

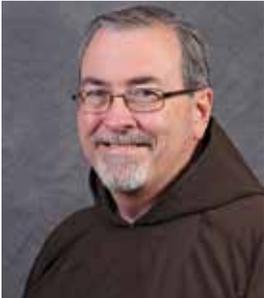
# The Mission CONNECTION

Newsletter of the Capuchin Overseas Missions Association

Winter 2016



## From the desk of the Mission Secretary



*Fr. Larry Webber  
Mission Secretary*



### *New Beginnings*

As we begin a New Year, my mind is still swirling with tasks from last year that remain before me.

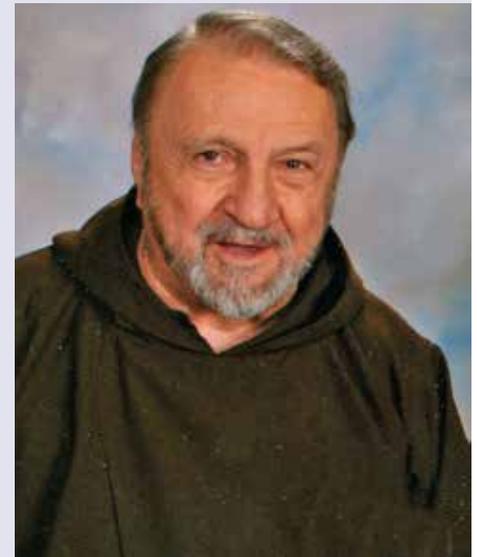
For so many throughout the world life is still about picking up the pieces of the consequences of tragedies or challenges from last year: natural disasters like hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes – or human disasters like economic distress or war and the consequent refugee reality.

And then there is the STAR.... We celebrate each January, the first month of the year, the feast of Epiphany: the remembrance of the three Magi who traveled from different points of the world to find the new “King of the Jews,” the “prince of Peace.” It is a story of hope, sacrifice and determination. It leads to the tender scene depicted on many Christmas cards. Gifts are shared. God’s loving mercy is seen as something not only for a select few but to be shared by all peoples and all nations.

It is this challenge that keeps the wider world mission of the Church in our consciousness as Disciples of Christ that the Capuchin Mission Office has rededicated itself to at the beginning of every year.

Soon I will be completing my first year in the office of “Mission Secretary” of Capuchin Missions here in Detroit. I have benefited in this first year from the hard work and wise counsel of two former Mission Secretaries: Br. Larry La Cross and Fr. Campion Baer. If you have ordered a large imitation red leather Mass Enrollment, one of their names are printed on the bottom of it.

Br. Larry LaCross remains here in Detroit, as the Local Minister of the Friars living here at St. Bonaventure Monastery. His work includes among other things, caring for the older brothers in their health needs, and making sure the Monastery is maintained and that we have food on the table.



*Fr Campion Baer*

Fr. Campion Baer has been living in Wisconsin over the last many years, making two annual trips to Detroit to help with Mission Office mail, and preparing appeal letters as well as the articles for this “Mission Connection.” The majority of the articles for this edition were prepared by him.

Starting January first of this year Fr. Campion has retired from this regular attention to Mission Office matters and from his much appreciated work of answering mail for the office. Capuchin Missions, and all its missionaries, are deeply grateful to Fr. Campion for his many years of dedicated service to the Mission work of the Church!

**Thank you Fr. Campion!!!**

## LOVE, FAITH AND MEMORIES – A CELEBRATION



*The celebration of Father Ted's life and ministry*

The anniversary of my brother Teddy Niehaus' death was celebrated with love and remembrance in Nicaragua with celebrations in La Cruz and San Pedro last month. My brother, Virgil and I travelled to Nicaragua to be with the people of the Rio Grande to celebrate his life, remember him fondly and join the prayer of the people of Nicaragua. As I shared with the people of Nicaragua, I feel blessed to have not only known Teddy's wisdom, compassion and love all my life but to have known all the people of wisdom, love and compassion that were drawn to him. May we continue to share that wisdom, compassion and love he modeled so well.

We landed in Managua late Monday met by Monica and hunkered down quickly for an early start to San Pedro the following day. As we rolled into San Pedro, a huge banner over the front of the Church announced and welcomed all to the 1st Anniversary of Padre Teodoro's death. People quickly gathered to greet us, kindness flowed as they carried our bags, made us comfortable and, of

course, sat us down to eat. All of this in the middle of their preparation for their Saturday event, four days away. Huge posters were made, flowers for the Church were coming in from all over as the women sat and made bouquets and hung brown and white banners in the Church. A funeral plot was laid out with lights and stones

and dirt in the Church; at the side altar people lit candles, knelt and prayed before the picture of Teddy. In process was a nine day novena that occurred each evening at 4:30 PM. Teddy t-shirts were all over; Teddy on his motorcycle, Teddy at the radio station, Teddy on the Rio Grande. We got organized for our trip down the Rio the next morning.

