

**WHEN  
THE  
MARIANITES  
WERE  
IN  
CHILE**

1996-7

**Sister Mary David, MSC**

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Father Thomas O. Barrosse, CSC, was Superior General of Congregation of Holy Cross; Sister Raymond Marsollier, Superior General of the Marianites of Holy Cross, and Sister Bertilla McNeely, Provincial Superior of the Marianites in Louisiana, when the Marianites were invited to go to Chile to minister with the Fathers and Brothers of Holy Cross who had been in that Country since 1943. The invitation was accepted.

There was much to learn about Chile. The Republic of Chile is an area of 292,258 square miles running 2,650 miles north to south and, when measured at its widest point, it is only 50 miles from east to west. Chile has a spectacular coastline of 3,317 miles on the western coast of South America. On the east are the majestic Andes Mountains, while on the west it appears that an artist wanted to highlight the country by drawing a thin line along the Pacific coast.

Chile, which means "where the land ends," has a population of 75% Mestizos, or Spanish and Indian combinations; 20% unmixed Europeans; 3% Araucanian Indians, the largest group of Indians, and 2% Quechua and Aymara tribes. According to the 1994 census, there are 14,009,000 inhabitants or 48 persons per square mile--85% of whom live in urban areas.

Then, there was a "preview" visit. The sisters made a "look see" visit to Chile in the months of June and July, 1983, experiencing firsthand the changes that occur in Nature when crossing the Equator.

They learned that summer in the United States is winter in Chile; that calendars begin the week with Monday and not with Sunday; that rain and bitter cold are par for the course; that the weather is warmer when traveling north and colder when traveling south.

Father Gerardo Whelan, CSC, District Superior at that time, threatened that when the sisters came to stay, he would put them in a convent and keep them there until they could speak Spanish like natives.

The "real thing" occurred in 1984 when two Marianites, Sisters Mary Joan Barry and Mary David Hecker, had the joy of fulfilling their vows of "Foreign Missions." They prayed that the basic course in Spanish which they had just completed at I.D.E.A.L. in Cuernavaca, Mexico, would hold them in good stead in this Spanish speaking land.

They were welcomed by the new District Superior, Father Roberto Gilbo, CSC, who immediately sent them off with Father Doherty, the founder of Hogar de Niños de San Jose.

As was customary, Father Doherty had brought a bus load of children from the Hogar to the airport. His purpose was two-fold: it gave the children an outing and introduced newcomers to them at once .

Legends abound about the beginnings of Hogar de Niños de San Jose', "the domain of Padre Jose." The most popular went as follows: one day, a mother brought her sons to Father Doherty, then Pastor of St. Roche Parish, and asked him to keep them until she returned from work

that evening. Father obliged. Evening came and went and the lady never returned leaving Father three children to feed, clothe and shelter.

Father lacked the money for this additional burden in his already poor parish. A man who worked with Father suggested that he use his truck for deliveries to earn money to care for the children. Father agreed.

Soon afterward Father was given a MACK truck by MACK Corporation.

This truck gradually multiplied until today Father Joe owns and heads his own trucking company. The proceeds support the Hogar. Father's philosophy is: no money is requested, no money is accepted from the government, and all money used for the care of the children should be earned.

The sisters first lived in an unassuming building on 21 de Mayo in Talagante. In the front hall, pictures of Father Basil Anthony Moreau, Father James Dujarie, and Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors grace the walls. Symbolically present the Family of Holy Cross, Priests, Brothers and Sisters, were there to welcome them. The sisters met Brother Donald Kuchenmeister, CSC, who completed the Family of Holy Cross ministering here in Chile.

The compound of the Hogar San Jose comprises four buildings. The first houses the Chapel, laundry, Father Joe's living quarters and a general purpose room; the second is for the older boys supervised by Brother Donald; the third built by Father Doherty contains the dining room, kitchen, storerooms and sleeping quarters for the smaller children

and the Tias, the women who care for the children; the fourth building is for the older girls with a study hall and recreation center.

All the dormitories are equipped with bathing and sanitary facilities added when Father Joe returned from the States. This compound housed 180 to 190 children ranging in age from 2 to 20 plus.

