



MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF SAINT PAUL
477 Royal Parade, Parkville Vic 3052

May 2022

LINK

***between relatives, friends, benefactors
and Paulist Missionaries***



*Episcopal coat of arms of
Bishop Giovanni Cefai mssp*

The territorial prelature of Santiago Apóstol de Huancané, Perú.

On April 3 2019, Pope Francis created the new territorial prelature of St James the Apostle, Huancané, Perú, and appointed me as its first bishop. This new prelature was carved out of two other prelatures and covers an area of twenty thousand square kilometres, with a population of two hundred thousand Catholics.

Part of the prelature is on the mountains with one parish sitting at an altitude of 4,700 metres above sea level. The highest point of this parish is 5,000 meters above sea level. Another part of the prelature is deep in the jungle.

During the past two COVID years, I visited every corner of the prelature. Travelling from one place to another I often had to drive for sixteen hours. I visited parishes that had not been visited by a bishop for twenty-five years. When the Missionary Society of St Paul was asked to accept the responsibility of this new prelature, the Apostolic Nuncio informed us that we were being entrusted with the most challenging prelature in all of Perú; a prelature where no one wanted to go.

Geographically we have to travel along some of the most dangerous roads in the world; you would not want to repeat the same mistake twice. Many people have died in traffic accidents on our roads, or falling hundreds of meters to their death. During Holy Week of 2021 one of our priests, 55 years old, fell down the abyss together with his driver. We found their corpses three days later, hundreds of miles away.



Culturally our prelature is made up of a variety of cultures. Three different languages, Spanish, Aymara and Quechua, are spoken on the territory covered by the prelature. The older population, in their 70s and 80s, do not understand Spanish. We also live among a people with different cultural and religious traditions, with a mixture of popular religiosity and witchcraft.



Economically, the vast majority of the people hard workers, dedicated to farming and agriculture. Due to the high altitudes, the only crop that can be harvested here is potatoes and quinoa. Typically farmers have little cash and they often barter their goods to survive. Most families lack the basic needs, like adequate housing, toilets and showers. Houses are built of pressed mud, and resemble stables rather than houses.

Medical Assistance. Due to the lack of good medical attention, death is extremely common. People often say that they have run out of tears. We are asked to celebrate a funeral almost every day of the week; death can strike anyone, anytime.

Education. Most people are consider themselves lucky if they succeed in finishing their secondary school and can read and write. Some of them would not be able to afford to pay for any further studies at university, making it extremely difficult to break the cycle. Most young adults choose to follow in the footsteps of their parents and dedicate themselves to farming and agriculture.

Pastorally, we have encountered people who barely know how to make the sign of the cross; they often have to look at what others are doing so they do the same. Some do not know any catechism, the Mass or anything about the sacraments.



Our pastoral plan is to tackle this challenge gradually. As our model we keep Jesus with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. Jesus cares, listens deeply, corrects and finally gives the gift of himself. In our prelature fifteen priests minister in twenty-one parishes.

Like in other parts of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit us hard. Two priests, one of whom was only 36 years old, died of COVID. Still, all this gave us the opportunity to immerse ourselves more deeply into this reality, without being judgmental and without being haunted by activism. Only now we are starting to reopen our churches and chapels, and we are trying to attend

to our people to the best of our ability. In our parishes we have started to organise catechism for small groups of children, youth and elderly. We imitate the first Christian churches and build communities by sharing the Word of God and Breaking the Bread.

The ongoing formation of priests and laity is extremely important; I strongly believe it provides a solid foundation for our future. Following the example of Our Lord, we not only support our people by nourishing them with the Word of God, but also by providing them with their daily needs.

We plan to supply clinics, schools, kitchens, clothes, houses and other necessities. Following in the charism of our Founder, the Servant of God Joseph De Piro, we help the People of God in whatever they need and in whatever way we can.

Towards a brighter future.

We are presently constructing a building to house our chancery offices. This will be a humble building. On the first floor we are building a large hall where children can come together to do their homework assisted by some teachers. This hall will be equipped with computers and multimedia resources to give these children the opportunity to study and to develop academically.

On another level we will have the offices for our administration, some rooms, and a small chapel. This will provide space where volunteers and visitors can sleep the night when necessary.



