

Notes from a South American sojourn

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I bring you the greetings, love and gratitude of our diocesan sisters and brothers now serving in Chile and Brazil. That group comprises our Sisters of Mercy in Santiago, Chile; our Sisters of St. Joseph in several Brazilian communities; and Father Charlie Mulligan (of our diocese, now serving a term as a Maryknoll Associate) and Maryknoll Father Jim Weckesser in Santiago, Chile.

As you know, I had the privilege of being with them, many of their co-workers and friends earlier this month. That journey was special for me because it allowed me the joy of expressing to our missionaries the ongoing support of our local church. It also afforded the opportunity to recall and reflect on our faith and our common baptismal call to bear witness to the compassion and love of Christ in all that we say and do.

To bear witness to Christ in that fashion is one way of expressing both the purpose and presence of our missionaries in Latin America. They are there to stand among the poor, to share their lives, to help identify and encourage the gifts of the people for the good of the community, to celebrate and give thanks for the loving presence of Christ so evident among the people with whom they work.

By so doing they extend and enrich the lives of our local church. And they offer a special reminder that Catholic life at its best is not enclosed but expansive — that Catholic life is not all it should be when it shuts down new possibilities because they involve risks, or when it excludes the other or the different from the concerns of the community.

I have many pages of notes from those days. Let me share just a few of them in the hope that they might give you some sense of life there.

From Chile — Woman's House: Weeklong workshops on nutrition, women's legal rights, cooking, exercise, use of herbs for health. Great enthusiasm among participants. Mercy Sisters Anne Curtis, Jackie Ford (Australia) helped start it.

Clinic: Health services not readily available to poor. Marg Mungovan and I visited Mercy Sister Judith Frikker of Detroit. A physician, she does

A LONG THE WAY



much to serve the poor. Ursuline Sister Gia Mudd, a nurse new to Chile, sits in to learn vocabulary.

A Second House for Women: Ann Kennelly, Australian Mercy. I sat in a class on domestic violence. The problem is real here. So real. Lively instructor, spirited participation.

Janet Caufield: Many years in Chile. We talk about the years, her experience, her sisters, Margaret and Scholastica, who are also Mercies. It's good to hear others reflect on what change, ongoing experience mean.

Conversation with Lia, Soledad, Jane Kenrick, Ann Marie Mathis and Sister Gisella from Panama. They try English. I try Spanish. Fun. We talk about Lia, Soledad, Maria Inez coming north. ...

Eucharist with Charlie Mulligan at Huamachuco. Community preparation for outreach mission. Slow, patient work. People bring strong faith. The training process seems to encourage them.

Joanne Deck in charge of formation program now. Great responsibility! I remember when she first went to Chile and started the vigorous process of language study, adjustment. All still say it takes several years.

Gia Mudd, Mimi Ballard (Ursulines), Jane Kenrick, Sister Bonnie (RSM from Detroit) and I go the Vina del Mar. GM, MB and JK to take up new mission in a place of incredible physical beauty, great poverty. Meet Mauricio, their pastor, young Chilean priest. I am impressed!

From Brazil: Chris Burgmaier, Barb Orczyk,

Joana meet me at airport in Goiania. Seems like only yesterday since I've been here.

Share close to three days of retreat with our SSJs. Father Eduardo and Sister Paula are retreat directors. Enjoy the conferences (what little I can understand — even with help!) and chance for prayer, conversation, relaxation with sisters.

Elaine Hollis off to Sao Paulo soon. Interested in new directions for pastoral care of hospital patients. Will study, explore possibilities.

A joy to see Joana, the first finally professed Brazilian member of our SSJs. Rubia and Nega are on the way with her. What will be written about the three of them 100 years from now?

Sue Wills excited about upcoming visit of her mother and aunt to the Myky Indian Village (Aldeia) where SW lives. Aldeia is the only place in which our sisters work that I have not yet visited. We talk about the possibility on my next visit.

Joana and Jean Bellini still in Mato Grosso. They love it. Am remembering earlier visit there, joy of meeting Pedro Casadaliga.

Barb Orczyk lively as ever. She talked to family last night. First notice that Bills got trounced in Super Bowl. Definitely not a football fan. "I don't remember who won but I know it wasn't Buffalo!"

Long walk today with Ellen Kuhl. It is always a privilege when people share their journey of faith.

Stay with Marlene Roeger, Pat Frisk. Great people. Many neighbors drop by and we visit several others. ... MR has long walk for phone call. Two public phones (no private) serve community of about 30,000 people!

Next with Catherine Popowich, Kay Foos, Maureen Finn, Rubia. Last night. Sisters, several friends including Bishop Matt Schmidt gather for wonderful party. Easy and peaceful and relaxing. ... Stop at bakery assisted by Operation Breadbox.

Kay and Elaine drop me at airport on their way back to Uberlandia. Catherine stays to see me off. Good conversations about leadership, what it means today, its challenges. C is a wise person.

Thank you dear friends for your support of our missionaries. It is so important. I am deeply grateful to you. Peace to all.

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