



reflections on life's similarities and differences between Minnesota and Venezuela

Did you know?

by the Venezuelan Mission of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis



A Tale of Two Cities...and Two Rivers

Although separated by 3,100 miles, two time zones, and 37 degree latitude (Minneapolis is at the 45th parallel and Ciudad Guayana is 8 degrees north of the equator), Ciudad Guayana and the Twin Cities of Minnesota have a few interesting things in common geographically.

The Twin Cities began with Fort Snelling at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers in 1819, one of a chain of US forts built to protect our northwestern territories, keep British-Canadian fur traders out, and maintain good relations with the Dakota tribes with whom Col. Zebulon Pike had previously made a treaty for land rights. Among those settling near the fort was a French Canadian fur trader turned bootlegger named Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant. When the fort banned the distilling and sale of whiskey and a new treaty with the Dakota opened up a broader area for settlement in 1838, Pig's Eye moved 5 miles downriver beyond the fort's jurisdiction and established the village which became St. Paul. As more and more settlers came, St. Paul, the northernmost port on the Mississippi River, became the gateway to the interior.



To provide lumber and flour for Fort Snelling, soldiers built a sawmill and grist mill upriver on the Mississippi at St. Anthony Falls in 1822. When the area around the falls opened for settlement in 1838, settlers, given the economic potential from the falls, rushed to stake claims. The village of St. Anthony grew on the east bank, eventually merging with west-bank Minneapolis in 1872. The flour milling capital of the world in the late 1800's and early 1900's, Minneapolis has been a major industrial center ever since.

Ciudad Guayana began with the Franciscan mission of Santo Tomé de Guayana along the Orinoco River 60 miles upriver from the Atlantic Ocean in 1593. In 1676 the Spanish began construction of a fort at the site to control access up the river and protect the settlement, but with limited success against marauding English, French and Dutch pirates, the Franciscans moved the mission 30 miles further upriver to a more secure location above a series of falls on the Caroni River four miles from its confluence with the Orinoco in 1724 with the village of San Felix as their access port on the Orinoco.



In the late 1950's, fearing that the oil reserves on which their economy was dependent would run dry by the 1990's, the government of Venezuela, together with US universities and industries, developed a plan to diversify its economy creating a modern industrial city from scratch at the confluence of the two rivers. The Orinoco would provide access for ocean-going ships. The region was rich in natural resources for producing steel and aluminum. The Caroni had potential for hydroelectric power plants. A modern highway

and a bridge across the Orinoco at Ciudad Bolivar would connect the isolated region to the rest of the country. As the plan became a reality in the 1960's, the modern city of Puerto Ordaz was created across the Caroni River from San Felix. From a population of 10,000 residents, the region has since grown to well over a million.

With such rapid growth...at one point the fastest growing city in the world...the need for priests to serve the primarily Catholic population was great. Together known as Ciudad Guayana, these twin cities of Venezuela at the confluence of two rivers became home to our archdiocesan mission in 1970. As we celebrate our mission's 50th anniversary, we offer these articles to help you understand and feel more connected with the people of our archdiocesan mission at Jesucristo Resucitado Parish in Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela.

Points to ponder

What areas of similarities and differences between Minnesota and Venezuela would be of interest to you? Send me your ideas at the email address indicated below, and thanks for reading these articles.

The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has staffed and supported parishes in the diocese of Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela since 1970. These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50th anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org or 651-368-7324.