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Archbishop Marcos Gregorio McGrath, C.S.C.: His Conciliar Commitment to Lay Ministry in  
the Panamanian Church

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I. Introduction

Particularly during the last five years of his life, Archbishop McGrath and I had a strong personal and pastoral bond as companions in Holy Cross. My Provincial at that time requested that I visit the Archbishop at regular intervals to be of support to him. For me, this was an honor and I continued to learn much about his commitment to the role of the laity in a post-Vatican II Church.

There was also a close similarity in our backgrounds, from the University of Notre Dame and from the Congregation of Holy Cross. We both had been lay students for two years at Notre Dame. We had both been influenced by two Holy Cross mentors, Father Louis Putz, a pioneer of U.S. based Catholic Action, and Father William Cunningham, an early academic leader at Notre Dame in issues of the Latin American Church.

Mark and I both entered the Novitiate of the Congregation in 1943, and graduated from Notre Dame in 1945. We studied theology at Holy Cross College in Washington, D.C. and were ordained to the priesthood in 1949. In the early 1950s, we did our graduate studies in Rome and in France.

## II. Undergraduate Years at Notre Dame—1939 and Early 1940s

Among the attractive pastoral activities at the university were the classes in Religion and History conducted by Father Louis Putz, C.S.C. Father Putz had arrived from Germany and had spent time in France. Through his own French experience, he firmly believed in Canon Cardijn's "intersection of prayer and action." Joseph Cardijn was the founder of the Young Christian Workers movement in Belgium, and he was the originator of the Observe-Judge-Act method known as the Jocist Method.<sup>i</sup> Bernie Bauer and his wife Helene formed the Young Christian Students in 1940. This was when Mark and I began our involvement in YCS. Then they began to include couples, which evolved into the Christian Family Movement; the first CFM groups began during the 1940s in South Bend Indiana and Chicago, Illinois. Cardijn believed that integration could be achieved through the activities of well-prepared laity whose daily lives were "in the world."

Father Putz also brought the beginnings of the *Nouvelle Theologie* of France, which included a growing awareness of the role of the Catholic laity in the Church. Of special interest was Father Yves Congar, O.P. who would later become the leading ecclesialogist of Vatican II, giving special attention to the laity.<sup>ii</sup>

From the beginnings of their relationship, Father Putz showed a particular interest in young Mark McGrath. With good reason, he saw in Mark strong potential for future Ecclesial leadership. Although Father Putz believed that the early Notre Dame environment had affected Mark in a significant way, he also believed that Mark had seen the face of Jesus Christ in the poor and suffering people of Latin America, just as he (Father Putz) had seen Jesus in the faces of the poor in the slums of Paris.<sup>iii</sup>

During his years of theology studies and especially during his graduate studies in Europe, Mark grew in his understanding and his acceptance of the challenges and opportunities that were to be discovered in Latin America. Consequently, it is not surprising that after his graduate studies he was assigned to the Holy Cross mission in Chile, South America. However, first he wanted to finish his doctorate in Europe, while I was asked to teach at the University of Notre Dame for one academic year.

### III. Graduate Studies

The two young priests met again in Rome in 1950 to continue their studies together. Father Mark had spent a fruitful year in France where he came into closer contact with the new thinkers of northern Europe, particularly at the Catholic Institute in Paris. At a later time in his life, Mark recalled the challenges he met while doing his graduate studies:

It was not until I found myself buried under in Paris and later in Rome in this very demanding work which consumed four and a half years—of studies, research, and preparation for the dissertation—that I understood the seriousness of that question<sup>iv</sup> [whether or not he could remain seated for many hours of study.] I learned the techniques of research, but more importantly, I developed a method and rigor for theological reflection, which would later be a precious gift for me...I had the opportunity to come in contact with the great thinkers and theological currents of Europe (Congar, De Lubac, Rahner, Guardini, the biblical and liturgical movements) as well as with the philosophical movements (personalism, Christian humanism) which were stirring at the time, and which laid the groundwork for the Second Vatican Council.

