



Dear Mission Friends:

In the 16th century, even as the bloody conquest of Guatemala by the cruel conquistador, Pedro de Alvarado, was raging, Dominican defender of the Indians, Fray Bartolome de Las Casas, was beginning the peaceful evangelization of the country. He declared: *“The Divine Providence established for the whole world, and for all times, one and only one method to teach humankind the true religion—that is, using the enlightenment of reason and gentle, peaceful works.”*

Las Casas then transformed a region of Guatemala known as the “Land of War” into a land of peace, renaming it Vera Paz (*True Peace*). In 1537 he, along with Fr. Pedro de Angulo, O.P., founded the parish of St. Paul in Rabinal, Baja Vera Paz, which is still thriving almost five centuries later.

For more than a decade now you have followed the pastoral ministry of our missionary in Rabinal, Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P. Through his moving reports and poetry we accompanied him as he preached the Gospel, celebrated the sacraments, comforted the afflicted, and sought, through his numerous social projects, to transform the lives of the Achi peoples. I give thanks to all of you for your support, including, at this time in particular, those who designated their gifts specifically for “Fr. Tim’s work in Rabinal.” I remember preaching a mission appeal in Fresno a few years ago and meeting Mike Conway who, along with his wife Joan, has given generously and continuously to Fr. Timothy’s projects. And they are just one example of hundreds who have shown particular concern and compassion for the needy in Rabinal over the last several years.

Recently the Central American Dominican Province made a decision to withdraw the Dominican friars from Rabinal and turn the mission over to the local diocese. Although we know that the role of the



*Fr. Tim
Conlan,
O.P.*

missionary is to prepare a mission to be eventually entrusted to the local church, this decision came as a shock to Fr. Timothy, and certainly all of us are feeling a tremendous sense of loss.

The following is Fr. Timothy’s “Farewell” to the community of Rabinal, his beloved mission, and his home. We have included photos of Father’s last project, that of working with our dear mission friend, Jim Coriston of San Francisco, to build a water system for an indigenous community which has never before known the “luxury” of a fresh water supply. We will keep you informed of Fr. Timothy’s next home, but you can be sure he will be somewhere serving those most in need.

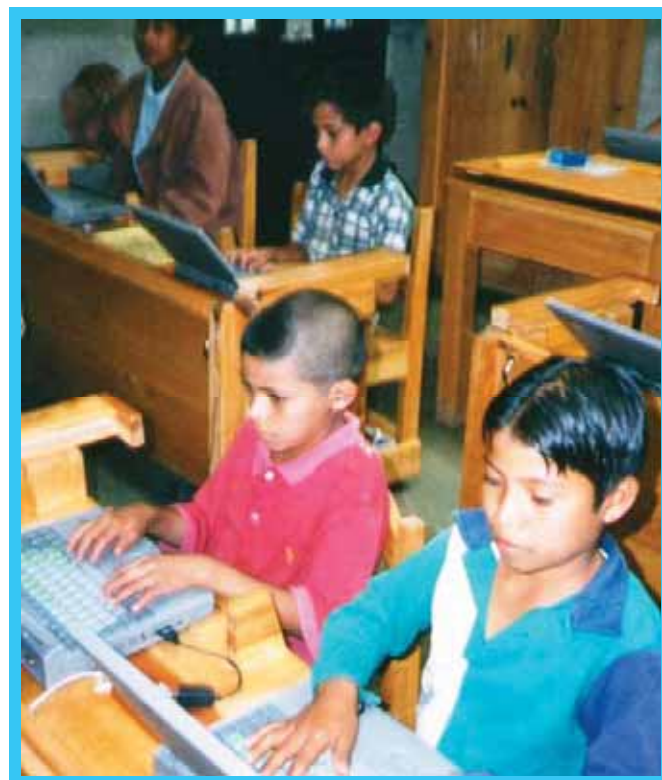
Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.

Goodbye, Rabinal

*Tomorrow will not find me where I am today.
 My bicycle will go back to the corner of the storage room where I found it,
 no more to run me around on the old errands
 to the grocery store, the bank, the post office, the office of the scholarship program,
 the hardware store, the cemetery, the sisters' convent, or back home.
 My room will finally be clean after ten years of being the haunt of many spiders,
 its windows freed of the old black and sagging mosquito netting.
 The boots I bought five years ago at a great price
 and had resoled with a vibram sole for just \$1.50 apiece will be given away.
 They served me well on trips along mountain trails visiting villages,
 but are now worn down.*

*Eleven years have passed since I first came to minister in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz, Guatemala.
 It is far away from everywhere but close to the heart of adventure and the human drama.
 You have to go off the road of the usual to get to this place outside time and modes.
 The road here winds through mountain passes with steep cliffs on its side and no guard rails.
 You can look into the pure abyss and wonder where the bottom of the world really is.
 It is a place beyond time but in touch with the past, back to the first parents,
 back to the mythical characters of the drama of the Mayan creation myth, the Popul Vuh.*

Fr. Tim's Weaving Coop.



