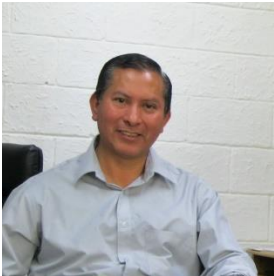




Missionary Fraternity of Mary Newsletter Summer 2017



“God writes straight -- in crooked lines”

F. Silvano Velasquez

“God writes straight -- in crooked lines,” said Fr. Silvano Velasquez, M.F.M to explain his journey from the rural, Guatemalan village of his humble childhood to his current posts as Pastor of San Rafael Parish in Guatemala City and the Prefect of Finance of the Missionary Fraternity of Mary.

A Straight Line

Perhaps his career path has been winding and unexpected, but his vocational journey was fairly straight. As the second of twelve children, Silvano had to work in the house before school in the morning and in the fields in the afternoons, but he is thankful for his upbringing because it taught him the value of hard work. More importantly, he credits his father with teaching him the value of prayer and of generosity. He remembers one night as a child when he told his father that he had too much homework to pray the rosary with his family, their nightly tradition, to which his father responded, “That’s alright, my son; we will wait for you.” The importance of prayer has stuck with him ever since. His father, who never had the opportunity to attend school himself, worked hard to make sure his children could attend. “He was my hero. Because of him, I learned how to help. He was so generous. I learned not to cling to material things.” Fr. Silvano’s father gave his time as a Eucharistic Minister and catechist, and also built the church in their village with his own hands and free of charge.

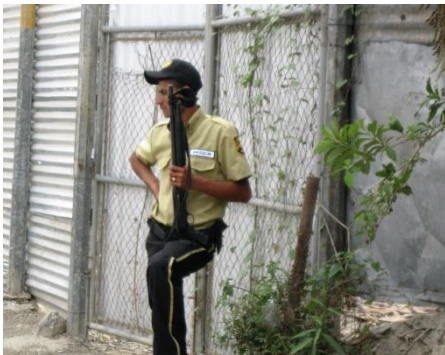
Though it had a church, the tiny village of San Pablo did not have its own priest, and Silvano’s family had to travel two hours on foot to attend mass in Tacana. The parish was run by a European priest, and as a young boy, Silvano was under the impression that priests had to

come from far-away places and have skin of a different color than his. He did not know any indigenous priests.

Two Brothers' Journeys

Silvano's father thought his outgoing, older brother Enrique would make a great priest, so he encouraged him to go away to study at a religious boarding school, but it was Silvano who really wanted to attend. Silvano begged to study with his brother, and their father finally gave in. At the school, the brothers studied all morning and again worked in the fields all afternoon to cover the cost. After dinner, they did their homework until lights-out was enforced at 10PM, at which time Silvano would sneak out to the wall surrounding the school to study by the light of a street lamp.

When the time came for high school, the brothers heard about a new seminary far away in the capital that was just opening, and so the boys entered the Minor Seminary of the Missionary Fraternity of Mary. Silvano was quite happy and flourished there, but Enrique decided that it was not the life for him and left with the hope of one day starting a family. While in the Seminary, Silvano began to feel called, little by little, to life as a missionary. It was there that he learned for the first time about other orders of priests, and it was there that his vocation to the Missionary Fraternity of Mary crystallized. He was ordained in 1995, then studied in Italy, and since 2000 has been professor of Theology at the Seminary.



Urban Mission, Despite poverty and violence God is present

Now Fr. Silvano is Pastor of San Rafael Parish in the gang-controlled “red zone,” one of the poorest and most dangerous areas of Guatemala City, where people are killed every day because of drugs and gang violence. The *pandillas*, or street gangs, terrorize the people of Fr. Silvano’s parish by extorting large sums of money, which they call “taxes” from anyone who has a job. Even the women who eke out a living making tortillas to sell on the street have to pay 500 *quetzales* per month to the *pandillas*, or face death. Fr. Silvano himself received death threats two years ago, most likely due to his outreach with the youth of his parish, whom he tries to keep off the streets and away from drugs. He refuses to be swayed and steadfastly ministers to the youth and has 170 involved in his youth program. “We have to teach them to love God and respect life,” he says. Fostering vocations is very important to Fr. Silvano, and two boys from his parish currently study at the Seminary, and one parishioner was recently ordained as a Missionary Fraternity priest.



Youth Gatherings at San Rafael Parish

Despite the violence and the poverty, San Rafael Parish is thriving. Fr. Silvano and his associate celebrate ten masses every Sunday, in different neighborhoods to accommodate the large numbers of church-goers, sometimes holding mass outside. Saturdays are filled with weddings, *quinceañeras* and other church celebrations. In his ten years as pastor, Fr. Silvano has seen his parish build five new religious buildings for prayer, in addition to a major addition to the parish church to double its size.

To Fr. Silvano, tending to his parishioners –and his closeness with them—are the most important parts of his mission: listening to them, celebrating the sacraments, visiting the sick, and hearing their confessions. Once, when he was a boy, Fr. Silvano traveled two hours to make a confession, but the priest turned him away. As a result, Fr. Silvano always makes himself available to hear confessions. “I’m only the *administrator* of mercy,” he says, “not the owner.” Outreach is integral to his parish, which has Family Ministry, Social Ministry, and Educational Ministry. “We educate the families, we go into the school and teach them values, to respect themselves. We help those most in need, bringing food, finding wheelchairs—whatever they need.”

In another bend in the road along his journey, Fr. Silvano was recently asked to be the Prefect of Finance for the Fraternity, and he will soon leave San Rafael to be able to devote more time to that position. Fr. Silvano gladly accepts the charge because of his love of the Fraternity, but he feels the full weight of the responsibility. He tries to cut expenditures wherever he can, but worries about the future of the Fraternity because of the challenge of raising enough money to cover the costs. He estimates the cost of educating one seminarian to be 25,000 *quetzales* (\$3,000) annually. However, his impoverished parish San Rafael raises enough money to sponsor a seminarian each year, so Fr. Silvano knows it can be done anywhere. He also proposes that his brother priests each give back 1,000 *quetzales* of their salaries to the Missionary Fraternity. “Someone helped us, and we have to help those who come after us,” he says.

As Fr. Silvano said, “Someone helped us, and we have to help those who come after us.” After all, the lines might *seem* crooked to us, but...

All contributions are tax deductible and are used exclusively for the work of the Fraternity in Guatemala and its missions worldwide. For more information or to mail contributions, please send to:
Missionary Fraternity of Mary, Ltd.
124 E. Freistadt Road
P.O. Box 94
Thiensville, WI, WI 53092

