



The Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle
Diocesan priests serving the poorest of the poor since 1958.

**April
2026**

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"They Continue to Give...Even Today..."

Dear Friends,

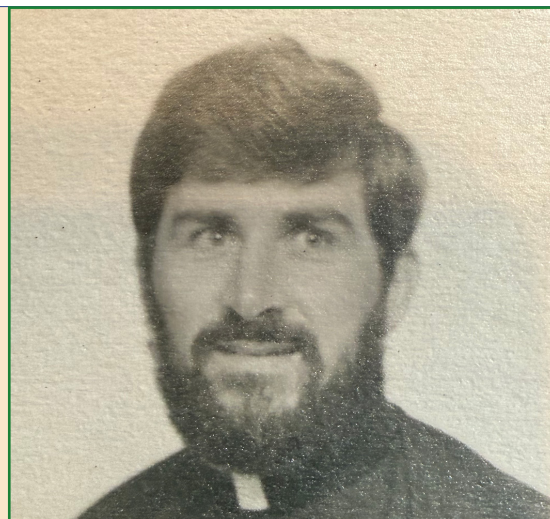
Fr. Frank Higgins is a native of Cork City, Ireland. He was ordained priest for the Diocese of Savannah, Georgia, USA, in 1968. Eleven years later he volunteered for mission service with the St. James Society. After language study and cultural orientation, he was assigned to Ecuador. Fr. Frank has always maintained close contact with the St. James Society. On a recent visit to Boston, he reflected on his mission experience in Ecuador:

On Sunday evening, September 1, 1968 I arrived in Savannah, Georgia from Cork, Ireland, having been ordained to the priesthood on June 16, 1968. I had been sent "*on mission*" to this diocese in the Southern United States. That same evening, I was appointed as the assistant to Msgr. Andrew McDonald at Blessed Sacrament Church in Savannah, Georgia. This is where I became introduced

to hot humid weather, which contrasted sharply to the cooler rainier weather I was accustomed to in Ireland!

In April 1957, Pope Pius the XII called on bishops throughout the world to share their priest resources with missionary dioceses in need. One year later in response to the Pope's appeal, Archbishop of Boston, Cardinal Richard Cushing, founded the Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle. Then, in 1959, the first group of fifteen priests left Boston for Peru where they were to work among the poorest of the poor and the marginalized. In time, Cardinal Cushing invited other bishops to join him in allowing their priests to commit a minimum of five years to work on mission with the Society. As their numbers grew, they expanded their footprint to include Ecuador and Bolivia. In 1962, Fr. Tom Duggan, who had been my pastor in Ireland, volunteered to join the Society, at the age of 72! I followed his footsteps and joined the Society in 1979, having been given permission to do so by Bishop Lessard. After language school I was assigned to Ecuador and served for five years in that country. My first assignment was in the Archdiocese of Guayaquil at sea-level, in the rural parish of Our Lady of the Highway, which had an estimated 80,000 parishioners scattered North, South, East and West from the small town of El Triunfo. We were four in number, all priests who hailed from Ireland. We were four wandering Irishmen, representing two dioceses in Texas, along with the Archdiocese of Wellington, New Zealand and Savannah. While we all shared responsibility for the main town, we each had responsibility for more than twenty other outlier villages. Covering this area was particularly difficult during the rainy seasons, when all areas were flooded.

To this day I recall my experience in Ecuador by the sights, the sounds and the smells, all rolled into one. The small town of El Triunfo is also known by the name Boca de Los Sapos. "*The Mouth of the Frogs*". Though you rarely saw them, even a deaf person could hear them! The frogs made their presence known, day and night, by their constant croaking in the surrounding marshes. The people we served and walked with lived in simple dwellings that were no bigger than 12 feet by 12 feet, the size of my living room today! However, this one room was their kitchen, dining room, sitting room, bedroom, all rolled into one; it sat precariously on stilts at perhaps a height of ten feet over putrid waters. The noise of traffic was constant, day and night since there was only one road running from the South at the Peruvian border up to the center of Guayaquil and the seaport. Trucks were continually transporting bananas, while constantly honking their horns!



Fr. Francis G. Higgins



The rainy season!



