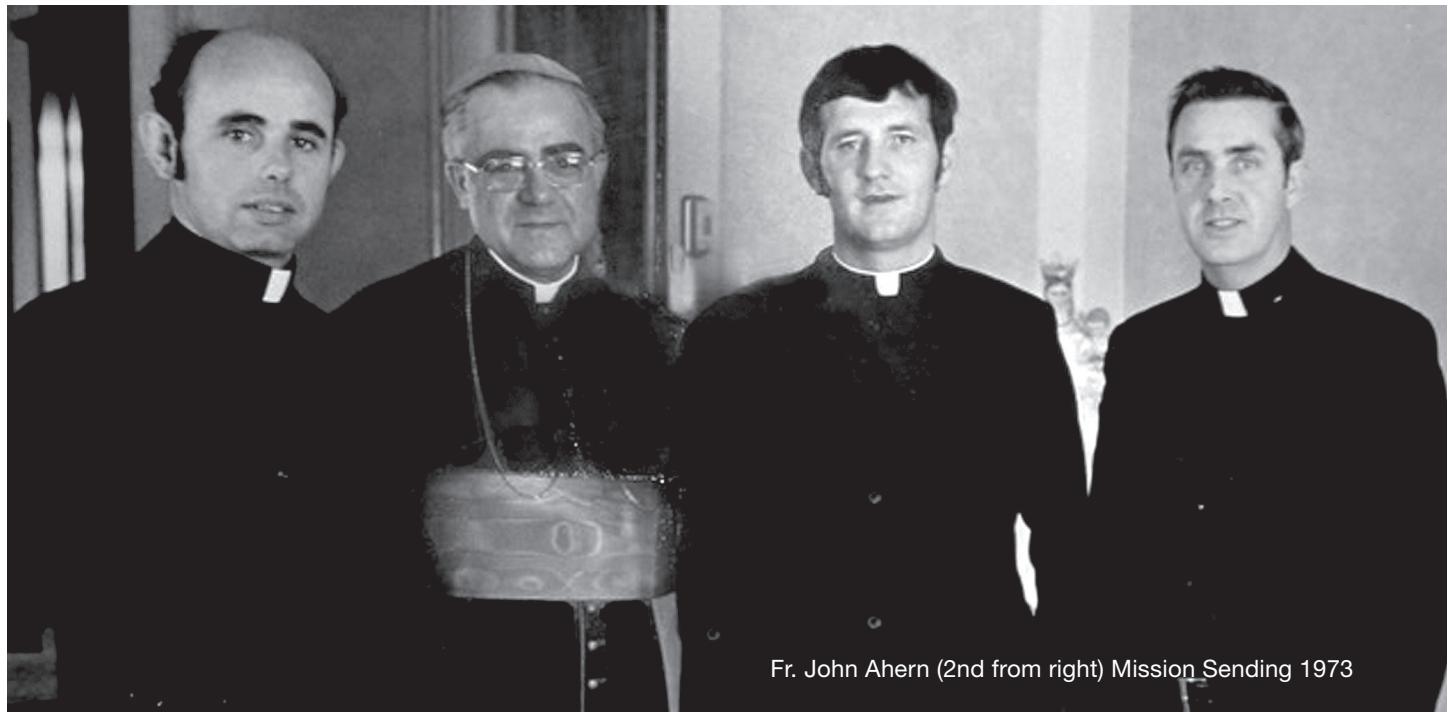




FRIENDS

THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST JAMES THE APOSTLE

JUNE 2020



Fr. John Ahern (2nd from right) Mission Sending 1973

THE EVANGELIZING POWER OF THE POOR

Dear Friends:

Fr. John Ahern is a priest of the Diocese of Salford, UK. He is a native of Farranfore Co. Kerry where he now lives in retirement. Fr. John has always kept in close contact with the St. James Society and is a regular visitor at our annual gathering in Lima. Before he left Peru at the end of February, he shared with me the following article which he was inspired to write:

How many times do we say “I would not have missed it for the world.” I want to say it after every visit back to Lima for the AGM of the Society of St. James the Apostle.

I was one of the lucky ones to have had the experience of sharing my priesthood through the Society with the wonderful people of this ‘Tierra del sol’ (Country of the Sun-Peru). I worked in Chimbote from 1974 – 1979, and in Villa El Salvador from 1979 – 1981. Words fail to convey the richness of that experience.

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

In the 8 years (I began studying Spanish in Lima in 1973) that I belonged to the Society of St. James my priesthood was enriched. I came into the Society in the years immediately after the meeting of the Latin American Bishops in Medellin, Columbia. A mantra emanating from that watershed meeting was “the evangelizing power of the poor.” I can certainly vouch for the truth of that phrase. In the difficult years after Chimbote’s devastating earthquake – 50 years ago on May 31st – I witnessed a people rise from the ashes armed with the liberating message of the Gospel,



and move from an attitude of being passive recipients of Charity to being a people aware of their God-given rights, to being architects of their own future. The help provided by the St. James Society in people resources, the women and men who led the projects in the spiritual and temporal advancement was eagerly accepted. The call was to accompany rather than lead the people toward a better future. It was great to know of the fountains of prayer and financial support that came from the friends of the St. James Society. Now it is wonderful to visit Chimbote and see a Church that was 90% dependent on foreign personnel in the 1970s providing its own priests and pastoral agents. Cardinal Cushing’s mandate to the early St. James priests was “to go down there and put yourself out of a job.” That mandate has been fulfilled in Chimbote.