--Archbishop McGrath, upon receiving the highest honors from the  
Mayor of Panama City, February 25, 1994<sup>v</sup>

Upon meeting in Rome, we went to the large Holy Cross House on Via Aldrovandi. There, we were to experience a plethora of languages: that of the country was Italian; the house language was French; classes were taught in Latin; and there was a Hebrew requirement for graduate theology students. Never having been to Europe before, I felt at ease with the Italian people, and I appreciated even more our own Church's heritage. During Lent, we both visited the Station churches of Rome. Mark, as predicted, was very diligent in his work and he took full advantage of Rome's many opportunities. I appreciated the time to interiorize the writings, especially the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas. I came to know and respect the Dominicans, particularly Rev. Paul Philippe, O.P. who was to direct my doctoral thesis. He later became a Cardinal.

As the academic year of 1951 began, additional space was needed for Holy Cross seminarians who wished to study in Rome and it was necessary for us to move from the Holy Cross Residence to the Collegio dell' Anima, a residence primarily for German priests but including those of several nationalities. Mark and I were the only priests from the United States. A number of the German priests had been prisoners of war in the United States during the recent Second World War. Many of them would become bishops upon their return to their own country.

On very modest budgets, we used our summer breaks to do further research and language study. Mark concentrated on German, whereas I spent time in our French Province. The academic superiors at Notre Dame asked me to finish my studies by the autumn of 1953. Mark was granted more time, and this proved very helpful for the later work he would assume. Even then, Mark was being prepared for greater Church responsibilities. He would be ready for them.

Mark's doctoral dissertation—entitled “The First Vatican Council and the Evolution of Dogma”—received the highest distinction and earned him a doctorate magna cum laude conferred by the Ateneo Pontificio Académico Angelicum, now the University of Saint Thomas.

#### IV. A Call to Chile

I have been acquainted with Chile since I first arrived in this land in 1939. I have worked as a priest since April of 1953. I say it all when I say that I feel Chilean...For these personal and pastoral reasons, it is in sorrow that I leave Chile after eight and one half years. I leave my work as Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic University, with many projects recently begun and hoping there will be no shortage of hands to carry them out. I leave my advisory position to the social action project of Saint George's after seven years, trusting in the interest of the fathers of Saint George College in this work and in the capacities of the new advisor.

It was in this way that Father McGrath expressed himself on the eve of his return to Panama in October, 1961. He who was determined to “walk the path of the will of God” was pressed to break the ties of close friendships and rich and fertile pastoral work.

From the earliest days of Mark's priesthood in Chile, his mind was swirling with numerous projects. Despite some anxieties, he began an active and growing apostolate which prepared him well for his future responsibilities: three years' service as rector of his congregation's seminary; professor and prefect of religion at Saint George College; founder of Saint George Social Action; seven years as professor of theology at the Catholic University of

Chile, including three years as Dean of the Faculty of Theology; and founder and editor of the magazine *Theology and Life*.

At the request of Bishop Manuel Larraín—one of the foremost figures of the Latin American episcopacy, and president of the Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM)—McGrath accepted directorship of the plan for evangelization for the Diocese of Talca, Chile. He soon became one of Bishop Larraín's closest collaborators.

Mark's gifts as an orator and his deep knowledge of issues kept him busy with conferences, debates, retreats for college and university students, and in the houses of formation of numerous religious congregations, who sought his guidance and spiritual direction.

One of the pastoral projects he held most dearly—and one which still exists today—is the Saint George Social Action, which attempts to form students' social conscience in a nation historically characterized by a chasm between the wealthy and the poor. One very successful program formed groups of students who traveled to the slums every weekend to meet and speak with the poor. Those first beginnings produced countless heart-wrenching experiences, friendships, and the beginnings of material aid.

