



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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Coming Home



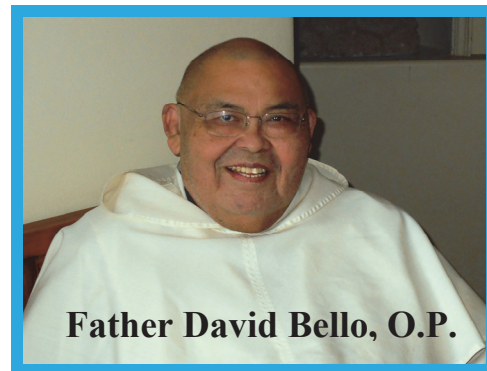
Dear Mission Friends:

It was in the late 1700s that Dominican Friars came from their native Spain to put down roots in Baja California, Mexico. The administration of the former Jesuit missions was handed over to them and they founded nine of their own, the ruins of which can still be seen throughout the peninsula. After several decades, in the mid-1800s, surviving Dominicans returned home since the indigenous population had been greatly reduced by European diseases or murder, and the missions and their lands were being confiscated by the government.

Over a century later, in 1978, Fr. Paul Scanlon, O.P. and I began negotiations with Bishop Manuel Perez-Gil of the Diocese of Mexicali for the return of our order to Baja, and with his blessings, friars from our Western Dominican Province served in the diocese until the early 1990s, when the quality of life there had so improved that the missionaries were no longer needed—their job was done.

A few years later the bishop invited us to return to establish a parish in a poor, spiritually-neglected settlement on the far eastern outskirts of Mexicali. Extending about 30 miles along the U.S.-Mexican border, the area encompasses crowded, impoverished neighborhoods and small, destitute ranches. In fact, in one of the area's most distressed communities, in the center of a harsh desert, electricity is just now being installed in the homes.

There was certainly no Catholic presence in the area, and so it was in October of 1995 that Fr. David Bello, O.P. arrived, alone but ready for the challenge, to establish a new mission of our province, the parish of Santa Maria de Guadalupe.



Father David Bello, O.P.

There was one small chapel, but with such an expansive area to serve, most of Father David's new parishioners had to celebrate the Eucharist in the open air which, in Mexicali, can mean up to 125 degrees in the summer and down to 43 degrees in the winter. In light of their sacrifices, Father refused to have a house built for him and the friars who would be sent to join him. Rather, he rented a small house in a depressed neighborhood, which became even more cramped as the next two missionaries arrived.

In an article for our newsletter, his first after arriving in Mexicali, Father David described the beginning of his ministry:

"For the last two months, I have been living in a rented house in one of the parish's colonias (districts)...The house was a mess!"

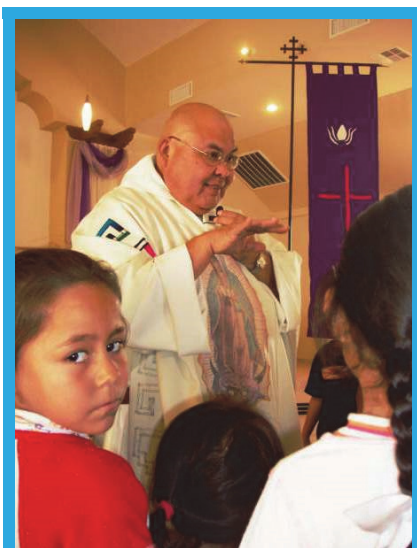
The electrical wiring had been stolen—it is melted down for the copper, which is sold to buy drugs; the kitchen sink was stolen and the toilet bowls were beyond repair; there were no doors; the fence in the front of the house was falling down... Did I mention it was a mess? But in place of rent for a couple months, and with the support of the Mission Office, I fixed up the house. Many parishioners helped too, cleaning the house on several occasions, making new doors, and donating used plates, pots, towels, blankets, a stove, and a sofa. When I offered them some money, they refused, saying it was part of their apostolate. Wow! So I try to show my gratitude by reciprocating with hospitality and generosity.



Above and below left, Fr. David celebrating the children's Mass on the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the late 90s.

During a recent visit, Fr. Daniel Syverstad, O.P., our Dominican provincial, asked if it bothered me to be alone. In my own Bello-esque way, I said, "No." Yet in these moments when there is no one with whom to share the story, I do feel alone.

However, on March 24 [1996], having been by myself for five months, Fr. Tom Kraft, O.P. arrived after some months in Columbia studying Spanish, and at last we are two!



