MISIONEROS MARISTAS

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Dear Friends,

 Once again we wish to share with you something of our missionary journey together. Our third and final term of our pastoral year is now behind us and we have now entered into a period of recess for the year through to the end of January. In some ways 2013 has challenged us perhaps like no other year. We keep reminding ourselves that we are no longer the vibrant young men of some 23 years ago when we iniciated this missionary adventure here in Bolivia; however we still consider ourselves as being young of heart!

 Juan after nine years as a member of the service team for the articulation of the Base Church Communities (CEBs) throughout the Americas and articulator for the Andean region has finally signed off, having completed more than the maximum 2 terms. After much consultation with the region Javier in the name of the Marist Team has accepted to serve in this capacity; so together we as a Marists Team will be involved as a back-up for Javier. To get to be better known in the region in this capacity, Javier participated in the Ecuadorian national encounter and visited different Base Church Communities in the country in the month of October. Meanwhile Gilberto and Juan gave an initial formation course in the Entre Rios Parish of the diocese of some 135 rural communities. After All Saints, the three of us took off to give a follow-up course on “Faith and Politics” in the Pando Vicariate (part of the Bolivian Amazonia Region and the vicariate of our previous mission of Palma Flor). The trip in itself was a real adventure. We left our Tarija residence at 2 a.m. Tuesday morning. As there was a road blockade in Potosi for a week, we instead of going via La Paz had to take a complete detour going via Santa Cruz and then on to Trinidad, arriving there at 10 pm. Each of us took three hour shifts at driving. At 5 am Wednesday we left our short stopover, crossed on pontoon two of the huge Amazonian rivers and arrived at Palma Flor at 10 pm for supper and night’s rest with Arminda’s and Nair’s families. The roads from Trinidad to Palma Flor are all dirt and badly maintained and effected by the recent rains. After breakfast there we continued on to Guayeramin, border with Brazil where we were to give the course to the animators of the vicariate. In all 3 full days of continuous travel. However our energies were raised by the enthusiastic reception of our course by the participants. Our return consisted of another 3 days on the road. We were able to take the shorter route via La Paz, given the end of the blockade in the meantime. Some 80 kms before Tarija City at 4 pm we arrived at a small rural town where the locals too had set up a road blockade for an indifferent period. Over 200 vehicles were stranded, then at 9 pm. the locals lifted it, in hope that the negotiations with the local government would follow. So after this final hurdle we arrived home at 10.30 pm. All along the way we were in search of gasoline- arriving in one town after another and they were either out of gasoline or there was no electricity for the pumps! In all we drove 4,500 kms.

 So after such adventures we had to turn our attention to preparing and giving another formation course here in Tarija to the animators of the diocese. Following this, we entered into our third and final spiritual retreat for the year, entitled “Have Courage in Following Jesus”. We were to have then our 23rd anniversary celebrations and a week of annual evaluation and planning; however one of Javier’s brother-in-laws died - (the second in 12 months). So Javier quickly set off to be with his family there in the Yungas. Finally we got to having a delayed celebration and end-of-the-year evaluation and planning. One last task for the year has been our development of one of the courses offered to the CEBs by the Jesuit Iberoamericano University of Mexico. Juan was asked to design and facilitate the course, entitled “CEBs and Mission”. It has proved quite a labourios task!

 Meanwhile our boys have been in the limelight. Paquito was selected for the state soccer team in his division. They won the national tournament. He was goalkeeper and returned to Tarija in hero-style. Previously Gilbertito represented the state in his division in the national tournament. Right now Juan José is up for selection for the state basketball team and Lupito has done really well in his basketball team. Juan Jose, as mentioned in previous letter, was president of the student body of his college; assisting in meeting with all the faculty and authorities and conducting student meetings and activities throughout the year. He received the Certificate of Honour for his year and was second in his class. As he has turned 17, he has commenced his compulsory military service. This means that he goes to barracks every weekend of the year and during the 2 month’s summer break he goes off daily to the barracks.

 As we come to an end of our pastoral commitments for 2013 and go into recess until the end of January, we have had an unfortunate happening for our community. Javier and Nair were returning home on motorbike, rounded a bend, and as the road was wet and sandy, their bike skidded and the two went to ground. Javier fractured his right arm badly and Nair suffered bruises. Fortunately their lives were saved. Javier had to be operated and a plate inserted in in his arm. So he will be somewhat laid up over the summer and their hopes to spend some time away will be changed. With Juan José’s military service programme as it is, Gilberto and family too now have to see when they can get away together. Nevertheless we hope that this Christmas season will be for us full of blessings.

 Know that you are constantly in our thoughts and prayers……and we look forward to hearing from you throughout the year.

 With all our love,

Gilberto/Arminda/Juan José/Gilbertito-Javier/Nair/Lupito/Paquito-Juan