

History and Purpose of the Sister Parish Ministry (November 2018)

Since 2007, ninety-five (95) St Francis Parishioners have made missions to our Sister Parishes staffed by Holy Name Province (HNP) friars in Peru. Several of these parishioners have made multiple trips.

Our first sister parish was *Nuestra Senora de Lourdes*, about an hour drive south of downtown Lima. In 2016 pastoral responsibility for Lourdes was returned to the local diocese. In the years since St Francis parishioners first journeyed there, the dirt roads have been replaced by pavement and sidewalks. There is bus service into the city and the circumstances of the people in the surrounding area has somewhat improved.

In 2007, four parishioners and Fr Bob Menard visited HNP ministries in Peru. In addition to visiting *Lourdes*, we were introduced to the parish of *Santa Ana* and Fr Tony which is further south of Lima and in a different diocese. *Santa Ana* was and is an area much more disadvantaged than *Lourdes*. In 2007 the parish consisted of a church, a K-4 elementary school, two medical clinics, a soup kitchen, and several very basic outlying chapels. As of 2018, they have a pre-k through 8th grade school, a computer lab, teachers of English, music, and PE. It is a fine school with a warm, loving environment, colorful bulletin boards, daily prayer---everything a Catholic school should be. Most of the students live in shanties or very basic adobe brick structures, many still without running water and sewer, and all without heat.....and the winters are chilly and damp. There are many bronchial problems and anemia and parasites are prevalent among the children in the community. The parish now also has a certified technical school to improve the employability of the people. There is a micro-loan program to assist woman successfully operate small businesses. One of the chapels, *San Tomas*, has been consecrated as a parish church. Fr Tony is building a separate structure for the high school and is adding one grade each year. Peruvian High Schools go to grade 11. Clearly your generosity has helped make these things possible - - but perhaps more importantly, over the years St Francis has formed bonds of Christian fellowship and solidarity with the people of *Santa Ana*: *They know they have brothers and sisters here in Triangle, Virginia, who care about them and their lives.*

Still further south from *Santa Ana*, in the rural areas across the Lurin Valley, lay the many chapels where Fr Carlos says masses weekly. They exist in the most amazing areas you will ever see....dirt, sand and rock on flat land and steep hills. The land is often staked out into lots with a shack standing in the middle. There are hardly any government services available. These folks live in what are known as “squatter towns”. Little employment exists and it is a very long bus ride to any job in Lima. Many of the residents are single moms. Many have come from the jungles and the mountains, but also some from crime infested slum areas in central Lima. Their hope is for a chance to improve their lives and that in the future they will have water, sewer, electricity, schools, doctors, and local businesses---they will be “new towns”. In the interim, Fr Carlos works very hard to provide medical clinics, meals for undernourished children, catechesis, and Mass at mission outposts throughout the area. We assist him by working on projects when on mission, and by providing funds to build mission stations, to repair and maintain chapels, and to buy food and medical supplies.

The parishioners of our Sister Parish are extremely hardworking and resourceful people. However, they have been deprived of many of the basic resources of life that we all take for granted here in the United States. Our relationship helps cultivate mutual understanding and allows them to pool their scant resources and to live in dignity.

Our pledge with our Brothers and Sisters in Lima calls for us:

- To pray for one another as Sister Parishes, especially at the Sunday Eucharist
- To learn more about the life of our Sister Parish community through education, and visits
- *To cross* frontiers and barriers of geography, politics, economics, race and ethnicity
- To become more just within our families, schools, work, business and political life.
- To give generously to meet the basic needs of those within our country and beyond
- *To advocate* for the protection of life, the defense of *human dignity, the care of God's creation and the promotion of peace.*

Our Sister Parishes offer opportunities for involvement within the Catholic Community of St. Francis of Assisi. The following are ways *you* can make a difference:

- Support the annual Special Collection to help our brothers and sisters in Lima
- Fund a specific project
- Sponsor a Catholic school student
- Provide tuition assistance for vocational training
- Serve in the Sister Parish ministry at St. Francis through planning, education, publicity, communications (fluent in Spanish), or logistics and finance