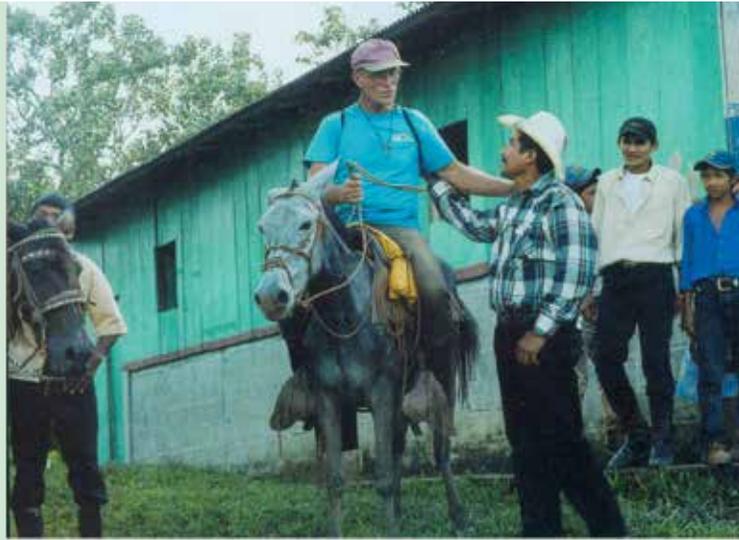
An early wake up and we were at Ayde's for breakfast at 5:30 AM so we could be on the river by 6:00 AM. A beautiful, uneventful, three hour trip down river (no portages!) blessed with some occasional rain and moments of sun. Soon we were at the dock in La Cruz, ready to stretch and walk up to the Church.

Fr. Tomas met us with a truck to bring our bags up to the Church. Again, the people were there to help hoist bags and

welcome us with overflowing kindness, again two huge banners over the streets welcoming all to the 1st anniversary and celebration of Teddy's life. We settled in our rooms in the hot sunshine of La Cruz. Sr. Lidia was there to welcome us, taking time away from her work with the MANY women in the kitchen, cooking and preparing for the meal after the celebration the following day. Animals were butchered, huge tubs of carrots being peeled, buckets of yucca and 300 pounds of rice ready to cook. (I also heard the women up and working by 3 AM on Thursday, cooking.) Wednesday night Fr. Tomas had Mass with the last day of their novena. After Mass there was a music exchange, individuals singing their songs of Teddy, sharing stories and poems.

Thursday, November 19 we awoke to a hot, humid day. After breakfast, my little buddy, Ignacio and his Mom appeared; Ignacio had made a bouquet of flowers for me to carry in the procession from the school to the Church. He asked that I bring them with me and place them at Teddy's grave in Wisconsin. He has attached a note to Teddy; if you happen to visit Teddy's grave, the yellow bouquet





afternoon we watched hundreds of people loading up the dugout canoes and heading home

The next morning we were up early and off to San Pedro. The place was abuzz with preparation for

is from Ignacio. His Mom said he went “through all his shirts so he could wear a yellow one today”. We rode out to the School. There, half of the crowd waited and a program was held put on by the children and School Director, Orlando. There were songs, poems and then we marched back to the Church for Mass. Some families had made little flags of brown and yellow (Teddy’s signature colors live on) and waved them in the procession as they sang their way back to the Church.

At Church, the pews had been brought outside and those who could, found a seat. People stood all the way back into the park across the street. During the celebration we had light rain, hot sun and no one moved but stood through it all. It was beautiful; the people sang the Mass with tears running down and carried on. Following Mass the lunch was served to all those people. Fr. Tomas asked those who lived locally to not eat for concern of not enough food and wanting to feed those who had come from a distance. The loaves and fishes ran out but no one complained.

Many had come by river and that

the next day. Food being prepared, the Church decorated and cleaned and everyone, in their busy day, taking time to care for us. That evening was the last day of novena in San Pedro. The night was one of prayer, music and sharing.

The following day I arose to men washing the steps of the Church and the sidewalk leading to the Church. The inside of the Church was beautiful with flowers and banners. The Delegates had been practicing their role in the celebration. They brought up the gifts at the Offertory. The symbols included a small “boat” (Teddy’s little aluminumcraft) they had made, sandals, the cow horn Teddy used to call people to Church in the mountains,

his Capuchin robe, his cross and of course the bread and wine. All of these things and others are in a special glass case in the Church.

The procession to Church in San Pedro was to be from the river dock to Church. However, heavy rain the night before flooded the entire dock so the procession began up the hill. We processed in song to the Church, Narcisio and other Delegates blowing the cow horn. Bishop David had the Mass with Father Flavio and Father Tomas. I don’t know how to express all the kindness and love that was shown to us in the week. So many people did so much and sacrificed to honor Teddy in a way that only their love could do. They had been planning this event for months and all did such beautiful, touching things. From my heart, thank you.