...there is another grief that afflicts me as I leave Chile. It is the sorrow it causes me to see Chilean Catholics whose Christianity lacks any social dimension. They have eyes, but do not see the physical and moral misery of large sectors of our population in the city and in the countryside; they have ears, but do not hear the cry that rises up from the heart of the people, whose very physical existence becomes increasingly difficult, and which causes them to listen to the doctrine of hate preached to them by the enemies of democracy, of

the human spirit, and of God. They have their careers and their summer homes and they do not think of so many Chileans who lack the essentials.

--Marcos McGrath

In the Saint George Social Action and elsewhere, Father McGrath put into practice the JOC methodology of seeing-judging-acting: observing a situation, checking it against the Gospel, and drawing appropriate lines of action. This gave rise to an assortment of cooperatives, youth centers, small-scale emergency housing projects, and a technical school for workers.

He was profoundly influenced by the Church's social doctrine and keenly aware that the primary task of the laity is carrying out the Gospel and its consequences to the world. Even during his earliest years of priesthood, he strove to give shape to the themes that would become central to his ministry as a bishop: a church with a forceful message of freedom for the entire person, and a laity committed to addressing temporal realities from the perspective of faith.

On November 11, 1959, he wrote a letter to Archbishop Emilio Tagle expressing his concern that the Catholic University of Chile "elevate the theological formation offered to a level more worthy of a university." In accordance with this goal, the Instituto Superior de Cultura Religiosa (Higher Institute for Religious Culture) was established, and "theology weeks" were organized for priests. In 1961, the Latin American Catechetical Institute was created by CELAM, under the auspices of the Catholic University of Chile, and the Institute for Theological Formation of Religious was formed.

Determined to make the voice of the Faculty of Theology heard both within the university and in the national arena, Father McGrath founded and edited the magazine *Theology and Life*. Despite limited financial resources, he made the magazine a powerful voice for

theological and faith-oriented reflection upon pressing problems facing the culture, the related politics, the sociological and economic factors, and the pastoral matters of interest to the Chilean church.

As Father McGrath wrote in his letter to Bishop Tagle, “The first mission of the Faculty of Theology is that of justifying itself, showing the importance of theology not only for the priest but also for the intellectual and pastoral life of lay Catholics, within and outside the university.”

Mark’s entry in the *Annals of the Church in Chile* (1991) encompasses his entire vision and plans of action for the future:

It is our deep conviction that the doctrine of the church must be explored and developed by theology...not just in the great European and North American centers, but also on our own continent and in our own country...To receive and repeat the theology presented in European texts and journals would be to paralyze the last impetus of our faith and would lead us to misguided pastoral decisions or the mere application of pastoral formulas designed for other countries and other peoples, but hardly applicable to our own setting.

The same text notes that “Nothing was left outside the Dean’s concern.” He pushed for better pay for the professors and improved physical structures, pointed out the importance of an auditorium for the diffusion of theological thought in the various extension courses for lay people and for the convocation of interdisciplinary conferences to facilitate an authentic dialogue



between faith and the world, faith and culture. Marcos McGrath's contagious optimism succeeded in lifting the Faculty of Theology off the island it had previously occupied within the university. He left a program that his successors in the deanship have since tried to continue. He also increased efforts to provide the Faculty's library with both book collections and professional journals."

Today, there are still significant traces of his fruitful apostolate in Chile, including religious and priestly vocations prompted by the witness of a priesthood unafraid to make sacrifices or demands, open and welcoming to all, especially the poorest. The time he spent in the southern part of the country served as a school of formation for Father McGrath, who always considered Bishop Manuel Larraín and Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez as influential people in his life as a priest in Latin America.

To many among the Christian laity, who were shaped by Saint George's Social Action, these words spoken by Father McGrath in his farewell to them still sound:

All over the world. the evil of our times is not so much the  
hatred perpetrated by the Marxists; it is mainly the little love  
shown by the Christians. Christian love, far-reaching, catholic,  
universal, sees Christ in every person, and it does not allow us to  
sleep soundly when there is a brother or sister without a roof, or  
without food, or without the possibility of learning about God.