Recipients of Fr. Tim's Computer Project.

The water project nearing completion.*Running Water!*

*There was no reason to come here as opposed to someplace else,
except the desire to put one's feet into the shoes of the legendary heroes
of the Dominican evangelical experiment during the Spanish Conquest of the Americas.
Led by Bishop Bartolome de Las Casas, these religious crusaders stood tall
against the inhumane slavery of the conquered peoples of America.*

These Dominican missionaries used the word of God as their only sword to free an enslaved race.

The persecution did not stop with the freedom from colonial rule.

Rather the struggle persists with the continued inequality of the indigenous races of the world.

*The chance to put one's light footprint on the trail of these great preachers was prize enough.
Hundreds of priests had done so before and what a privilege it is to be counted in their number.*

*The faded thirty year-old summit pack that I carried to the top of many mountains in earlier times,
and which recently held the chalice and paten, the hosts and the wine, the habit, stole and books
for the village Masses high above Rabinal, can rest awhile now until the next adventure.*

*The bright red backpack that I used this last year to carry the projector, speakers, cloth screen,
video player and all the cords for showing movies in the far villages will be awaiting further orders.*

*My walking stick that always led the way on the 100 or more trips up to the top of Kajyup,
the Mayan mountain fortress perched 1000 feet above Rabinal
and the scene of the pre-Columbian dance drama, the Rabinal Achi,
will perhaps be put on the wood pile to be used for cooking a monthly meal for the catechists,
small sacrifice for helping to carry out the preaching mission of the Church.*

The final farewells are now official.

The Dominican fathers hosted a three day presentation of cultural and religious activities.

*There were movies, talks, dramatic presentations, live marimba music,
and displays on the history of the 350 year-old Dominican presence,
lots of children participation, and then the final Mass.*

Few people came, since it was organized as a sort of conference.

There were no sentimental speeches, no big dinners, no presents, no tears.

It was like the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites:

The waters of the sea washed away the footprints, but the journey would continue.

*Recently I went to pick up an altar that I requested to be made at the local carpenter shop,
the first one that I believe they had ever made during 30 years of business,
built from reddish cedar wood, emblazoned with Alpha and Omega above,
and below a cross which was done with elegance although they had only a stick drawing to go by.*

*All three carpenters came to the door of the shop as we loaded it onto the pickup truck,
and it was clear they were so proud of what they had done--it was written on their faces.*

A rough crew, but their hearts were in that altar.

*So I called to them to come down by the truck and we got a picture of them in front of it--
a very proud moment for them--and later I gave them the picture as their faces were beaming.
Again, no speeches, no ownership, no tears--they gave the extra effort and felt renewed and rewarded.*

In the mission, mistakes were made, opportunities were lost, some choices would be regretted.

The preaching needed more study; the weakness of all the ministers was evident.

The Catholic Church needs a huge renewal now as in every other age.

My part was pitifully small in comparison to the great challenge.

But the mystery of faith continues in spite of all that.

*For those who have eyes to see, the hearts of many people are longing for a spark to keep ignited
that faith which they received in baptism.*

The problems we face are enormous and we need wise saints to lead the way.

The grain is on the stalk and we need reapers to bring in the harvest.

The Dominican Order in the world needs the torch of St. Dominic to light it once again.

*I struck a match in a faraway place and I hope others, younger and more capable,
will follow to spread that little flame.*

*The Evangelical churches are growing at a great rate with electrifying preachers,
as we have seen so often before.*

We need the Spirit to inspire everyday faith and profound analysis of the false prophets.

We need a radical conversion from

too many rich Christians, too many rich churches, too many sleepy and comfortable Catholics.

It remains for us to be etched onto the church of martyrs, apostles, saints and pioneers in the faith.

Give us your Spirit, Lord; we are lost in the maze. Let us get down on our knees today and always.

Peace to all,
Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P.

*Fr. Tim
with
mission friend
Jim Coriston
(far left)
and
their
construction
team.*