## IN MEMORIAM Mary Ratkowski 1942 - 2015

Capuchin Missions lost a wonderful friend and collaborator on November 18, 2015, but heaven has gained another member of the Communion of Saints!

Mary has worked with us at the Capuchin Mission Office in Detroit since June of 2000. She has often been the contact between donors and the Mission Office and between our Capuchin Missionaries and the generosity of those same donors.

May God grant her an eternal reward for her goodness.



## Capuchin World Missions – Getting the Bigger View

One of the important demographic changes in the church today that ecclesiologists point out is the growth of the church in the southern and eastern hemispheres and the aging of the church in the northern traditionally large churches of Europe and North America. This demographic change has brought with it economic realities that affect the capacities of these new and growing churches which do not have the economic resources that the older churches of the North and West have and have had.

Traditionally, the missionaries that have built up these newer churches came from these



northern and Western countries, and brought with them the economic support of their churches. As these churches no longer are able to supply missionaries because of the decrease in vocations, they have also, in many cases, reduced their efforts at continuing to

connect their many benefactors of the missions with the broader missionary needs of the church and especially of the Capuchins. This dynamic has been felt in a particular way in the Office of Solidarity at the Capuchin General Curia in Rome, whose work is to disperse the mission funds

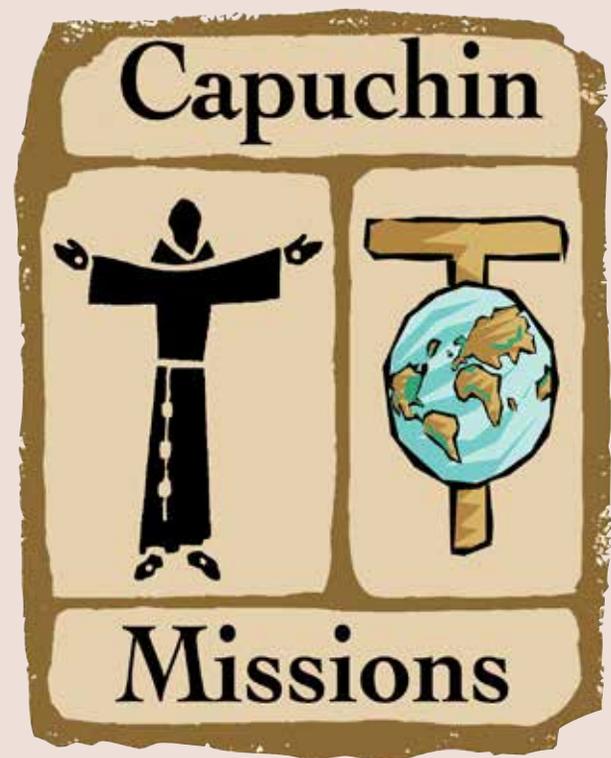
sent by the provinces throughout the order to those missionaries who present their projects to their offices for financial support. Increasingly, the amount of donations sent by the provinces for the work of the missions of the order is more and more only a fraction of the amount needed to meet the growing demands of the churches in the South who have in the past depended on the economic generosity of the North and West, and do not have the economic basis to be able to respond to the human and ministerial needs of the people they serve.

In an effort by the brothers in charge of the Solidarity Office in Rome to find ways to maintain the connection between traditional benefactors of the Capuchin missions in the North and West with the continued need of Capuchin missions in the South and East, a request was made late last year to visit the provinces and at least present to benefactors the reality of the mission of the church, and the Capuchin response to it – without directly appealing for funds. The first province that was approached was the Province of St. Joseph – a traditionally strong supporter of the missions.

As a result, on October 1 of last year, three of our friars involved in the increasing needs of the church of the South and East came to Detroit to lead a day of reflection at the Solanus Casey Center for a group of benefactors of the missions. Br. Aklilu Petros, from the Province of Ethiopia in the North of the African Continent, is in charge of the Office of Solidarity for the order. Br. Benedict Ayodi, from Kenya, is the secretary of the general Office of Justice, Peace and Ecology. Br. Nithya Sahayam from the Tamilnadu Province of Capuchins in India has worked extensively with refugees and persecuted Christians in India. Br. Aklilu and Br. Benedict presented a very moving description, with videos and PowerPoint, of who we are as Capuchins, what we do in the world and how benefactors of our Capuchin Missions around the world are so vital for the work we do, including and in a special way in response to the present situation of the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, the subsequent flood of refugees coming into Europe – and how our brothers in those areas are being organized to help in tending to this difficult reality. Br. Nithya gave a powerful presentation specifically on the difficulty that Christians live under