## V. APPRENTICESHIP AS A BISHOP

One had to learn, and we will continue to learn. The first phase was serving as auxiliary bishop to the aging Archbishop Beckmann. Two good years of apprenticeship, which were for me like a rebirth and a baptism into our Panamanian situation, and into the church that is growing in our land. Without realizing it, as a nation and as a church, we are closing one era and opening an entirely new one, in which both would have to search for their own identity and their mutual ties, within the life of one people.<sup>vi</sup>

From his first arrival back in Panama, Fr. McGrath was conscious of the fact that he was beginning an age of greater demands and responsibilities on his walk of faith. He could not have known where it would take him, but he was willing to offer “the highest service” that pastoral charity would suggest, just as he intended back in the novitiate of the Congregation of Holy Cross.

He returned to Panama, after long years away, to learn and to serve:

I come to serve...first of all our beloved pastor Archbishop Francisco Beckmann; to be of one mind and one spirit with him, one pastor of the flock of Christ in this archdiocese. I come to serve all of you: the priests, who know better than I the problems facing the church in Panama and with whom I plead to have the patience to help me along the way; and those in religious communities, men and woman of God, on whose prayer the strength of our faith and our love depends. Above all, I come to serve, with my archbishop, together with the clergy and religious, you the laity,

who are the great Body of Christ...I would like to be a friend to all of you; to give my life, over a shorter or longer period, as God wills, to each one individually, especially the poor...to secure for many a life that allows for the fuller development of the Christian life for the glory of God and for our own happiness.<sup>vii</sup>

The enormity of the work that lay before him never dampened the characteristic optimism of Bishop McGrath. With his arrival in Panama came a fresh new air. In those years leading up to the Second Vatican Council, the situation in the archdiocese was similar to that of the church in many areas of Latin America: juridical organization with a Latin liturgy; catechism with little scriptural or liturgical content; laity organized into parish committees for promotions of saints' days and eventual construction of chapels; and a few specialized areas of Catholic Action. It was a church marked by the personality of Archbishop Beckmann: benevolent and fraternal, but also energetic and focused. He was a pastor concerned with the religious education of the people and the promotion of priestly vocations from among the Panamanian people, a man over whom hung the weight of the pastoral endeavors of an archdiocese that extended to the provinces of Veraguas, Herrera, Los Santos, Coclé, and Panama City.

The magazine *Land and Two Seas* published an interview with the new auxiliary bishop, inquiring about his impressions of Panama. His response reflects the urgency he placed on making Panamanian Catholics aware that a new reality was growing in the church and in the world:

I have above all an impression of change. I have changed, Panama has changed, the circumstances of our time, of our world of Latin America have changed. The years of study and work in the United States and Europe and eight and a half years in Chile, have opened me to horizons that I could not even glimpse in those tranquil years around 1939 when we were living in Colón, Marañon, and Bella Vista. I have been able to witness in places as diverse as they are far-flung the fascinating vigor of a new world formed by people and the forces they have unleashed, which is taking shape before our eyes. The world is now one: physically and consciously, maybe without our realizing the enormous consequence of this...Our responsibility is great. We must alert Christians to what is happening before their eyes.”<sup>viii</sup>

Thus, there arose the cursillos on Christianity, the cursillos on social empowerment, the secretariat of the press for the archdiocese, the January-March 1962 pastoral visits to the parishes of Herrera and The Saints, aided by the recently ordained Jorge Altafulla and the Hermanas Misioneras Catequistas (Religious Catechetical Missionaries). The summer of 1963 brought visits to the parishes of the province of Panama, from San Carlos to the coasts to Darién. Soon followed the founding of the Federation of Catholic Women, construction of the Emmaus Retreat House, and numerous study sessions regarding Vatican II.

Upon the death of Archbishop Beckmann on October 30, 1963, McGrath was placed in charge of the archdiocese as capitular vicar. It was his fate to witness the events of January 9, 1964, when many Panamanians began to assert an appropriate nationalism. This signified a milestone in the struggle for sovereignty over the Canal Zone and the rights of Panama over the inter-oceanic canal. It was a unique moment in which McGrath sensed the birth of a new

national consciousness, one which perhaps the majority of Panamanians were not expecting and one which many did not understand for some time. Amid the confusion, the bloodshed, and the mourning, the voice of Bishop McGrath was heard throughout the nation and beyond its borders, urging restraint and good judgment to end the violence and supporting the just claims of Panama against the United States.