What did the sisters do? "Glorified Grandmothers" is how they often called themselves. Father Joe provided food, clothing and shelter for all. At the outset of the Hogar, a Tia known as Alicia took over the responsibilities of the institution. At this time, for reasons not fully understood by the sisters, Father Joe was recalled to the United States. During Father's absence, Alicia took care of his business as well as the children's and, upon his return, Father found everything in better running order than when he left.

Padre Jose' purchased a convent in Talagante which became the present site of the Hogar. When Alicia died, at an early age, Father kept her memory alive by placing her picture in the entrance of the building and by offering a memorial Mass for her each year on March 15, the anniversary of her death.

Tia Isabel, who had grown up in the Hogar, replaced Alicia and became Father's right-hand. He delegated and placed his utmost confidence in her. Tia Isabel retained her position, even with the arrival of Brother Donald and the Sisters. Although Brother's talents and abilities far eclipsed hers, Isabel always had the upper hand. Eventually

Brother returned to the States. Thanks to the Providence of God, Brother Richard MacDonald, who had come to join the Holy Cross Family at Talagante, remained to preserve the presence of the Brothers at the Hogar. He set up a clinic to care for the health of the children. His dream was to establish a small Hogar that could be run as a family home rather than as an institution. This was uppermost in his mind and he presented his ideas to the District Administration which approved the concept and enabled Brother Donald Kuchenmeister, CSC, to return as the director of Hogar Santa Cruz. This September, this second Holy Cross Hogar is celebrating its Tenth Year.

There were strained relationships between the Tias of the first Hogar and Isabel. When the Tias needed certain articles for the care of the children, they would ask Isabel but their requests more often than not fell on deaf ears. The Tias then went to the Sisters, who, through the generosity of benefactors, were able to supply the required items. How was this possible? The answer is found in the following tale of Divine Providence.

While making a thirty-day retreat before leaving for Chile, Sister Mary David had informed her companions of her future mission and asked for their prayers. Some months after her arrival at the Hogar, Sister received a letter from the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lilburn, Georgia, containing a check for \$1,000. One of the retreatants had returned home and asked the Society to adopt Sister Mary David's mission as one of its



projects. This generous help arrived periodically during the stay of the Sisters who were thus able to meet the needs of the children.

For thirteen years Father Joe had tried to celebrate the birthdays of the Niños, but had little success. When the sisters came that was an easy task for them to accomplish. Simple as the Birthday Party was, the children delighted in it. Each month a large poster containing the names and dates of the children whose birthdays were to be celebrated was hung in the dining room. If there were any errors or omissions the little ones were sure to detect them at once. On the given date the child was called forth and his or her companions sang "Felix Cumpleaños." The birthday children received a suitable gift, a medal, a holy card, and ten pieces of candy - a small remembrance to be sure but much appreciated even by the older children who were pleased with this recognition of themselves as individuals.

Sister Mary Joan Barry's Irish heart was happy to administer to the Chicos who were her special care. However, the cold climate was telling on Sister's frail health; reluctantly she returned to the States and was greatly missed by all.

Some time later Sister Kathleen Farrell, MSC, came to the Hogar bringing different talents. An excellent seamstress, Sr. Kathleen beautified the Hogar by making curtains for the dining room where the sun had shone in the faces of the children seated at the table. She made God's abode, the Chapel, more attractive with more pretty curtains at the

windows. She also made curtains and bedspreads for the dormitories of the older boys and girls. That motivated them to keep their places in better order. Having had experience working in clinics in France during her novitiate and early religious life, she improved Brother Richard's modest clinic. Brother no longer was at the Hogar. Sister saw that the children were kept clean, tended their frequent bruises, and was on call whenever a child was ill or injured.