Mobile Clinic. Public health is a big consideration. We have equipped a mobile clinic that to travel to remote areas and villages to provide medical assistance in places where there are no clinics. Here we are providing the services of a doctor and a nurse and give people the medicines they require free of charge.



Our dream: A university. We have a very ambitious project on our bucket list, one I strongly believe is urgently needed. Our children and young people will be able to succeed academically if we could provide them with the opportunity. Since they have to pay their university fees, and they cannot afford this, tertiary education is considered a luxury. Those who are able to attend a university, have to work in the morning or at night to cover their costs.

It would be a great blessing if one day our prelature could provide free university education of those who cannot afford it. We will ensure that academic studies will deliver the values and dignity of the human person that our societies desperately need today.

Education is the answer to many of our struggles in Perú. Through education we would be able to form better leaders and families, able to face the challenging times we are living in. I believe that in this way we would be offering these young adults a fishing rod to learn to fish for themselves, and not simply providing them with fish for a few days.

+ Giovanni Cefai mssp
Bishop of the Prelature
of St James the Apostle, Huanacane, Perú.



Dear friends,

I have the privilege of writing about my time in Australia between August 2019 and February 2022.

When I arrived in Australia I felt very nervous. I had just completed two years of studying philosophy in The Philippines and was wondering how I could bring the message of God to others. I endeavoured to adapt myself to the new environment; I tried to cope with the cold Melbourne weather, eat Vegemite, enjoy a VB beer and experience all the other things Aussies enjoyed. As I look back I can say that, after two and a half years I have achieved everything I set out to do; I even obtained my driving license and contracted COVID-19.

During my time in Australia I was touched by many different experiences. I had an opportunity to meet many people in our parishes of St James the Apostle, Hoppers Crossing North, and St Bernadette, North Sunshine.

Many people shared with me about their journey to Australia, often in a small boat. I admired them as they shared their story, tears running down their cheeks. They had lived tough lives, but were able to overcome their difficulties. Various refugees shared how, traveling by boat, they endured hunger and thirst. They all shared



the same prayer: *“Lord, please, help us survive; without you we will surely die.”* I listened to them with all my heart. I could do nothing for them except to be present, listen and empathise with their stories. I could not help but feel that their stories were similar to that of the people of Israel in Egypt, with God looking after them.

I was also present as one parishioner lay dying in hospital. This was not an easy moment for me as I sat with the grieving parents, relatives and friends. The encounter with human suffering reminded me that life is short and beautiful, and that we need to live mindful of God’s presence, thanking God each day.

I met with a number of successful Vietnamese business people in Melbourne. I asked one of them: *“How did you become successful in life?”* He replied: *“The successful person needs to look after two elements in life, he needs to keep his family healthy and to take care of his work; both need to be kept in a balance.”* This thought touched me.

On my way home I reflected on what would make me successful in my faith journey, especially as a minister of the Kingdom of God. I concluded that the successful pastor needs to pray and to be close to the People of God. I felt strongly that this needed to be the standard for my ministry in the future. I too needed to keep these two elements in balance, without one of them it would be hard for me to find joy in ministry. The more I pray, the closer I get to God and to his people. When I bring the people into the presence of God, I will recognise that God is real and that he lives in us.



Unfortunately, due to the various COVID lockdowns, I had to spend a lot of time inside; Melbourne has the world record of the longest period of COVID lockdowns. During these lockdowns I took the opportunity to continue to learn English and to start playing the guitar. I was happy to discover this new talent.

Due to the continuous lockdowns, I limited in the number of people I could meet, and in the ministry I could do. I believe that God gave me enough time to meet with people to help me in my faith journey and these experiences strengthened my faith in God’s love. I can now say that my vocation is stronger and clearer.

I thank my Paulist Missionary family in the Australian region, who accepted me and gave me the opportunity to join them in ministry in their beautiful country. Thank you to everyone who supported me through prayer, teaching me English and the various other opportunities. I can never pay you back for what you did with me. I can only assure you that I will offer you all my love and care as I remember you all in my daily prayer. I ask the Lord daily to continue to be with you and to shower you with his blessings. I also kindly ask you to continue to pray for me as I continue on my faith journey.

With love and prayer,

Br Can Tran mssp

Third year theology student

