

The Mission CONNECTION

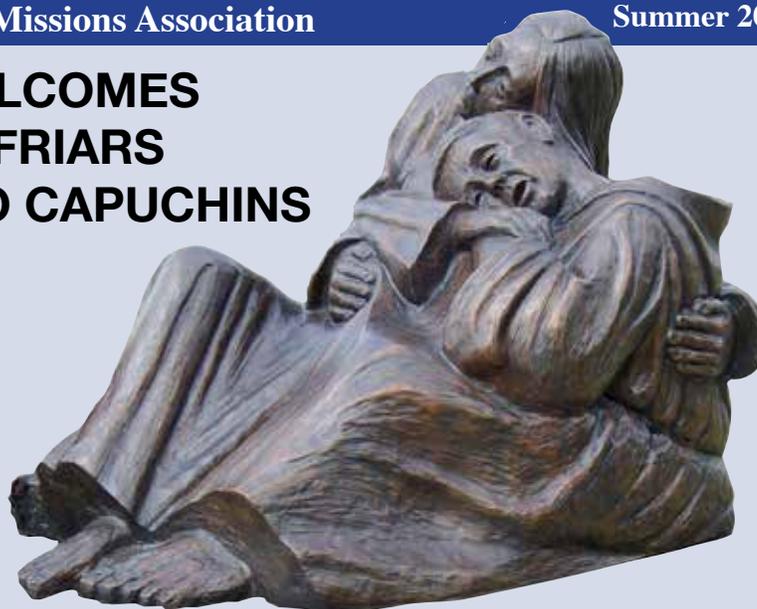


Newsletter of the Capuchin Overseas Missions Association

Summer 2015

SISTER DEATH WELCOMES THREE MISSION FRIARS AND MOTHERS OF TWO CAPUCHINS

Saint Francis of Assisi died on October 3, 1226. Death was not something that simply “happened” for Francis. Rather, he considered it a human reality that the saint embraced as his sister. In the song which he wrote praising God for creation, Francis added the words: **All praise be yours, My Lord, through Sister Death, From whose embrace no mortal can escape.... Happy those she finds doing your will. The second death can do them no harm. Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks.”**



This statue which is in both the Capuchin cemeteries in Mount Calvary WI and Yonkers NY has been created by Brother Michael Gaffney in remembrance of all our Capuchin brothers who have gone before. It is Sister Death in a loving embrace with a friar who is a symbol of each of us. One day we all will greet her. It makes our inevitable death, not a fearful one but for many a comfort. We pray we will have the gift of meeting God, who is love.

Missionary Friars who have died this past year:

Name	Joined Capuchins	Solemn Profession	Ordination	Death	Mission Years
Theodore Niehaus	8/31/1957	9/1/1961	9/16/1965	11/19/2014	1967-2014
Loran Miller	8/31/1955	9/1/1959	5/16/1964	02/05/ 2015	1965-1977
Kevin Heagerty	9/1/1953	9/1/1957	9/07/1961	02/14/2015	1986-2012

Mothers of Capuchin Bishops in Nicaragua who have died this past year:

Mother of Bishop Paul Ervin Schmitz of Bluefields, Nicaragua - Lovina Mary Schmitz Fond du Lac, WI

Mother of Auxiliary Bishop David Albin Zywiec of Bluefields, Nicaragua - Lillian Grace Zywiec Highland, IN

Fr. Ted Niehaus (Eugene)



Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel Literature prize in 1930 for his book, *Main Street*. It is a novel based on his home town Sauk Center MN. On May 17, 1939 a son Eugene was born in that city to Joseph and Lucine Weiner Niehaus. The Niehaus family, three sons and four daughters, lived on the family farm about four miles from the city of approximate 3,500 people. One of his sisters recalls that Eugene had curls as a youngster. Like Linus, he loved running around outside dragging his blanket. In the springtime, the young lad checked out the turtles and frogs and ducks. He often picked flowers in the meadow and brought home wild berries he harvested. As a member of a farm family, Eugene helped in the garden and harvest the crops, milked the cows and engaged in the general farm labor. As a 4-H teenager, he exhibited his pet farm animals at the local fairs. With his brothers, he enjoyed driving the Model T they “fixed up.”

When he celebrated his 40 years of mission work, he reflected that the foundation of his life was set by his Mom and Dad and his siblings. It wasn't through long

classes, but through their example and inspiration. He recalled that when he was 15, his father was leaving for a few days. Before departing, he told his son: “Make sure to get everybody together for a little prayer each day. You will find that things will go a whole lot better.” That advice he never forgot. “During my 25 years on the mission trail in Nicaragua, I established the custom of getting up at three o'clock in the morning to get a good block of time for prayer. Things have gone a lot better.”