“It would be beneficial for all future amicable collaboration between the United States and Latin America if the press, the leaders, and the representatives of the United States perceived more clearly the ideals of the Latin American peoples,” he wrote to former President Harry S. Truman. Although the Canal crisis has long passed, his letter remains a valuable part of the history of the struggle for national sovereignty.

In March of 1964, the Holy See named Bishop Tomás A. Clavel as the new Archbishop of Panama City, and assigned Bishop McGrath to serve as bishop of the recently created Diocese of Santiago, in the Veraguas province.

“Veraguas was a novitiate for me, my fundamental formation in the work of being a bishop,” he would later recall. “It also provided daily contact with the poverty in Panama, with the poorest: the rural and the indigenous.”<sup>ix</sup>

In his new diocese, Bishop McGrath wrote a new chapter of his life, in a stimulating but trying encounter with the realities of Latin America. As in Panama City, he organized various lay movements: catechists, the Veraguas chapter of the Federation of Catholic Women, and a Center for Social Assistance and Advancement (CEPAS). But there were also new initiatives to meet the needs of the poor, rural population. He launched a new system of educational radio for outlying populations, broadcast by Radio Veraguas. Enlisting collaboration and support from

Monsignor Alejandro Vásquez Pinto and layman Osvaldo Rodríguez, he created the John XXIII Center for Rural Advancement in the Veraguas town of San Francisco; it gradually extended its services throughout the entire province.

New vocational training centers sprang up in Santiago, La Mesa, Soná, las Palmas, and Altos de Piedra, and McGrath firmly supported the work underway by the Brothers of the Cross of Saint John in their Vocational Institute of Atalaya. Along with all these initiatives, he also worked to build a bishop's residence and major offices, the first stages of which began on August 27, 1965.

Evangelization was enhanced by teams of religious sisters working in the parishes. The Catechetical Sisters, who had been present for several years, were joined by the Sisters of Saint Joseph, the Maryknoll Sisters, and the Bethlehemites. The first steps were taken toward creation of a pre-seminary. New priests came from outside Panama due to the precarious position of the clergy in some nations, and they joined in the pastoral work of the diocese. Among them was Father Héctor Gallego, who had been ordained by Bishop McGrath in Medellín, Colombia. Father Gallego's lived witness, his disappearance during the Torrijos regime, and his death opened new horizons of determined evangelization of the poor.

Convinced of both the decisive role of the laity and of the urgency that the church be a sign of communion, Bishop McGrath wrote:

The church's mission in the diocese is not the exclusive responsibility of the bishop, but rather it is his and the whole diocesan community....At the parish level, it is the responsibility of the pastor and the entire parish community. The unity of the diocese is forged above all by the views and action of all the priests in

conjunction with the bishop. Through them and through the various religious communities, this unity is spread to all the movements and activities of the laity.<sup>x</sup>

## VI. His Experience at the Second Vatican Council

To have lived, profoundly and up close, the Second Vatican Council, was an enormous privilege. It was also a privilege to have experienced up close all kinds of meetings at the Vatican and international forums, especially at the level of our great land of Latin America, as in Medellín in 1968 and Puebla in 1979, the Council, which is that of Christ for his church in today's world. Those of us bishops who participated in the Council are called "Fathers of the Council."

I am a father of the council; I am, as a bishop, also its son."

--Archbishop McGrath, 1986

Pope John XXIII announced three major changes in 1959: a Synod of the Diocese of Rome, the reform of the Code of Canon Law, and a future ecumenical council. For this last goal, he assembled a preparatory commission, charged with gathering suggestions for topics the Council should discuss. Initially, the Council did not inspire great enthusiasm from the Faculty of Theology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Santiago because the professors did not believe that Rome would seriously consider input from the church so distant.