In addition to the responsibilities at the Hogar, the work of the Sisters expanded. Talagante was known to have the best record of vocations in the Diocese. A group of women in the Parish made a weekly Hour of Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament for religious and priestly vocations. The pastor, Padre Guillermo, asked Sister Mary David to assist the group in his place as he found it difficult to be available at a specific hour each week. What a privilege and a joy for Sister! However, she found that this group of truly holy women prayed so rapidly that she was frequently out of breath just trying to keep up with them. Under Sister's leadership, gladly bestowed on her by the Señoras, the group prayed more reverently, more slowly, and with frequent pauses of silence and/or music which helped them enjoy more fully the Presence of the Lord. Sister would remove the Blessed Sacrament from the Tabernacle for their adoration and each one venerated the Lord before she returned Him to the Tabernacle. These holy women made a deep impression on Sister. After adoration, as poor as they were, each gave a few pesos to



help those less fortunate than themselves. In this way they imitated the widow praised by Jesus for her mite.

One day, a friend named Samuel Navarro came to the Hogar to see Brother Donald and was introduced to the Sisters. He immediately became their friend too. His impeccable English and sincere friendliness endeared him all the more. Once when the prevalent topic in the District was about being poor and helping the poor, the Sisters asked Sam for his thoughts. He said he sincerely approved of the Sisters and their work, but he hoped the Sisters could do a bit more. He explained that there was a home for elderly men greatly in need of care. He took Sister Mary David to the home- -a distance of a twenty minute walk. Sister could hardly believe her eyes- - windowless rooms, sparse furnishings, no heat, little recreation and less solace. Sister "adopted" the men visiting them regularly and taking to them the Liturgy of the Word and Holy Communion which brightened their drab existence. Sister Mary David was also formally installed as a Eucharistic Minister which enabled her to take shut-ins, the Blessed Sacrament.

During the Mes de Maria, the month of Mary celebrated in September, the Sisters joined the parish groups and opened their convent for meetings which included the recitation of the Rosary, Scripture discussions, and Communion Service.

The Sisters also participated in the Christmas celebration when the Nativity portrayed by the children on a flat bed truck would be paraded through the streets.

The Marianites could not have chosen a more interesting- -though sometimes frightening- - time to minister in Chile. What could be more terrifying than an earthquake?

The Sisters and Brothers Donald and Richard were present at the Mass for Profession Ceremonies of Holy Cross. Father Roberto Gilbo had just begun his homily when the Sisters, sitting on plain benches on the dirt floor of the chapel, heard what to Sister Mary David, sounded like a squadron of airplanes. People began to run from the chapel. Knowing the country was in political unrest, Sister wondered why the people seemed to be running to meet the enemy, rather than waiting until they arrived. Glancing sideways, however, she saw that her companion had disappeared and turning towards the altar, she saw the priest trying to calm the remaining congregation. She realized that an earthquake had struck and the people were running to care for their families and homes.

That very day Brother Richard was scheduled to leave for the United States. As soon as possible, Brother Donald and the Sisters began the trip to accompany him to the airport. Everywhere there was evidence of the earthquake. Whole sides of buildings were demolished, glass was strewn all over the streets, cars were traveling in all directions. It was Brother Richard's profound faith in Saint Joseph that allowed them to get

through traffic before the intersection they had to cross became impassable with jammed automobiles. On arrival at the airport, they saw that the ceiling of the lobby had fallen and passengers were waiting on the neutral ground only to be informed that all flights had been canceled.

On the journey back to Talagante there were fires everywhere. At the Hogar the children were forced to spend the night outdoors. Some of the rooms resembled war zones. Crushed glass and articles from cupboards littered the floors. When day came, all were grateful that there were no injuries. Later the buildings passed inspection as to their solidity although many statues and other contents of the buildings had been broken.

Then there was the joyous visit of the Holy Father, John Paul II. What an inspiration to see the whole population, except, of course, the entrenched die-hards, gather for this historic occasion; to hear everyone singing the one song written for the visit which was played day and night on the radio. While waiting for the Pope to pass, people smiled and greeted one another in the streets. No fear on their faces, just joy and happiness. Following the Pope's motorcade, a group of dissenters were dispersed with tear gas. During the mass at which the Pope beatified the native Soeur Teresa de los Andes, the same group of dissenters tried to disrupt the ceremonies, but the Holy Father carried on despite the disturbance on the fringe of the crowd.