Homes on stilts in Ecuador



The markets



Ash Wednesday

Sadly, the hundreds and thousands of acres of bananas they were transporting were in the hands of the Multinationals, such as Dole Fruit, Standard Fruit and others; they were not in the hands of the Ecuadorian poor.

We priests lived in a spirit of expectation each day as we never knew what was coming next. It was not unusual to celebrate the Eucharist, an emergency baptism, the Anointing of the Sick, a marriage, plus a funeral or two, all in one day. Due to the tropical climate, a person who died was buried that same day, so you were given short notice that you were doing a funeral. We used a large amount of incense at those funerals, which made great sense and was fairly necessary! The unique offertory collections at Masses in this parish will always stand out in my mind: a half dozen eggs; a bunch of bananas; a pineapple, a papaya or two; a few ears of corn. People gave the fruits of the earth, at the offertory, from what little they possessed.

My second assignment was in the Archdiocese of Quito, at an altitude of ten thousand feet and there was a fellow priest I worked with, in a neighboring parish. I recall his words to me: "*Frank, if you just remember they have not yet left the Ark, you'll do fine*". My areas of responsibility included four main areas: Tocachi, Cochacqui, Moronga and Tanda. These were at altitudes which ranged from nine to thirteen thousand feet above sea level. The people I served there were as poor if not poorer than the dirt beneath their feet. As many as 50% of this population, both young and old, suffered from Cretinism, the result of centuries of in-breeding and a lack of certain nutrients in their diet. Those who suffer the disease are both severely physically and mentally underdeveloped. In both of my assignments, very few if any of the adults, had even a Grade School education. The Catechetical program of the parishes was known as: Catequesis Familiar. The parents are the ones who attended Catechism Classes each week for two years. In the days following, they share what they had learned with their children at home and on the following Sunday, the children celebrated what they had learned from their parents.

The celebrations for Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday are not to be forgotten! On Ash Wednesday, the ashes were always heavily applied and on Palm Sunday, the larger and more conspicuous the palm branch, the better! On Good Friday, as soon as the Church's Liturgy concluded, the Body of the Crucified Lord was taken down from the Cross, and placed in a coffin with

glass on three sides and then it was paraded throughout the town and across the mountain for hours, often in torrential rain on the coast and bitter cold in the mountains. In the mountains, Good Friday was live theatre and filled with passion. The parishioners in this region informed me that I was to begin speaking the Passion of Christ at 1:00 PM with the Last Word spoken at 3 PM. Upon arriving at the church, I discovered that a Calvary scene had been built across the Sanctuary, wall to wall, floor to ceiling. At 3 PM, the Crucified Lord's Last Words were barely out of my mouth when someone behind the Calvary scene, set fire to the dynamite! That day I learned an important lesson that served me for years: I may be the Pastor, but



Fr. Frank Higgins (far right) at an alumni meeting

I am not in charge; it is the people's church! On Easter Sunday I wondered where all the people went, whom I had seen on Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday and Good Friday. Alas, I realized that while they readily identified with pain, suffering and condemnation they struggled with the concept of new beginnings and new life. This message of hope and joy in the Resurrection was one I became determined to emphasize with these people, who suffered greatly every day.

*A*s we enter the Easter Season, let us, by our example, remind others, especially those who suffer so much, that the Resurrection of Jesus brings the promise of salvation, along with hope, joy and peace. Despite dire circumstances, Jesus is our Savior who brings us comfort and help. My experience as a missionary in Ecuador was a great blessing. It enriched my life beyond measure. I was one person giving to others; they were thousands giving in return. I received much more in return for the little I had to offer; they continue to give, in memory, even today. I wish you all a blessed Easter Season and thank you for supporting the Society of St. James. ~ Fr. Frank Higgins



DRAW US FORTH

*Draw us forth, God of all creation.
 Draw us forward and away from limited certainty
 into the immense world of your love.
 Give us the capacity to even for a moment
 taste the richness of the feast you give us.
 Give us the peace to live with uncertainty,
 with questions, with doubts.
 Help us to experience the Resurrection anew
 with open wonder and an increasing ability
 to see you in the people of Easter.*

--Anonymous

With Every Good Wish in Christ,

Rev. David Costello, Director



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 EASY**

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For the purpose of wills, bequests, and living trusts, our official name is:

The Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle, Inc.

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