But, as Archbishop McGrath told the Chilean magazine *Mensaje* in 1976, "Four years later, at a meeting of the Commission on the Doctrine of the Faith at the Second Vatican Council, two members of that friendly gathering of professors would be present—one as a member and the other as an expert—and a text from the Conference of Chilean Bishops would

be presented as a foundation for the new plan for the Church, prepared in large part by those professors of that beloved department...and parts of that text were destined to become precious elements of the future *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*.<sup>”xi</sup>

Soon after he was named Auxiliary Bishop of Panama City in October, 1961 he began preparations for the trip to Rome to participate in Vatican II. At the beginning of the first session, he and two other Latin American prelates were elected to the Committee on Doctrine, which necessitated travel to Rome every three months from 1962 to 1965. Even as the young bishop contributed his theological training and experiences, the Council was also shaping his future pastoral thought and action. He later spoke of the Council with intense affection. He considered it a milestone in the life of the church, especially at the Council’s first stage (October 8 to December 11, 1961): “Those were probably the two most decisive months for the Catholic church in modern times. It was the historical crossroads at which this church, from its highest officials, prepared itself to close four centuries of Counter-Reformation and definitively entered the era of “The Church in the Modern World.”<sup>xii</sup>

His interventions in the Council are readily observable in the proceedings of Vatican II: *On the Sacred Liturgy (De Sacra Liturgia)*, November 27, 1962; *On the Church* (chapter on the laity) October 22, 1962; *On the Apostolate of the Laity (De Apostolorum Laicorum)*, October 1964; *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (De Ecclesia in Mundo Hujus Temporis)*, November 10, 1964; *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (De Activitate Missionali Ecclesiae)*, October 11, 1965.

As the Council continued, Bishop McGrath became its fervent apostle. He gave lectures to bishops, priests, and laity in the United States, in several European countries, and in Latin



America, all of which emphasized and exemplified the energy of the Council and its double action: return to the sources (the church ad intra) and outreach to the world (the church ad extra). His lectures included a number in Panama, first as Auxiliary Bishop of Panama City and later in Veraguas, as Bishop of the Diocese of Santiago.

He gave powerful testimony on the direction of the church in the twentieth century by contributions to the Vatican in numerous positions of responsibility: Secretary for Non-Believers, Consultant to the Committee on the Laity, membership in the Standing Committee on the Synod, and membership in the Pontifical Council for the Union of All Christians.

His determination to bring the aims of the Council to concrete reality throughout Latin America was demonstrated at the Viama Meeting in Brazil, in 1964, at the dawn of the conciliar age; the Extraordinary Assembly of the Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in Mar de Plata, Argentina, which focused on “The Church in the Development and Integration of Latin America;” and by his service to the Conference of Latin American Bishops (1963-1972) as Secretary General and Second Vice President. Of singular theological impact was his presentation of the theological foundations of the bishops’ conferences at the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October, 1969.

His participation was both decisive and influential in the historic CELAM conferences at Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979). At Medellín he delivered the keynote address, “The Signs of the Times in Latin America.” At Puebla, he was named chairman of the Central Committee on Coordination of the Joint Commission, the efforts of which produced a document that is remarkable for its depth and for its solid theological and pastoral base.

Firmly convinced of the value of the Secretariat of the Central American Bishops, (SEDAC) he lent SEDAC his support and his theological and pastoral guidance. SEDAC owes to his initiative its Commission on Theological Reflection, in which theologians and pastoral ministers of the region participate.

These efforts on behalf of the life of the church earned him recognition by the Latin American bishops, from numerous North American universities, and from the University of Louvain, where, in 1970, he was awarded a *Doctor Honoris Causa* degree in theology and delivered an address entitled “Theology Alive in Latin America.”

