

Mission Appeal 2020

Each year St. Raphael's and other parishes in this Archdiocese are blessed to receive a visit from a missionary. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect with our brothers and sisters in the wider Church and to share with them God's many blessings. This year's mission appeal is for the Diocese of Kingston in the West Indies. Because of Covid-19, no one could come here from that Diocese to speak to us, so I am making the appeal myself. Below is a letter I received from their Bishop.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a protestant Country having been a Colony of England with population of 109,000 of which the Catholic population is only 6.7%. Not only is the population small, but the catholic parishes/churches are scattered throughout the mountainous terrain in small pockets which makes communing difficult and the need to have a good number of priests.

At present there are eleven (11) priests in the Diocese of which only five (5) are indigenous. The others are from Nigeria, Philippines, America and India. Two are still incapacitated having suffered strokes some two years ago and in a few months the 2 Nigerians and the Filipino contracts end and they would return to their native Countries. The Indian priest goes back to the USA having only come out for a few months.

The diocese not only depends on Missionary priests but also on financial aid from abroad for the running of the Diocese. Our main sources of income are from grants, Pontifical Mission Society, mission preaching, Parish monthly collection and two large annual diocesan fairs. This year with the COVID-19 pandemic, the diocese could not have the fairs, the collection is down and the diocese could not participate in Missionary preaching.

The Diocese of Duluth with whom we are twinned, over the years have constantly and systematically contributed to the upkeep of the diocese by an annual grant that ranged between US\$21,000 – US\$30,000. Effective 2020 this financial assistance has been discontinued and has created a huge dent in our finances. Added to that, with the COVID-19, many people have lost jobs due to the closure of some businesses especially in the tourist industry on which the Country depends on heavily; our Churches were closed thus preventing the Parishes from making their monthly contribution which has always been very small but essential.

The Diocese has always had to pay many of the Priests since most of the Parishes are too poor to pay their priest the monthly stipend of EC\$500.00 – US\$186.00. The paying of priests and the chancery staff have now become a monthly struggle for the Diocese.

The diocese sees the ministry to the poor as an important one and has over the years been assisting the daily soup kitchen and has given a few Secondary School scholarships to poor and needy children from the rural areas. However, due to our financial constraints I have had to make the painful decision of withdrawing the scholarships. This is also very painful and distressing for the parents of the Children who have no proper income. I have had to make some diocesan jobs redundant and the Chancery and domestic staff have all been put on half month work and half pay.

Sincerely,

+ Gerard County,
Bishop of Kingstown.