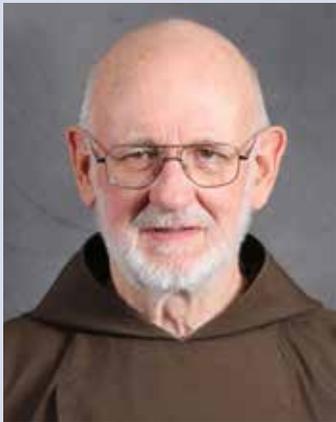
His grade school teachers were the Benedictine sisters. He then enrolled at St Lawrence Seminary in Mt Calvary, WI and joined the Capuchins after graduation. He gave tribute to the Capuchins for 14 years of study and training, all through high school, college, philosophy and theology. “They did it all. I never had a lay teacher. They did a dedicated job to get me ready. Two months after closing the last book, I was on my way to the missions in Nicaragua.” His first stop was a Spanish language school, from July to December, 1967. For the next ten years, he served at Rama, Muelle de los Bueyes and Siuna as assistant or

co-pastor. In June, 1977, he was appointed pastor of LaCruz, Rio Grande, which was to be his parish until his death. La Cruz is one of the most difficult and isolated spots in Nicaragua. This was to be his home for the next 37 years.

The LaCruz Parish embraced chapels in close to one hundred communities. Fr Ted spent Sundays in LaCruz. He then had a schedule of visiting the other communities, some only once or twice a year. Delegates of the Word held weekly services. Travel was mainly by boat, horse, motorcycle and even walking. There were very few roads in the district. Once while traveling by motorcycle, he had an attack of malaria. He got off the bike, and laid on the ground. As he looked up, he saw buzzards circling above him. Despite the pain, he got on his bike and continued his trip. Again in 2014, he became very sick on one of his trips. The doctors told him to return to the States. The medical staff in Wisconsin found that he had cancer of the brain. He underwent chemo and radiation treatments, but to no avail. He passed away several months later. He is buried in the Capuchin Cemetery, Mt Calvary WI.



Fr. Loran Miller (Donald Joseph)



The Funeral Mass for Father Loran Donald Miller at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Monona WI was very personal. Fr Loran had been told in 2001 that he had a form of cancer that was not curable. He underwent some treatments but knew he would never fully recover. In subsequent years, he not only continued working but also preparing for Sister Death. Craftsman that he was, he built his own coffin and arranged his entire funeral liturgy. Playing key roles were his two brothers, five sisters and close friends. Even the homily he had written was read by a fellow Capuchin, Fr. Ron Smith.

Writing about his twelve year mission experience, 1965-1977, he noted that some interest in missions had always been in his life. This was increased at St. Lawrence Seminary during his high school years. What was exciting for him was that missions would open up new worlds. He cited the usual experience of saving pennies for pagan babies and then sorting stamps for the missions. While in the clericate, there was talk of sending a team of missionaries to go to Soviet Russia and re-establish the Church. "Wow, what a dream!"

At the end of his Pastoral year of studies, the provincial told him and two other members of his class, Hugh Heinzen and Joe Wolf, "You are going to Nicaragua. Get ready. Take a six week's course in Spanish and off you go." His reaction. "Were we ready? Hell, no. We did not have the slightest idea of what we were getting into." A three year program called for a young missionary to live in three different settings, the Mines experience in Siuna, the city experience in Bluefields and then the Jungle experience. Instead of the Jungle experience, Loren was sent to work with the Miskito Indians at Waspam on the Rio Coco River. In his words "We worked our butts off" during the five years he was there. Then in 1972, he became co-directors of the Bluefields Pio X Seminary. He called the next five years "the best years of my missionary experience and the most difficult, too."

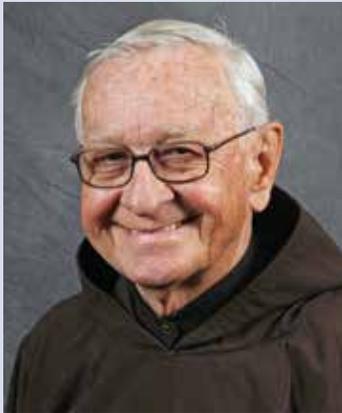
In 1977, for personal reasons, he accepted an invitation from Fr. Jim Keilman to return to the states and participate in a "Comunidad de Base" experience. However, he never forgot the Missions. Together

with some friends he organized a group that sent needed materials to the missions. Several times a year, large containers filled with clothing, food, religious and medical supplies, furniture and other things requested by the missionaries were shipped to Nicaragua.

Subsequent assignments took him to Downsville, Canada, Saginaw MI, Appleton WI, Marathon WI, Chicago IL and finally back to Madison as Local Minister in 2003. When his physical condition required additional care in winter, 2014, he entered Waunakee Manor, where his mother Grace had served as a volunteer. On his last days, he wrote a letter to his Capuchin Brothers, telling them "the journey has been long and difficult during these days of getting ready to go Home, to say good-bye... I am grateful. I want you to know that I am at peace. I am going home where I belong. This is not a letter soliciting pity; rather an invitation to rejoice with me." His welcoming of Sister Death was the most powerful homily that he preached. He is buried near her statue in the Capuchin Cemetery in Mt Calvary WI.



Fr. Kevin Heagerty (Philip Joseph)



An overseas mission assignment for Fr. Kevin Heagerty did not take place immediately after finishing preliminary priestly studies. His first assignment in 1966 was a three year role as assistant novice master. He then began Spanish studies, to prepare himself for ministry at St. Joseph Parish in Saginaw MI. The bishop would soon assign the Spanish-African American Parish to the Capuchins. He spent two years from 1966 to 1968 in its Spanish ministry program. The Racine, WI Spanish Center ministry was in a bit of turmoil when he became director in June 1968. His calm and reasonable manner eased the situation and led to the formation of the Cristo Rey Spanish parish. In 1975, he was transferred back to Saginaw as pastor, and then in 1981, he became a member of the St Francis WI pastoral team. During these years, he was also involved in the Cursillos de Cristiudad movement.

Events in the civil war in Nicaragua had a direct influence of Kevin's life. The Capuchin missionaries there feared that they might be expelled from that country. Negotiations began with the Archbishop of Panama to serve in that county. An agreement was

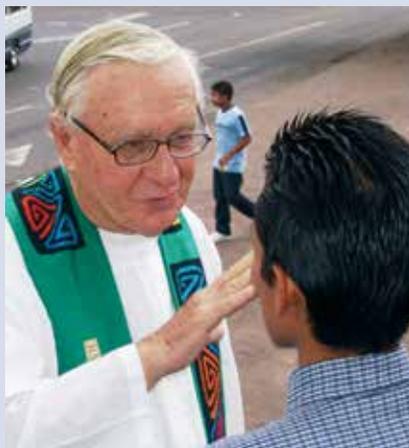
reached that the Capuchins would take over the Chapo parish region. The parish covered an area about half the size of the archdiocese. Since a diplomatic skilled Spanish speaking friar was needed, Fr. Kevin was asked to lead the three priest team. Fathers Michael Sullivan and Bernard Casper joined him on September 1st, 1986 in Chepo. Soon, they would be joined by Fr. Wally Kasuboski who is still ministering to its most remote parts.

The city of Chepo is about an hour west of Panama district. The still non-completed Pan American Highway runs through the city. All along the highway and in the neighboring forests and rivers migrants from eastern Panama have come seeking farmland, and many new communities have established. It is among these people that Kevin ministered. However, the parish also included two Indian tribes, the Embera and Kuna. As more people migrated, problems arose concerning the recognition of Indian land rights. Migration problems are not limited to the United States.

Often he undertook weeklong trips by jeep or horseback. Upon reaching the gathered community, the assembled warmly greeted him. Next, he imparted religious instruc-

tion especially to the parents of the children to be baptized and the couples to be married. These rites were performed during the Mass that followed. Then, a community supper. After that, he heard confessions and counseled those in need. Time for bed. At sunrise, he journeyed to the next community. At other times, the trips were made by boat. Depending on the tide, he could visit communities either up river or down river. The river emptied in the Pacific Ocean. The river trips were very dangerous, often on rough seas. He even ministered to some islands and Pacific Ocean shore villages.

Kevin was born in March 22, 1935, and was baptized Philip Joseph. He attended St. Boniface grade school in Milwaukee. Upon graduation, he entered St. Lawrence Seminary in 1949. After his senior year in 1953 he joined the Capuchins. He was a good community member and loved by those to whom he ministered. In October 2012, his physical condition forced him to retire. His last two and a half years were spent at St. Fidelis Friary, Appleton WI. He is buried in the Capuchin Cemetery at Mt. Calvary WI.