The intervening years have decisively disproven the prediction made by Father Henry, a Belgian theologian lecturing in Chile in 1961. Father Henry told Father McGrath that his new designation as a bishop meant the end of his days of theological reflection. Quite to the contrary, the conciliar and post-conciliar years, the Medellín and Puebla conferences, and service as president of the Commission on Theological Reflection of the Conference of Panamanian Bishops were years of intense theological activity. More importantly, they saw the translation of conciliar theology into pastoral action and daily life. In 1986, on the 25th anniversary of Marcos McGrath’s ordination as a bishop, Bishop Oscar Brown noted: “During the past twenty-five years, the church in Panama has found in Monsignor McGrath a pastor carried by the very spirit of the Council.”

Archbishop McGrath reflected on this occasion:

The great work of my life has been to guide our church in Panama in the conciliar renewal. My greatest satisfaction has been in learning, witnessing, and living this renewal with all of you. We are very far from our goal. The enormous

consequences and potentialities of the Council will be manifested with the dawn and labor of generations yet unborn. But the church in Panama, thanks to so many people, represented by you...is in motion: conciliar, evangelical, and pastoral motion.

Being a great student and accomplished expert in ecclesiology, Mark McGrath believed the church was not merely an object and subject of faith, but also a lived meditation—a sign to the people of that to which humanity is called. For this reason, he was the impetus behind the establishment of inter-diocesan retreats for the clergy, initiating this program in 1967, with the participation of bishops and priests from the dioceses of David, Chitré, and Santiago, and the prelates of Bocas de Toro.

Convinced that the church does not exist in a vacuum but that it is lived day-to-day and that nothing about human life is outside its interest, he insisted that the reality of the poor and the indigenous of Veraguas be known and understood. To achieve this goal, he initiated an interdisciplinary study which culminated in *The Veraguas Plan: A Guide for Action for the Social and Economic Development of the Province*. This was the first regional study of its kind ever conducted in Panama.

When Marcos McGrath was named Archbishop of Panama in 1968, the principal of the Juan Demóstenes Arosemena Normal School, gave this testimony: “Monsignor McGrath understood since his arrival in Veraguas that he was needed here, that we needed him. And the pastor dwelt among us. Not to pity us. Not to conduct philosophical conferences or to accompany us in our helplessness and material and spiritual poverty...No! He lived among us to work, to plan, to help us, to rouse us from centuries of lethargy.”

Indeed, the pastor remained with his needy brother and sisters. From the archepiscopal see which he assumed in February, 1969, he continued to speak and to act on behalf of those in Veraguas—and all of those in need.

### The Church of Panama Today

From October 1-8, 2014, I interviewed over 20 lay persons in the Archdiocese of Panama. These individuals had been trained and encouraged by Archbishop McGrath in various aspects of lay ministry in their local church. Their continuing activities include adult catechesis, lay formation, single parenting, vocational recruitment, and more.

Archbishop McGrath wished to move the Second Vatican Council to Panama. He certainly achieved this.

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<sup>i</sup> Andy Pozdol. *Christian Family Movement*, Nov. 2008

<sup>ii</sup> Especially worth notice is an earlier writing by Congar, “Not the Walls But the Faithful Are the Church.” He based his theme on *Christians Active in the World*, NY: Herder & Herder, 1968

<sup>iii</sup> Based upon interview with Robert Ball, earlier biographer of Louis Putz (1997)

<sup>iv</sup> A reference to the Superior’s question whether he was able to spend many long hours in a chair

<sup>v</sup> Rev. Robert S. Pelton, C.S.C. Archbishop Marcos Gregorio McGrath, C.S.C.

<sup>vi</sup> Archbishop McGrath, speaking at a fundraising dinner for the seminary in 1986

<sup>vii</sup> Bishop McGrath, To the Clergy, Religious, and Faithful of the Archdiocese, Oct. 5, 1961

<sup>viii</sup> *Land and Two Seas*, October, 1961

<sup>ix</sup> Archbishop McGrath, speaking at a fundraiser for the seminary in 1986

<sup>x</sup> Pastoral letter of July 25, 1966

<sup>xi</sup> *Mensaje*, ??? 1976

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid