



Honduran cardinal visits Cincinnati archdiocese

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By David Eck

ST. ANDREW DEANERY —Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga visited Good Shepherd Parish in Montgomery Nov. 4 as part of the faith community's commitment to establish a parish and to help build a bi-lingual school in Honduras.

The cardinal celebrated Mass, spoke about the conditions in his country and blessed those who are spearheading the fund drive. The drive was launched Oct. 30, and the parish hopes to raise \$450,000 in the next three years for the two projects. Mary Flores, formerly the first lady of Honduras, spoke during Good Shepherd Masses Nov. 6-7.



Teaming up with Shoulder to Shoulder, a non-profit organization that helps the poor in rural Honduras, Good Shepherd hopes to see the school open next fall, serving children in pre-school through the first grade. The school, to be located in Concepcion, Intibuc'a, will add grades each year through high school. The region is one of the country's poorest areas.

"Education really is one of the most needed things in our country. We need to educate these children," Cardinal Rodriguez said. "When you have good education, the kids grow up with dignity."

Forty-two percent of Hondurans are under age 15, the cardinal said, and they need to be educated. Children often learn when their horizons are opened, he added.

Good Shepherd parishioner Christy O'Dea, a family physician, lived in Honduras and volunteered with Shoulder to Shoulder. She understands the impact a bi-lingual school will have in the region and encouraged Good Shepherd to take on the project. Shoulder to Shoulder typically supports medical, dental and public health projects, but O'Dea said the school would be of greater benefit in the long run.

"We felt that this was the most [effective] way to alleviate poverty. Without education, people can't get out of poverty," O'Dea said. "We want to be able to give kids the opportunity to go on to college and university. A bi-lingual education is really the ticket to a good job."

The quality of public education in the area is poor. Students may get only 100 days of schooling per year, and those are usually half-days, the cardinal explained. The bi-lingual school will also provide tutoring in the public school, English training for public school teachers and offer adult vocational training.

In the second project, Good Shepherd will establish a parish in Santa Lucia by building a rectory and offices for a priest. The funds will also be used to provide catechists and materials for formal religious training.

"A new parish is like establishing a new family," Cardinal Rodriguez said, adding that parishes also bring education and ethics

to a community. Many parishes have no rectories, and he has slept on a pew in church at times.

In addressing parishioners, Cardinal Rodriguez said there is some industry in the area, but many people survive on the beans and corn they grow themselves. Small farmers are learning to form cooperatives to sell their produce, and the country needs to develop an agricultural industry, he said.

“Most people just survive,” the cardinal said. “This is our handicap.”

Drugs also hinder the quality of life in Honduras, he added. Corruption and a culture of fear keep the drug trade strong. Judges won’t sentence drug traffickers to prison and journalists won’t write about the issue out of fear of being killed.

“You can’t imagine the amount of money [drug lords] move. It’s incredible,” Cardinal Rodriguez said. “This is our tragedy. Drugs are the worst threat to our peace.”

The cardinal also celebrated an All Souls Day Mass at St. Christopher Parish in Vandalia, spent a day at the Athenaeum of Ohio/Mount St. Mary Seminary and celebrated Mass at St. Margaret of York Parish in Twenty Mile Stand during his three-day visit to the archdiocese.

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