

## From the Director...



Dear Mission Friends:

Our Dominican friar, Bartolome de Las Casas, born in Seville, Spain in 1474, is known throughout Mexico and Guatemala as the “Defender of the Indians.” After he received a law degree from the University of Salamanca, he set sail for the Indies, where he acquired a hacienda and, like the other landowners of the time, held Indians in bondage.

However, when the Dominicans arrived in Hispaniola in 1510 and witnessed the horrible torture, slaughter, and enslavement inflicted on many of the native people, they preached adamantly against the injustice, even denying absolution in the confessional to any Spaniard who kept Indians as slaves. Under the influence of the Dominicans, Las Casas

freed his own Indian slaves, and eventually entered the Dominican Order. He displayed a genius for missionary work, believing in the importance of finding compatibility between the Gospel and the Mayan culture of the people in Chiapas and Guatemala to whom he ministered.

Named the first bishop of San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas, Bartolome is remembered for his selfless struggle in defense of the indigenous people, lasting until his death at the age of ninety-two.

Since 1963, you, our mission friends, have supported the work of our Dominican missionaries as they have sought to continue the ministry of Las Casas in Chiapas among the Tzeltal and Tzotzil peoples. And ten years ago our Father Timothy Conlan, O.P., joined the friars of the Dominican province of Central America to help spread the Gospel to the Achi peoples over the Chiapas border into Vera Paz, Guatemala.

Now, with the impending



*Scene from “Las Casas and Cortez,”  
fresco by Diego Rivera,  
National Palace, Mexico City*

beatification of Bartolome de Las Casas, the Dominican Order is putting greater focus on the lands of Chiapas and Vera Paz, where he battled in defense of the dignity and rights of the indigenous people, all of whom share in common the Mayan culture.

Fr. Carlos Aspiroz, O.P., the master general of our order in Rome, has asked three Dominican provinces—Mexico, Central America, and ours, Western United States—to form a “Maya Region” of Dominican ministry by collaborating on much-needed projects in the area.



*The young Achi catechists of the Maya region of Guatemala arrive by boat on the Usumancita River to meet the Tzeltal and Tzotzil catechists of the Maya region of Chiapas.*

Fr. Pablo Iribarren Pascal, O.P., the coordinator of the new “Dominican Maya Region,” gives us the following account of the first such project, a Mayan Youth Encounter, sponsored by the three provinces:

*“The youth of Chiapas stood on the banks of the Usumancita River which separates Mexico and Guatemala, anxiously awaiting the Guatemalan youth. Presently they saw the boats on the great river, decorated with banners, coming toward them, carrying their peers along with elders and Father Cristobal. The fraternal encounter was very emotional, those from each land greeting the other, and, conforming to Maya tradition, it was led by the elders, followed by flags, flutes, drums, guitars, incense, flowers, fireworks, and then the images of Christ and Our Lady of Guadalupe.*

*Soon we moved to the ruins of an ancient Maya temple where we prayed at the altar, which consisted of a circle on the floor formed by flowers and different colored candles. Grains of red, purple, white, and yellow corn, symbolizing the corners of the universe, were divided by two lines forming a cross with its*



*Under the images of Christ and Our Lady of Guadalupe, along with ancient symbols of their elders, these Maya youth live out Las Casas’ teaching that Christianity can be compatible with their Maya heritage.*

*arms open to the universe. The images of Christ and the Virgin of Guadalupe presided over all.*

*As the incense burned, elders from both Chiapas and Vera Paz lit the thirteen candles, symbolizing all that is living, and we were all down on our knees praying aloud and giving thanks for this successful youth encounter.*

*The celebration of the Mass involved combining the Christian and the Mayan cultures. For the Gospel reading the youth selected Jesus’ parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10).\**

*The event lasted three days, with the youth camping out and joining together as a community. The youth summarized the encounter stating:*



*These young Christian catechists renew their cultural heritage at the ruins of the ancient Maya temple of Yaxchilan. Father Pablo Iribarren Pascal, O.P., coordinator of the Dominican Maya missions, is in the center, holding his hat.*

*'We have rediscovered the music, dance, rituals, language, prayer, worship, and beliefs of our elders.*

*We recognize the intelligence, knowledge, and wisdom of our elders.*

*We affirm that culture is a living thing that guides us to give and take so as not to impede the development of communities.*

*We acknowledge our common ground and the importance of a spirit of unity toward each other.*

*We recognize each other as brothers and sisters of a great Maya community.'"*

I am sure that Fray Bartolome de Las Casas is looking down from Heaven on us all—his beloved Maya people, his Dominican brothers and sisters, and all of you, our mission friends—and sending his blessings upon us as we forge ahead with the goal of his ministry.

Yours in Christ's Love,

*Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.*

\* Luke 15: 8-10

*"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*



## Prayer to St. Martin de Porres

*I turn to you in my sorrow and anxiety to seek your friendly protection. Please intercede for me with our merciful Father in heaven so that I may be truly sorry for all my sins and be freed from the evils that shackle me. Ask that I might have something of your spirit of love and self-sacrifice, and so be at all times reconciled to God's holy will. Oh heavenly Father, in the name of your Son and of His blessed Mother, and by the merits of your faithful servant Martin, help me in my trouble and do not forsake me. Amen.*

### MISSION APPEALS

*We have been invited to speak on our missionary work at the following parishes. If you are in the area, please come out and meet our Dominican preachers at the weekend Masses.*

**September 20-21**

*St Francis de Sales Church  
Riverside, CA*

**Preaching: Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh**

**October 4-5**

*Our Lady of the Assumption Church  
Watsonville, CA*

**Preaching: Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh**

*"The first step in the work of being a missionary is not to preach a message to those who have not heard of it, but rather to investigate the cultures in order to discover what God is doing and speaking already in the hearts of these men and women."*

--Msgr. Samuel Ruiz  
Chiapas, Mexico

*"Your indigenous cultures are the richness of the human society, efficacious means to transmit the faith in God, encounters of their relations with God, with other persons, and the world. They merit, therefore, the greatest respect, esteem, sympathy and help on the part of all humanity."*

-- Pope John Paul II  
Guatemala, 1983