



FRIENDS

THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST JAMES THE APOSTLE

MARCH 2022



From Marines to Missions...

Dear Friends,

At our annual gathering in Lima, Peru (Jan 17 - 21) I was delighted to welcome four new members to the St. James Society. Two of those, Frs. Joe Bibby & Simon Cadwallader, both from the Archdiocese of Liverpool have returned to the St. James Society having ministered with us previously. Frs. Michael Sharkey from the Archdiocese of Glasgow, and Fr. Amaro Vasquez Ortiz from Chimbote, Peru, are both joining us for the first time. In this edition of *'Friends'*, Fr. Michael Sharkey introduces himself to us:

Who would have thought that after seven years working as a priest in the Archdiocese of Glasgow, followed by 29 years as a Chaplain to the Royal Navy/Royal Marines, that I would now find myself ministering

Diocesan priests serving the poorest of the poor in Latin America since 1958.

to a new flock in the Andes Mountains of Peru!

After my ordination in 1983, I was appointed to St. Joseph's Parish, in the east-end of Glasgow, very close to a well-known stadium called "Paradise", the home of Celtic football club. St. Joseph's was a wonderful parish, especially for a newly ordained priest, with many families and young people actively participating in the liturgy, as well coming together for social occasions. Undoubtedly, this first parish enabled me to develop and hone my pastoral skills.

During my time in the parish, I often reflected on the possibility of working on the "Missions" in South America. However, also during that period, the Royal Navy Chaplaincy approached me with an invitation to join them. I thought to myself, "That's Mission work too!" With the blessing of the Archbishop of Glasgow, I joined the Royal Navy on October 1, 1990.

My ministry to the young men and women of the Royal Navy/Royal Marines, over a period of 29 years, was both challenging and very rewarding. My time with the Royal Marines during the highly kinetic operations in Afghanistan, was certainly among the most difficult and rewarding. Conversations with my Royal Marines during those difficult times were both meaningful and very frank. These men and women were able to express and communicate to me very clearly, their highs and lows, their concerns and also their expectations for themselves and their families. Indeed, if they had been under contact and experienced those rounds of bullets whistling past their ears, their perspective in life changed very quickly and was easily discernible. As a chaplain, it was a privilege to be part of their discussions and thought processes.

Hospital visitation in the Field Hospital of Camp Bastion, Afghanistan was an important part of my pastoral work. Moving from one operational theatre to another through injury can be a very traumatic experience for the young serviceman/woman. Once treated by the medical staff, regular visits by the chaplain can bring much comfort and encouragement.

On many occasions I prayed with them and over them, and when required, also administered the sacrament of the sick and dying. In spite of their injuries, some which were very grave, I was continually amazed at their resilience and their unexpected moments of humor.





This view was reinforced during my time as their chaplain at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham where I witnessed, first-hand, their amazing inner strength. These young men and women, who had sustained life changing injuries serving their country, went on to compete and achieve marvelous feats in the “Invictus Games” where injured Service men and women can compete, refusing to be limited by their

injuries. Who would have thought that a double or triple amputee could swim several lengths of the swimming pool or participate in deep sea diving? Such was and continues to be the resilience of these young men and women! From a personal perspective, it was such a privilege for me to serve and care for them during those challenging times, as well as the care of their families and the medical staff.

Having served 29 years as a chaplain in the Royal Navy, I now find myself in the Andes! How did that happen?! As I alluded to earlier, my pondering discernment on the possibility of being a priest on the Mission began in Glasgow. However, I was very doubtful if this could now happen as I had reached an age where the Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle might not accept me. To my delight I was accepted! In preparation for this new ministry, the Royal Navy supported my Resettlement application to spend seven weeks in Lima learning Spanish in one of the language schools in Miraflores, a section of Lima. It was tough to begin learning a new language and, I must say, that the school was very patient and supportive of me as I tried to get to grips with the language in those early stages. Weekends were not wasted in Peru three years ago, with opportunities to visit Arequipa, Cusco, Puno, Chachapoyas and Iquitos. Already, Peru and its people appealed to me! At this point I had not formally applied to St. James Society but after spending a weekend in their Central House in Barranco, Lima and talking to a few of the priests on their work on the Mission, I had no doubt that working with the St. James Society would be an enjoyable, challenging and fulfilling role for the next stage of my ministry. Covid affected everyone and this delayed my travel to Peru. However, I used my time constructively



by continuing with the Spanish from Glasgow, via Zoom, with my former teachers in Lima. Zoom was not quite the same as the one to one or group teaching that I experienced in Lima! Eventually, I left Glasgow on the June 10, 2021 to join the Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle, in Peru. After a month in Lima, I was assigned to my first parish on the Mission, Santa Cruz, in Tocroyo in the Diocese of Sicuani and in the



Four priests join the Society of St. James



Department of Cusco. I also have responsibility for three other parishes: Alto Pichigua, Condorama, Ocoruro and many other small communities. I am now living and working at a height of 4,300 meters above sea level here in the Andes Mountains. The climate, whilst sunny and warm in the afternoon, can be very cold in the morning and at night. While all of these conditions were a challenge at the beginning of my ministry here six months ago, I am now well acclimatized. Obviously, my training with the Royal Marines has helped me adapt to varying and challenging conditions like these.

The Society has provided me with a sturdy vehicle to reach my communities. Needless to say many of the roads are narrow and full of holes, so a good vehicle is essential. As well as celebrating mass for my communities (which has been an absolute joy) my priority from the outset has always been to get to know my flock and build up strong relationships with them. Of course, one of the primary challenges I face is the language which includes not just Spanish but also, in this part of the world, Quechua. Quechua is the first language for many of the villagers in the Andes Mountains. Thankfully, most of them speak Spanish too!

So far this experience of working on the Mission here in the Andes has been very demanding and also extremely gratifying. Without your support we would not be able to evangelize and serve the people in the mountain areas of Peru. Please continue to remember and pray for the priests of St. James Society who are working here in Peru.

*With Every Good Wish in Christ,
Rev. David Costello, Superior General*

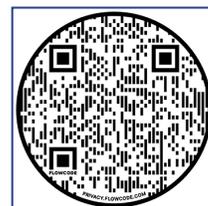


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