



FRIENDS

THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST JAMES THE APOSTLE

July 2022



Evangelized by the Poor...

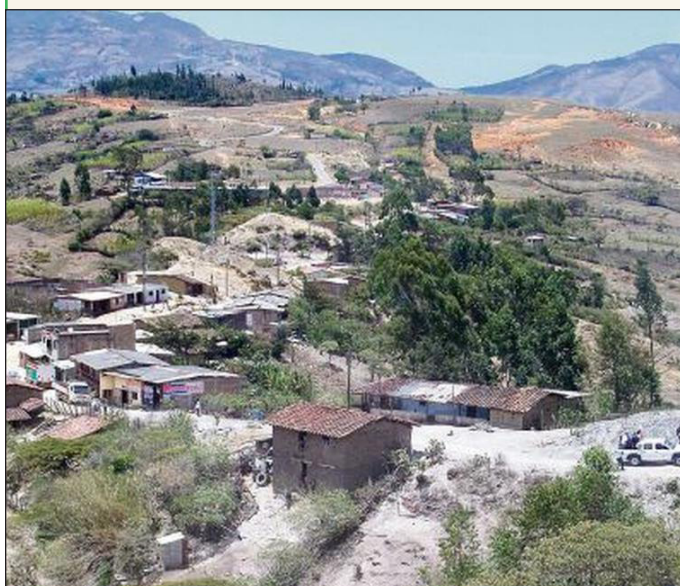
Dear Friends,

At our annual gathering in Lima, Peru, in January we welcomed four new members to the St. James Society. One of our new priests is Fr. Amaro Vasquez Ortiz. Fr. Amaro is a native of northern Peru but has been based in North Carolina for the past ten years. I have known Fr. Amaro since 2004 when I arrived at the parish of San Luis Gonzaga, Nuevo Chimbote. At that time Fr. Amaro was still a seminarian, and having spent a pastoral year at our parish, he would join us there whenever he was on vacation from Seminary. I was delighted to be present for Fr. Amaro's ordination to priesthood in 2006 in Nuevo Chimbote. I have invited Fr. Amaro to introduce himself to us:

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



Fr. Amaro's childhood home in Aragoto



The village of Aragoto



Fr. Amaro with his sister and grand aunt

I was born on July 15, 1977 in the Peasant Community of Aragoto in the Province of Ayabaca, within the Department of Piura, Perú. I come from a Catholic family and am the oldest of eight children. My parents taught me the basics of the Christian faith. Every Sunday we met in the chapel of my hometown, Aragoto, to celebrate the Word of God. Because we did not have a priest, we could not celebrate the Eucharist. When we did attend the Eucharistic celebration at the “Nuestra Señora del Pilar” Parish in

Ayabaca, I had to walk six to seven hours to reach this Parish. These were special days as my family and our neighbors walked to Mass together. Growing up in an area without a priest who could regularly celebrate the Eucharist certainly influenced me in my desire to become a priest and help provide the Eucharist and serve the people. Additionally, I was impressed by my uncle's witness and testimony. My uncle, Miguel Ortiz, is a Benedictine monk who lives in the ‘Santa Maria de los Toldos Abbey’ in Argentina. Miguel Ortiz regularly spoke to me about serving God and the people. Our many discussions along with his example, nurtured my own desire to serve God and His people; to become a priest. In December 1994, I finished my studies in Secondary Education and then I traveled to the city of Chiclayo to apply to the University there, in the hopes that I would study law or medicine.

While I was there, I began to prepare myself for these studies, and I continued to consider what I wanted to do with my life. During this time, I also became active in the “Señor de los Milagros” Parish. Fr. Cesar Herrera, pastor of this parish, invited me to become a “Youth Missionary Volunteer”. Thus, I began to delve deeper into my vocation to the priesthood. Fr. Cesar sent me to the Diocese of Chimbote for a Vocation retreat and Bishop Luis Armando Bambaren SJ welcomed me there. Shortly thereafter, Bishop Bambaren recommended me to begin the pre-seminary studies in 1997. In 1998 Bishop Bambaren sent me to study Philosophy at the “San Carlos & San Marcelo” major seminary in Trujillo.

