

**June 29, 2008 – Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul;
Founders' Day for Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers
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| Acts 12: 1-11 | Peter is freed from prison by an angel. |
| Psalms 34: 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9 | “In my misfortune I called, the Lord heard and saved me from all distress.” |
| Second Timothy 4: 6-8, 17-18 | The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. |
| Matthew 16: 13-19 | Jesus names Peter as the rock upon which he will build his church. |

Today the Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers celebrate Founders Day. In a great act of faith, Fr. James Anthony Walsh (later Bishop) and Fr. Edward Price, in conjunction with the Catholic bishops of the United States, founded the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America (now commonly known as the Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers) while the United States was still considered a mission territory under the control of the Vatican's office on the Propagation for the Faith. On this day, when the church celebrates St. Peter and St. Paul – both jailed for their faith commitment, Maryknollers remember Bishop Walsh who was himself imprisoned in isolation in China for 12 years.

When Fr. Walsh was a seminary rector, he would instruct young seminarians to take a folding chair, find a cement wall, and sit in front of it for three days. In doing so the seminarian was to learn patience and to find out who he was.

My mission experience with Maryknoll has allowed me to help people find out more about themselves and the world around them. Some of this has been done through people learning how to use computers – a 20th century invention that has indeed made our world much smaller.

Some years ago I served as professor at a state university in Jianmenn, China. In the same town was a community of sisters, founded by the Maryknoll sisters. Mother Fong, a congenial octogenarian, was in charge of the novices. She had been imprisoned for almost 30 years under the Communist regime. Steeled by her suffering, she had a marvelous sense of serenity about her.

Some sisters from Hong Kong had sent the convent in Jianmenn a computer. At the time, I was teaching an English class for university computer majors. I suggested to Mother Fong that a few of the novices could come onto the university campus to audit computer classes. Mother Fong adamantly refused my suggestion – there were boys at the university!

After licking my wounds, I came up with another suggestion. What if some of my computer science majors came over to the convent to tutor the novices? Mother Fong accepted immediately. For the next period of months, I would teach for an hour, then some of my male students from the university, mostly from the city, all cell members of the Communist Party, would show up to tutor the novices, mainly farm girls from the provinces. While the young Chinese from different ideologies and different levels of society would learn computer, I would go over to the chapel that Bishop Walsh had built.

The young men from the university treated the novices with great respect. But one day I turned on the computer to get ready for the computer tutoring session and realized life was changing for us all; it was indeed a shrinking world! What greeted me was something about

which I didn't have the heart to tell Mother Fong: Chinese rock and roll well organized and programmed!

In 1998, I was on the other side of the world, assigned to San Pedro Sula, a city on the east side of Honduras. I was to help in post-Hurricane Mitch rebuilding and to be a positive presence amidst the high incidence of gangs and overall street violence. Wages in the factories were abysmally low and the young lived with little hope of a better future.

Early on in my assignment a Catholic Worker group from Connecticut brought us some used computers. As I watched the youth from the U.S. work with the Honduran pre-teens, none of whom had ever touched a computer, I was enthralled. It was clear to me that in a couple of hours the little kids were far ahead of what little I knew about computers. In what seemed like no time at all, one of those children acquired enough skills to manage all the accounting and financing for our housing program that served former gang members. This same child is now studying at the university, developing his skills. Rather than become a young man on the streets with the guns, he is the young man the next generation looks up to and tries to imitate.

Now in Guatemala, the times are different, yet the problems I had encountered in Honduras are much the same. The cardinal archbishop of Guatemala City and the other Guatemalan bishops have just returned from their *ad limina* visit with Pope Benedict XVI. In their joint statement, the Pope and bishops listed their main preoccupations as out-of-control street violence, dire poverty, and the maltreatment of the indigenous population.

Today, as we celebrate the courage and vision of St. Peter and St. Paul as is our Catholic tradition, we celebrate the founders of the Maryknoll Society, Frs. James Anthony Walsh and Edward Price – people with St. Peter and St. Paul's courage and vision – who went out from the United States to minister to the rest of the world.

For more information:

In this election year in the U.S., themes of systemic violence, distributive justice, and immigration are all present in presidential and congressional campaigns. The agenda is daunting. Voting intelligently requires the same kind of maturity, patience, and reflection that Fr. Walsh inspired of young seminarians. Let us have the same depth of reflection and the courage as the Apostles Peter and Paul and the founders of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers as we ready ourselves to cast our vote in November for those who will lead us for the next four years. Read more about the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions in "Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world," a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates' policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the scourge of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:
www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm

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