Ten years before the Marianites went to Chile, the government of Salvador Allende Gossens , the first Marxist to be freely elected to lead a nation of the Western Hemisphere, was overthrown under the leadership of General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte. Chileans did not look too kindly on Americans because it was American bombs which helped Pinochet gain victory. In Chile, the Sisters witnessed the dictatorial tactics of Pinochet as he had hundreds of low income housing projects constructed just before the plebiscite which would determine whether or not he would remain in power. On the day of the vote, long lines of citizens stood in silence awaiting their turns to cast their ballots. Pinochet was confident, but the morning papers showed the military men going to give Pinochet the official news. He had lost! National elections followed. Pinochet had rewritten the Constitutions making certain that he would have great power. He set up his candidate for the presidency, Hernan Buchi, against elderly Patricio Aylwin. Although the T.V. constantly showed Buchi with cheering crowds and the Sisters feared that he would surely win, Father Whelan would say quietly, "Aylwin will win." He was right! Pinochet's man lost. Aylwin won.

Twenty-five minutes is not long enough to include all the interesting things which happened while the Sisters were in Chile.

Sister Raymonde Marsollier's visit took place at the time of the Holy Cross Congregations' Leaders International Meeting. Sister Mary Verda Frederick's visit took place when she was filling the unexpired term of

Superior General after illness forced the premature resignation of Sister Mary Bertilla McNeely. Regular Holy Cross Community meetings found the Marianites taking an active part in the deliberations. There was a Salesian Brother Dave Verret who twice gave the Sisters new clothing for all the children at the Hogar. The faith of the people as manifested by their unique observance of Good Friday was truly outstanding. Their frequent processions in the Parish, and their fervent celebrations in the month of September which holds so many important days for Chileans.

Why are the Marianites no longer in Chile?

When Sister Sylvia Asselin, General Assistant in Charge of Missions, came to visit the Sisters, she found Sister Mary David in bed with a serious case of pneumonia and had her hospitalized immediately. Appraising the situation and conditions under which the Sisters worked, Sister Sylvia advised them that on her return to France she would recommend that Sister Mary David return to the States and that Sister Kathleen not be left alone in the mission. When the General Council decided to recall the Sisters, the Marianites prepared to leave Chile. They took with them only their personal effects and gave their furniture and other household articles to poor families, mostly going to those who worked for the Hogar.

What are the greatest memories of the Marianites' experiences in Chile?

In addition to caring for more than one hundred eighty children for seven years, the memories include living in the District of Chile; being an active part of the Family of Holy Cross; meeting so many Holy Cross priests, missionaries, and visitors; getting to know Notre Dame associates who gave two years of their lives for service to Chile; being proud when attending graduations at St. George College; seeing the improvements at Andocalla; appreciating Father Delaney's beginning of his own parish for victims of alcoholism and drug abuse to whom he ministered; visiting the novitiate in Los Andes; celebrating with the Family of Holy Cross. (If you ever see Father Tim Scully, ask him about the celebrations hosted by the Marianites.)

This past Easter Sunday, Samuel Navarro called Sister Mary David and told her that, even though the Sisters are far away, they remain close to the hearts of people in Chile.

Four years have passed since the Marianites left Chile. To end this Chilean experience on a personal note I'd like to say that I believe the Marianites in their Biblical Seven Years in Chile brought much joy to many children, helped to strengthen the bonds of the Family of Holy Cross, served the local Parish Church; and established lasting friendships.

Now the last question: Will the Marianites ever return to Chile?

I would be on a plane tomorrow if asked to return. Whatever the future holds, an excerpt from a note received from Sister Sylvia Asselin, dated August 3, 1992, gives an apt conclusion to this paper: "I am so glad



that you continue to hear from the men in Chile. You made a wonderful impression on them and created a sense of unity with them. God had His reasons for having you as part of the Holy Cross District." She continued: "The Council had a wonderful visit with Father Canepa. He is very open to the Marianites continuing in mission with the men of Holy Cross.....I believe the day will come that we will return. The Spirit is slow in acting but, with determination, God's good time will come if it is meant to be. We have the support of the Holy Cross Family."

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## **CORRESPONDENCE:**

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