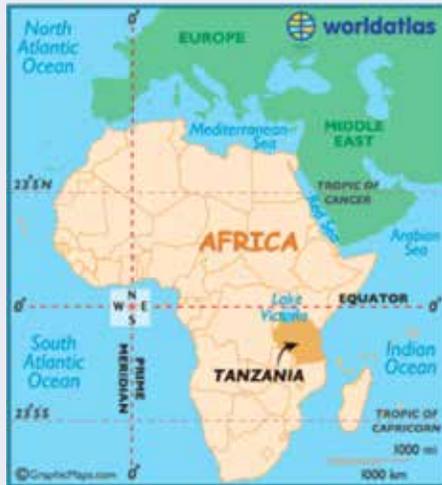


in areas where Christians are in a decided minority – such as in India. Those present had many questions, and left the day deeply grateful for the opportunity to hear firsthand about these realities – some of which they were not aware of. For them the reality of “mission” in the month of October was more than an envelope at church or a mission appeal in the mail. It was a call to consciousness as a world church.



# The Catholic Church in Africa and Tanzania

The beginning of Christianity dates back to the first century. The Patriarchy of Alexandria in Egypt and the founding of the Coptic Church flourished in the country and spread along the south shores of the Mediterranean. The conventional view is that the conquest of North Africa by the Islamic peoples between 647-708 effectively ended Catholicism in Africa for several centuries. Christian had the choice of martyrdom or conversion. By the year 1076, only two bishops were left in Africa, a decline from over four hundred before the conquest of the Arabs.



In 1830 the French came as colonial conquerors to Algeria and Tunis. The growth of Catholicism in Africa after their successful conquest encouraged other countries such as Great Britain, Spain, Italy, Belgium and Germany to follow their example. The growth of Catholicism in the region after the French example was built on European colonizers and settlers. Various religious orders followed laying the foundation for the modern African Catholic presence.

As a result, the Catholic Presence in Africa differs in three regions. The north, along the Mediterranean Sea, has few Catholics. Most of the descendents of the European settlers have returned to their native counties. The second, the mid-section of Africa is a region of conflict between Christianity and Islam. Since the northern region is heavily Muslim and southern Africa heavily Christian, the great meeting place is in the middle, a 4,000 mile swath from Somalia in the east to Senegal in the west. This region has and is experiencing many civil wars, religious discrimination, migration problems and terrorism.

The Catholic population is greatest in the southern part of the continent. African has seen the biggest gain in recent years, now having 17 million Catholics,

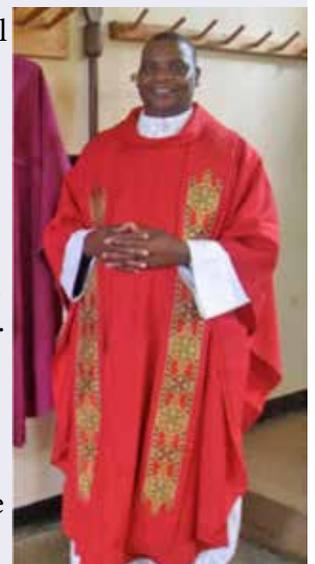
or 15.2% of the world's total. Latin America still leads with 43 million or 41.3%. By contrast, the United States numbers 76,480,000 million for 6.37% of the 12 billion Catholics

## Tanzania, the Church and the Country

Tanzania, twice the size of California, is bordered on its east coast by the Indian Ocean. Some claim it to be the most visited country in the world since it received its independence from Great Britain in 1964. Some describe it as a land of safaris, friendly people and fascinating culture. Lake Victoria, Zanzibar and a variety of national parks attract visitors, as does the great Migration of Animals.

According to the 2013 census, the population is 44,928,923. In 1967 it totaled 12,313,469. If the present birth rate continues, it could have 135 million inhabitants by 2050. There were 126 different ethnic groups. 94% of the people are native Africans. About 30% are Christian, 35% Muslim and another 35% retain indigenous beliefs. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, with life expectancy of 63.3 years. Health officials estimate that 8% of the population has Aids/HIV. This has resulted in an estimated 1.3 million orphans.

The Capuchins from Switzerland were responsible for the establishment of the Order in the country. As the foundation grew, it became the Capuchin Province of Our Lady of the Assumption. As it increased in members, it founded and maintains parishes, schools, clinics hospitals and retreat centers. Especially important was the establishment of a seminary to foster vocations to the new province and also a girl's school to promote their welfare. Delegates at its provincial chapter held from Feb 23 to 28, 2014 are numbered among the one thousand two hundred Capuchins engaged in the ministry in one hundred twenty-eight African countries. As is customary, Chapter members elected its provincial and four counselors to serve for the next three years. They chose Kalist Tesha as their vice provincial.



*Fr. Kalist Tesha, Capuchin*