



FRIENDS

THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST JAMES THE APOSTLE

May 2023



Learning to Be a Missionary...

Dear Friends,

In January we welcomed Fr. Nilton Iman Chero as our newest member of the St. James Society. I got to know Fr. Nilton back in 2004 while he was still a seminarian. Back then I was assigned to San Luis parish in Chimbote, and Fr. Nilton and other seminarians were given pastoral assignments with us priests of the St. James Society. I was present for Nilton's ordination in Chimbote in 2008 and I am delighted to welcome Nilton as a member of the St. James Society. In this issue of Friends Fr. Nilton will share his journey with us:

*M*y name is Nilton Iman and I am from Peru. I was born in a city in the coastal region of Northern Peru to a Catholic family. I am the seventh of nine children, which consists of six girls and three boys. I am a priest of the Diocese of Chimbote, a land blessed with the blood of the first Peruvian martyrs: Fr. Miguel, Fr. Zbigniew (Polish Franciscans) and Fr. Sandro (Italian missionary), killed by the terrorist group “Sendero Luminoso,” (the Shining Path) in August 1991.

Appointed to Mission

My vocation to the priesthood has been inspired by the testimony and the missionary life of priests from the Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle. They worked for many years in the parish of my hometown. Their example of life and service encouraged me to leave all and to follow the Lord in the priesthood. I was ordained priest on March 23, 2008, and after five years of service in the mountains of my diocese, I began a missionary journey with the Columban Fathers. I was appointed to their mission, to serve in the Fiji Islands. I arrived in Fiji in July of 2014 after a long journey. I didn't know anything about Fiji. I then studied English at the University of the South Pacific from July to December. While in Fiji, I experienced a new culture, and a variety of customs which differed greatly from mine. The first few months were very difficult, because I had to adapt to a new climate, time zone, language and more. After studying the Fijian language, and visiting some communities of the Columban mission, I learned how life is lived in this part of the world and how God shows his love through the people. My first impressions were that the people of Fiji had a humble faith and were very generous. They were extremely welcoming and hospitable. They made me feel at home. In July 2015, I was appointed to the mission at the town of Ba.

Grandeur & Dignity

The Fijian culture is a deeply symbolic one. Their ceremonies are conducted with grandeur and dignity. For example, Veiqaravi Vakavanua is the traditional ceremony to welcome visitors. Yaqona, a traditional beverage, is consumed at all ceremonies. People present their condolences offering gifts, food, and mats on the occasion of a death, and this is known as Reguregu. Cobo is the applause done with cupped hands to give thanks when a gift is received, or when you want to say something important in a meeting. People in the Fiji Islands have tremendous respect for the priest.





Usually the priest sits in a place of honor when visiting the villages, and the first glass of yaqona is served to him. He is offered sevusevu (a yaqona plant) and a tabua, (a whale's tooth) which are symbols of gratitude for his visit.

Family is Important

The people in Fiji live their faith with joy, familiarity, and generosity. For the Fijian culture, the family and the people who inhabit the same territory are very important. Tasks such as cleaning, preparing a welcome ceremony, fishing, gardening, and more, are not only individual efforts, but also are accomplished with the help of neighbors,

with a sense of family - people living each day to help each other. The essence of life in Fiji is to live with joy, showing generosity to family and neighbors, demonstrating a genuine sense of brotherhood & sisterhood, expressed through a symbolic view of the world. In my conversations with families, meetings with young people, visitations to the sick, interreligious meetings, and the celebration of Mass, I perceived that God was very near to these people, very close and present in their history, their customs, and in the whole culture of Fijians. God gave me the strength and courage to continue discovering His presence within and among the people and to serve Him joyfully, passionately and enthusiastically in mission.

Serve the Lord

My personal motto is derived from the Vatican II document on priestly life which states: *"...that the priest is not only ordained for his own diocese but for the world..."*. I embrace this and now am sharing my priesthood and mission with the Missionary Society of St James Apostle. I was presented with my Mission Crosby Bishop Hennessey and formally welcomed to the Society of St. James the Apostel in January, 2023. I was assigned to the parish of El Resucitado, Ate Vitarte, Lima, Peru. God continues to reveal His signs to me, through the faith of the people and He invites me to open my heart so I will continue serving Him faithfully as a missionary priest. I am continually amazed at how God has blessed me and worked in my life. I was born in the coastal region of Peru and I was sent to the jungle for my formation at the seminary run by the Jesuit priests. The bishop usually sends young priests to work with an older priest in the city but I





was sent to the mountains of my country for five years. This experience working in the mountain regions helped prepare me to go on mission to the Fiji Islands for seven years. Today I am blessed to be in Peru again, working with the Society of St. James.

As I reflect on my vocation and experience, I realize that missionary work is an invitation to know, to live, and to share our faith with others, wherever we are. With a contemplative mindset, I have tried to understand what it means to serve the Lord in the mission. I am beginning to understand “something” and that fills me with joy. I have a broader idea of priestly and missionary life now. Therefore, I feel like I’m learning to be a missionary. I want to thank God for His goodness and His love during my missionary experience in the Fiji Islands. Also, I want to thank the Columban Fathers for giving me the opportunity to have a missionary experience with them outside of my home country. Finally, I am grateful to the Missionary Society of St. James Apostle who has given me the opportunity to continue my missionary journey with them in Peru.

With Every Good Wish in Christ,

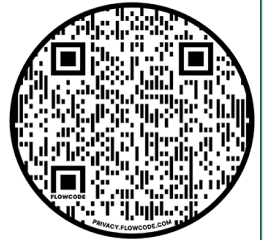
Rev. David Costello, Director



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