As a prerequisite to apply for theology, we seminarians had to do a year of Pastoral Experience in a Parish. In 2001, I had the opportunity to work in pastoral care at the Chapel of “San Luis Gonzaga” with Fr. Ned Wall of the Society of St. James the Apostle. We were joined there, soon after, by Fr. Al McGuinness and Fr. David Costello. The chapel was south of Nuevo Chimbote, and it had fifty human settlements or “Villas”. Initially, this chapel belonged to the neighboring Holy Family Parish. All the dwellings there were made of ‘Esteras’ or straw mats. The families who lived in these villas did not have basic services such as running water, sewage, electricity, schools, or medical centers. It was all a desert full of sand. I found this environment very challenging. On the third day after I arrived, I was completely discouraged from continuing on this mission. I found it extremely difficult to see so many people who were suffering so much, in order to survive. On the fourth day, I awoke very early and opened the window of my room where I watched a very old woman walk slowly through this desert towards the water truck, to fetch water for her family. Seeing this elderly woman filling her jugs with water, and struggling to walk back to her home, truly humbled me. I realized I could not feel discouraged or sad witnessing this poverty when this woman endured so much and struggled each day. Witnessing this woman encouraged me to continue on the mission. Two days later, at 6:00 A.M. another woman knocked on the door of the house I lived in with Fr. Ned. This woman handed me three avocados for our breakfast. I knew these avocados were likely most of the food this woman possessed that morning. I was overwhelmed and in shock by the tremendous generosity of this very poor lady who gave us her own breakfast. Today I can say that the poor evangelize us and encourage us to continue in the missionary call that God has created us for, to be generous with them. Faced with these needs, Frs. Ned, Al and David along with the help of the Missionary Society of Saint James the Apostle created the “Social Assistance Center of San Luis Gonzaga Parish” to help the elderly, the children and all the people who were suffering, particularly those suffering from family violence. We focused especially on single mothers and young people, helping them with various social assistance programs in order to prevent their joining gangs with drug involvement. The missionary priests also helped many families who had lost their homes due to frequent fires. The St. James priests bought materials to rebuild their homes, and also helped supply food, water, transportation and medicine. On June 21, 2001, the Chapel of San Luis Gonzaga became a Parish. Then, Mass began to be celebrated in each community. Because each community did not have a chapel of its own the Eucharistic celebration was held in homes or in the local community center. Later, the St. James missionaries built several other chapels



Fr. Amaro with his family



including: the “Santiago Apostol Chapel” in the Las Palmas sector; the Chapel “San Jose” in the sector known as ‘March 19’; the “Niño Dios de Belen” Chapel in the Belen sector; the “Virgen de las Mercedes Chapel” in the Villa Amauta sector; the “Virgen del Pilar Chapel” in the Las Delicias Sector; the “Virgen del Rosario Chapel” in the Los Cedros sector, among others. Fr. David Costello created the “Centro de Estimulacion Temprano”, an early

learning childcare program for children from three years to six years where children would receive pre-school education in preparation for going to mainstream school. From Monday – Friday they would also receive a nutritious meal each day. It is through all of these circumstances that I came to meet and know the priests of the Missionary Society of Saint James the Apostle, and particularly Frs. David Costello, Ned Wall and Al McGuinness. These priests were my spiritual guides throughout all of my formative years in the Seminary. I am extremely grateful to all of them, especially to Fr David Costello who, since his arrival at the Parish of San Luis Gonzaga, became my mentor, along with Fr. Ned Wall. This is why I remain highly motivated in the mission that God has entrusted to us and I feel particularly blessed to have officially joined the Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle.

Sincere thanks to Fr. Amaro for sharing his vocation journey with us thus far. I am delighted that he has officially become a member of the St. James Society. He has been assigned to work with me here in Boston. Currently there are four priests contemplating membership of the St. James Society. Please continue to keep them in your prayers.

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

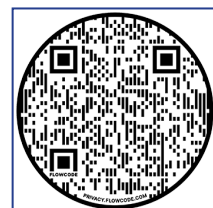


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