Viva Mi Patria



BOLIVIA

by Jerry Stookey, O.P., Vicar Provincial

Our Vicariate in Bolivia is one of the more exciting provincial projects underway. Once again the visitation that Ed and I made (December 9-22, 1995) was filled with signs of growth and apostolic vitality.

The Dominicans in Bolivia continue to uphold preaching as their number one priority, especially with the aid of the mass media. Many of our brothers, including students, routinely preach on TV and radio. Some brothers, like Walter Várgas and Rogelio Fernández, are becoming famous for their cassettes of religious music. Communications studios have been set up at La Mansión in Santa Cruz and at Centro San Martín in Cochabamba. Many Dominicans preach in Quechua, Aymará, and other indigenous languages of Bolivia.

Another area of real progress is that of study and formation. Two brothers have just finished their master's degrees - Mario Rocha in economics and Hipólito Michel in mass media. Several more are finishing master's degrees or going back for further theological studies: Róger Terceros, José Luis Várgas, Gerardo Rójas, Pastor Amurrio, and Lucas Br'tez. In addition we have two deacons, Jhony Lújan and Cirilo Aceituno, who are doing their internships this year.

When six novices made their first profession in Cochabamba on January 21, 1996, the total number of brothers in our vicariate rose to 38. Only six of these are North Americans. In March, the academic year starts up again and eight students are expected to begin the pre-novitiate program with Tom Lynch as director. In fact, we now have a happy, but expensive problem. The new student master, Jim Spahn, has nowhere to put more students! A committee on formation buildings is looking into that dilemma.

The annual vicariate assembly was held at a new retreat center opened in Cochabamba by the Dominican sisters. The spirit was one of openness and support, which contributed to making 1996 a "Year of Reconciliation" to improve common fraternal life in the Vicariate. There was much hope about the future, especially about possible sites for new foundations and the possibility of becoming a Vice Province in a few more years. An Economic Council was named to better coordinate financial matters and to even start fund-raising in Bolivia. God is truly blessing the Dominicans in Bolivia.

As always there were many Bolivian celebrations, especially a remarkable fiesta in honor of Our Lady of Cotoca with our brothers at the fore. Overall, it was wonderful to visit again our growing Vicariate. And on this year's trip Ed did not get sick! He even had time to see the parks and the market for the first time. When we left, the song "Viva Mi Patria Bolivia" was still ringing in our ears, thanks to our joyful Bolivian friars!

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