Friends in Mexicali were opposed to [the location of the house] because they felt the neighborhood was very dangerous with frequent burglaries, robberies, violence, and prevalent gang and drug activity. But I told them it is important to live among the people to whom we minister.



Above, Fr. David in 2005 consulting with architect Juan Loubet and his assistant on the future site of the friars' house; and left, that of the catechetical building to be dedicated in 2009 to Fr. Tom Kraft, O.P.

I just finished celebrating the funeral of an elderly woman, Loretto, who died after a long, terrible battle with diabetes. She lived with her daughter and small grandchildren, and while her daughter worked her night job, Loretto, who could no longer walk and was bedridden, somehow took care of the little ones.

*It wasn't till her funeral that I learned about a terrifying ordeal she experienced last summer. It was one of our horribly hot nights and a couple of thieves entered the house to steal the cooler from her room. When they saw that she was unable to get up, they were in no rush to leave. While Loretto and her little grandchildren were huddled in terror on her bed, the thieves commenced to take food from the refrigerator and eat it teasingly in front of them. Then they left with the cooler and her prayer that they would not be harmed was answered. When I heard the story though, *I couldn't help thinking that for many in this neighborhood and others, death is the only escape from fear and misery.**

*My life is not threatened here in Mexicali...or is it? My sense of comfort and security, my illusion of power I felt as a Dominican [in California], are broken, and I feel more vulnerable with each story of misery that I hear...I pray that I don't abandon those who are suffering their own crosses...All I can give to this poor woman's family and others who live in fear and poverty is my own weak and imperfect faith. **'I am with you.'***



Left, the present-day community of Dominican Friars in Mexicali: Fr. David Bello, Fr. Miguel Rolland, Pastor, Fr. Bart de La Torre, Fr. Martin Walsh.

Below, Fr. David (with Br. Cody Jorgensen) is warmly welcomed by parishioners after Mass on his first Sunday back.



Over the next decade, under the hard work and leadership of Father David and his staff, and with the loyal support of you, our generous donors, the parish community flourished, as indicated by the building of three chapels, a beautiful *Santa Maria de Guadalupe* parish church, and later, a much-needed, long-awaited house for the friars and two catechetical centers. According to Fr. Miguel Rolland, O.P., the parish's current pastor, "It is a parish that was forged into being by the Holy Spirit through the talent and tenacity of Fr. David Bello."

After Father had achieved or set

into motion most of what he had planned, he was assigned to Holy Rosary Parish in Antioch, CA as Parochial Vicar. But as much as he grew to love the parish and its parishioners, he longed to return one day to his beloved mission in Mexicali, and that day has come. In July, Father David rejoined the staff here as Parochial Vicar and we are all honored to welcome the man who arrived alone two decades ago and singlehandedly prepared the way for the vibrant, dedicated parish it is today. Welcome home, Father David!

In Christ's Peace,
Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.

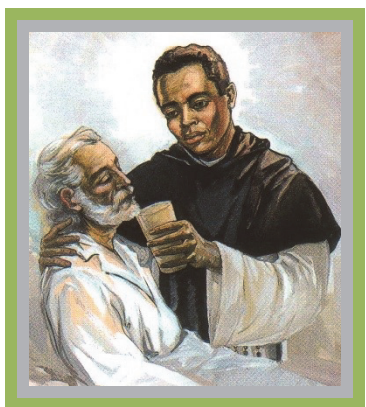
*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

~T.S. Eliot

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Isaiah 41:10).

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am
your God. I will strengthen you
and help you; I will uphold you
with my righteous right hand
(Matthew 28:20).

I am with you and will
watch over you wherever
you go, and I will bring
you back to this land. I
will not leave you until I
have done what I have
promised you (Genesis
28:15).



**Prayer to St. Martin de Porres, Patron of the
Dominican Mission Foundation**

*Brother Martin, when you were here on earth,
you spent your life loving God
and your neighbor.
Now that you live in the presence of God
in paradise, intercede for those who stand
so much in need
of the healing help of God
and beg the Divine Physician to give us
health of soul and body.
Amen.*

Upcoming Mission Appeals

*If you are in the area, please come and
meet our preachers.*

Sept. 3-4: St. Joseph, Fortuna, CA
Fr. Martin Walsh

Sept. 17-18: Holy Trinity, Greenfield, CA
Fr. Martin Walsh

**Oct. 29-30: Cathedral of the Madeleine,
Salt Lake City, UT**
Fr. Martin Walsh

St. Patrick, Salt Lake City, UT
Fr. Peter Rogers