Fr. Ted in procession with the children



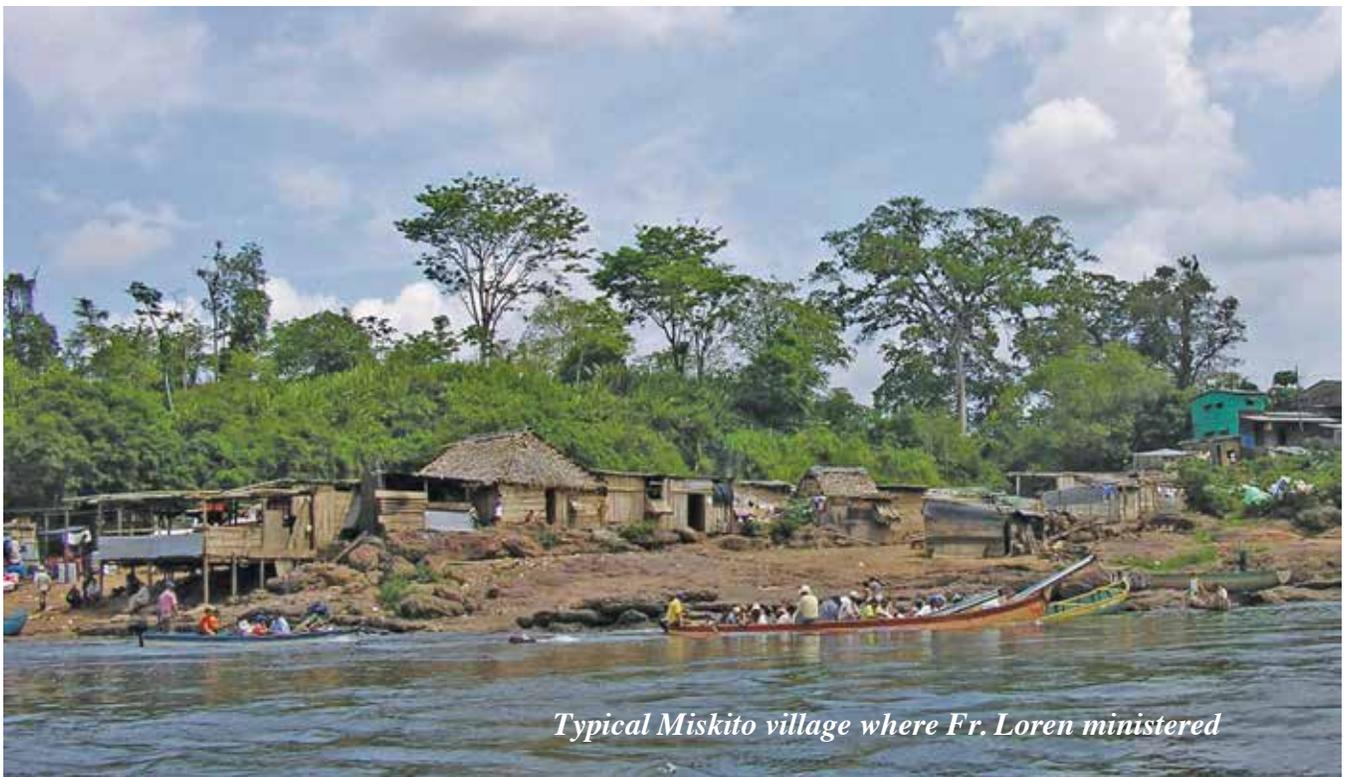
Village square



Fr. Ted and his family



Fr. Kevin greeting his parishioners in Chepo



Typical Miskito village where Fr. Loren ministered

Welcome Fr. Larry Webber

Thirty three years ago I left the US to go to Nicaragua for what was supposed to be a “help-out” of five to ten years, and ended up being twenty seven. As a young Friar I never dreamed of going to the “missions.” I went because there was a need. The Capuchins were making an effort to invite young men from Nicaragua to consider a Capuchin vocation, but we needed more Friars there to help form the Fraternities that would accept them and form them. The call was put out for volunteers, and there were no “takers.” A classmate of mine was already working there, and he called to ask me to consider. I was young, and had never been adventurous. This was my chance!



And adventurous it was – and full of much grace. To enter into another completely different cultural reality, learn and manage a new language – a whole new cultural world is something most people never have the chance to do in life. It opened my eyes when I never really knew how closed they were.

I was privileged to get to know and work alongside Friars whose names I knew but had only met occasionally. Two of them, Fr. Ted Niehaus and Fr. Kevin Heagerty are remembered in this edition of Mission Connection. I had known Fr. Loran Miller on his return to the province from Nicaragua, and worked with him often over the years as he became our link to “ship” things to us that helped us in our Mission. I am eternally grateful to God for the privilege of experiencing firsthand the incredibly generous and Spirit filled ministry of these men, and the many other Friars I worked with and whose work I was able to build on, and the young Central American Friars continue to build on today.

