did for us. As a second year without the deceased begins we may find our feelings of loneliness and sadness have lessened. As we develop new relationships and do more things for ourselves, our grief will diminish and we will be able to restore hope and happiness to our lives. Our grief, however, may never completely disappear as our memories linger.

Should you feel the need to discuss your feelings with a trained counselor, please call on us for referrals.


We purchase all forms of insurance to protect our family & assets, not because we expect the worst to happen, but to be prepared. Doesn't it make sense then to prepare for what will happen. Let our trained counselors assist you with the many options available in planning for a worry-free future.

Burial Cremation Entombment

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HOUSE OF GUITARS

We received 12 correct entries identifying "Suzanne" as the woman named in James Taylor's "Fire & Rain".



The winner was
Melanie Falzoi
of St. Anns

MUSIC TRIVIA

This week's question:

What Three Dog Night hit sang of a bullfrog named Jeremiah?

A: _____

Rules:

Each week, the Courier-Journal, in conjunction with the House of Guitars will feature a Music Trivia contest. All you have to do to enter is answer the question, fill in your name and address and the school you attend (if applicable), cut out the coupon, and send it in to the Courier-Journal. If more than one correct entry is received, a drawing will be held and one winning entry will be drawn.

If yours is the winning entry, you will be mailed a coupon for a free album or tape of your choice redeemable at the House of Guitars, 645 Titus Ave.


All entries must be received within seven days of this paper's issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

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