In 1979 I moved to the budding new town that was Villa El Salvador, on the Southside of Lima. There with Frs. Eugene Kirke and Joe McCarthy and a wonderful team of Religious women and men we had the rich experience of forming Christian Communities through the program known as “Catequesis Familiar” (Family Catechetics) which had been introduced to Peru from Chile

through the Sisters of the Cross and Passion and a group of Italian missionaries in an inner city parish. This program, which we painstakingly adapted to Peruvian reality, empowered deeply committed parents to take leadership roles in forming local church groups – concerned not only with the spiritual development of their children – but armed with the Word of God, reading the reality and the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. Even the late great St. John Paul II was gob-smacked by the sincerity of the leaders who welcomed him to Villa El Salvador in 1982. Two Saints met that day on the same podium: Victor Chero, a man who was part of the early invasion – Victor’s heartfelt welcome to the Pontiff caused him to set aside his prepared script and proclaim to the



Cross and Passion Sr. Clare Dawson at Parish Medical Center



Parish Catechesis Group

world from the massive sand hills of Villa El Salvador: 'Hambre de Dios Si, Hambre de Pan No' (Hunger for God – Yes, Hunger for Food – No). The people of VES grasped the challenge with heart & head. The miracle of the city in the sand is a wonder to behold. As I celebrated Mass there last Sunday how satisfying it was to see the third generation on from the late 70s and early 80s assuming the roles their grandparents before them assumed in building the Kingdom of God. Like Chimbote, Villa El Salvador is now self-sufficient regarding personnel. Fr. Eugene Kirke, a veteran of those early days, and a recent recipient of the Cardinal Cushing Medal, still lives there in retirement in Villa El Salvador. The St. James Society retains responsibility for one of the nine parishes. The contribution of the St. James Society to the life of Villa El Salvador is incalculable. Only God himself knows what has been achieved over the years. Without you, our friends and benefactors, nothing could ever have been possible, it would not be what it is today.

St. James Society parishes in Ate/Vitarte and Carabayllo are developments subsequent to my time with the Society, but I know your generosity continues to reach the poorest of the poor in these areas. Frs. David, Loreto, Francis, Denis, Eddie, Cesar, and so many others carry on the great work done by so many of their predecessors. Fr. Cesar is the first Peruvian priest to work as a member of the St. James Society, he ministers in Villa El Salvador, and what a welcome addition he is to the St. James Society. I have never had the opportunity to visit our parishes in the Andes region, but I know the presence of the St. James Society is very much appreciated by the local church, especially in the Prelature of Sicuani. I have met with, and spoken to, Bishop Pedro Bustamante many times in Lima, and he is very effusive in his gratitude to the St. James Society for the help he continues to receive, most of all by the presence of four St. James priests in his diocese.

I retired from parochial ministry in Salford, England, in 2014. Every year since then I have come to Lima for the annual gathering of St. James priests and alumni. For me, being able to join the current members of the St. James Society each year is a veritable recharging of the batteries!! Every time I come back to Peru it is an opportunity for me to relive my mission experience as well as an opportunity to give thanks to the Lord of Life who has gifted me with so many blessings throughout my life. Each year the Society invites a speaker to give some input during the gathering. It is always a great blessing to be enriched and challenged by the various speakers. This year we were blessed with Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh, Ireland. Last year we welcomed my own bishop from Salford, Bishop John Arnold, who is



Fr. Peter Huges and Fr. John Ahern in Lima



Conference with Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez



FR. GEORGE R. FLYNN, RIP

The Society of St. James mourns the loss of one of its founding members. Fr. George R. Flynn died in Boston April 10th, 2020, just a week shy of his 91st birthday. Ordained February 2nd, 1956 by Richard Cardinal Cushing, Fr. George was one of the founding members of the St. James Society (1958) and among the first group to travel to Peru in 1959. He is credited with being one of the few members of the Society to have worked in all three countries: Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. In all he would spend 55 years in South America, the majority of his time there being spent in Peru.

He is probably best remembered for his broadcast work through PROSAN (Producciones Santiago Apóstol) which he himself founded. In 2019 Fr. George transferred PROSAN to Radio María, Lima, Peru. Fr. George is very fondly remembered whenever Society priests gather and we extend our sympathy to his brother Joseph and sister Ann, and all his extended family. We are also most grateful for the wonderful care he received in retirement at Regina Cleri Residence, Boston. Que en Paz descansa Padre Jorge!

also the current chair of CAFOD, Catholic Aid for Overseas Development, for the Bishops Conference of England and Wales. The annual gathering also allows each of us the opportunity to catch up on all that is going on in the local Peruvian Church. Meeting people like Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, a lifelong friend of the St. James Society, as well as many of our friends from the Columban Fathers, and of course the many men and women who form part of Peru's "Iglesia en Marcha" ('Church on the Move') – all of whom are instrumental in implementing the call of Pope Francis "To care for our common home." I feel so blessed at having this missionary experience in my life – thanks to Peru, thanks to the Society of St. James the Apostle, but perhaps thanks most of all to you our benefactors and friends for making all of this a reality in my lifetime. I look forward to returning to Lima again next year. I would not miss it for the world.

Sincere thanks to Fr. John for sharing his thoughtful inspiration with us. Our gathering in Lima each year provides us with a blessed opportunity to gather the 'old and the new,' and together reflect, renew, and give thanks to God for our common mission experience.



With Every Good Wish in Christ,

Rev. David Costello, Director

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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