I am also grateful for the generous benefactors who have supported us in our work there in Nicaragua, and later my time in Panama as well.

When I felt it was time to return to the province I was given options of where I might serve. One of

those was Detroit, and specifically the Solanus Casey Center. I chose it for two reasons. One was that Fr. Solanus through his support and promotion of the Capuchin Mass Association assisted greatly in building up the financial support of the Missions that makes the work we are doing in Nicaragua, Panama and the rest of Central America possible. The other reason was because Detroit is the headquarters of the Capuchin Mission Office, and I hoped that I might be able to be a support to that office, and to those like Fr. Jim Zelinski, Fr. Campion Baer and Br. Larry La Cross who served in that office during my years in Central America, along with our caring and loving secretary of the office, Mary Ratkowski.

That time has come in a way I had not anticipated. In February of this year the Capuchin Ministers asked me to free up Br. Larry La Cross for other responsibilities, and move from the Solanus Casey Center to help direct the Capuchin Development Office which raises the funds for our various Capuchin Ministries, including the Capuchin Missions. With that came the responsibility of directing the Capuchin Mission Office, which I gladly embrace. It is easy to do because of the wonderful work that Br. Larry, Fr. Campion and Fr. Jim have already accomplished.

And so your thank you letters will continue to be signed by a “Larry” – it is just the last name that will change! What will not change is our commitment to remember all of those who support our Capuchin Missions in our daily prayers and Masses. We and the people we serve and serve with are eternally grateful for God’s Divine Providence shown to us through your generosity.



(L to R) Fr. Andre Weller, Fr. Michael Sullivan, Fr. Joseph Timmers, Fr. Kevin Heagerty and Fr. Larry Webber.

Dear Father Larry,

I have enclosed \$ _____ in the envelope provided in this newsletter to further the Capuchin Missions to serve the poor and needy. My name and address are on the reverse side of this mail-in response.

I prefer to charge my gift to my credit card: Visa Mastercard Am Express Discover

_____ *Card Number* _____ *Exp. date* _____ *Signature*

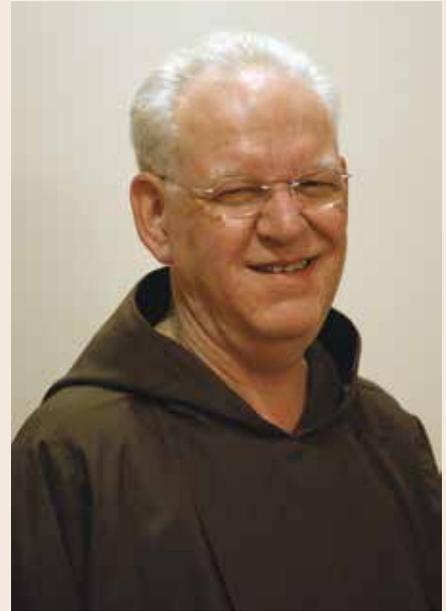
- Please send me a copy of the latest brochure of cards and certificates for the living and deceased.
- Please send me additional information about including the Capuchin Missions of the Capuchin Province of St. Joseph in my estate plans.

The prayers of the entire Capuchin Order are joined with yours as we pray for your special intentions.

People come and go, but the Mission of the Church continues until the Kingdom of God has been finally established at the Second Coming of Christ. Here at the Capuchin Mission Office we make every effort to work diligently to be of assistance to the Holy Spirit who helps animate that Mission of the Church through generous donors like yourselves.

As we have seen in this issue, great Missionaries come and go – and many have gone ahead to that Kingdom they worked so hard to help build here on earth. God reward them!

Others of us remain to continue the work. We are grateful to all those who have worked hard over the years here in the Capuchin Mission Office of Detroit. We are particularly grateful to Br. Larry La Cross who has so generously served the Mission Office, our Missionaries and you our supporters for so many years. May God reward him, and strengthen him in his new “mission” to tend to the needs of the Friars, especially our older Friars, here in Detroit.



Br. Larry LaCross

Those of us who remain in the Mission Office promise to rededicate ourselves to work with the same dedicated and sacrificing way that Br. Larry has served you. All of us are grateful to you, and promise you our prayers and assistance in any way we can.

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Church Parking Lot



Fr. Ted's sister, "Chuckie" visited him often with a group of volunteers. She shot the above picture at San Antonio's Chapel. It was displayed at his wake to show how people traveled to his pastoral visits.

