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Holy Name Province

100 Years

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2001 marks the 100th anniversary of the Holy Name Province. It is a strange twist of history that most of the Franciscan Provinces in the United States and representatives of the Province in Brazil are due to the May Laws In Germany.

The architects Bismark and his minister of religion, Falk, used the May Laws to expel all religious in Germany with the exception of those who worked in hospitals.

The Franciscans came in large numbers to the Eastern United States. The Italian Province had come in the mid 19th Century to serve the Italian immigrants and founded St. Bonaventure College. In 1901 the German and Italian friars founded Holy Name Province. From these small seeds, Holy Name Province has its beginnings.

The missionary impetus was so strong that 'missioning' in the United States was not enough. Go, therefore, to all nations! inspired the Province to expand its missionary activities. The first members of the province went to China to a region called Shasi. Through the 1930's and 40's the mission grew. The friars who went were determined to implant the gospel and establish a local Church. The mission grew almost to the size of a diocese.

Parishes, schools, infirmaries were established and from these friars, catechists, and others went out to proclaim the gospel in word and deed. Vocations were fostered, there are still priests and religious alive today who came from that mission. The mission suffered during World War 11 and the aftermath when the Communists took power in China. The friars were expelled and they had to trust that God would watch over the vineyard which they helped to plant.

Even though the mission seemed doomed, many good things came of the Shasi mission. Some of the friars began to serve the Church in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In Hong Kong the spirit the Chinese Mission was kept alive and missions all over Asia were given assistance, in addition to the friars' work for the local Church. In Taiwan they went about ministering to those who had left mainland China and their work also supported the ministry of the local Church.

From these two sites a Chinese Province was established which has enabled the work of the original missionaries to continue. Another offspring of the Chinese mission is the Japanese mission of Holy Name Province.

Many of the friars who had to leave China never came back to the U.S., but stopped in Japan and began to establish a mission there.

Holy Name Province was assigned the Gumma Prefecture in Japan. There they built a central

house, which served as a renewal house and formation community and now serves as a retreat center. Parishes and schools were built and soon the mission was attracting vocations and growing in size and numbers. Some served in the seminary as professors, others helped at the language school and from there sprang a ministry to the foreign community. A few worked as hospital chaplains, teachers and retreat masters.

The Franciscan Order created a Japanese Province. The Holy Name Province Mission, its projects and, its members became part of the new foundation. This mission also became 'missionary' when members of the mission joined the African Project.

In 1943 there was a great departure ceremony. Thirty-four friars were sent forth to the two newest missions: Mexico and Brazil. This begins another era in the mission history of the province, the south of the Border era, an era, which still provides many challenges to the missionary activity of the Province.

In Mexico, the Church was in difficult times. After having suffered a severe persecution, the Mexican Church needed help to survive. Friars answered the call readily. Working under very difficult conditions, they were able to help the local Church and the Franciscans begin the long process of recovery. So many people were without any access to the Church or the sacraments, and the friars did a remarkable job of seeing people through these difficult times and bearing hope to people who were hopeless.

The friars left Mexico, but their work did not end. Today there are new provinces of Franciscans in the areas where the friars worked, who benefited from the gifts the friars shared. Many of the friars who have been in Mexico still were hearing the call of the Lord to Mission. Missionaries who had been in Mexico became some of the first friars from the Province to go to Bolivia and Puerto Rico.

Brazil's history as a mission is truly a sign of the success of mission work. The State of Goias was assigned to the Province. The friars arrived and immediately went about setting up apostolates that would serve the proclamation of the gospel. Looking at the work of the mission, one finds schools, a seminary, parishes, renewal and retreat centers, infirmaries and even a radio station. The mission settled into the life of Brazil, and became even more a part of the life of Brazil when it participated in the founding of the new capital Brasilia. The friars' church served as the pro-cathedral while the city was being built and the cathedral prepared.

The mission grew so quickly and became so much a part of the life of Brazil that the mission eventually became a vice-province. Today with many Brazilian vocations, it has proven its ability to survive and thrive on its own. Five of the friars of the Province have become bishops in Brazil and instrumental in the establishment and growth of dioceses. Friars from this mission joined the African project.

In 1954, the friars accepted an invitation to serve as missionaries in Bolivia. In places so high up that you looked down at the clouds passing by, the friars went about establishing the mission. The most unique part of the Bolivian mission was the Oscar Project. Education, work and prayer formed young vocations as the studied for the Order and also helped their own people by road

building so that people could bring their produce and crafts to market and help support themselves. The friars found many creative ways to proclaim the good news and bring people the gift of faith.

At one point, the Bolivian Province, established long ago by missionaries from Spain, began to experience a severe fall in numbers and was unable to sustain itself. It was welcomed into the Holy Name Province as a Custody. This enabled it to recoup and redevelop. The custody was reformed as a missionary Province and the staff and sites of the Holy Name mission were incorporated into the new Province, which now continues to support and sustain the local Church. The mission also helped to establish the Diocese of Coroico and one of the friars served as the first bishop.

Another development from the Bolivian Mission is the mission in Peru. Originally it began with an invitation to serve in a parish in Lima. There the friars from Bolivia could come to rest, and there too the friars encouraged the members of the parish to take an active part in caring for the less fortunate of the many barrios. Today there have been many vocations and remarkable projects, which feed,

shelter, heal and educate people who have been forgotten and abandoned. This mission continues to grow as it confronts the needs of more people because of poverty and civil unrest.

Friars of the Province from the United States, as well as from former missions responded to the African Project.

The call to the missions also brought friars from the Province to the Caribbean accepting missions in Puerto Rico and Jamaica, which grew into large communities. These were returned to the local Church and continue to thrive as part of the Archdioceses of Kingston and San Juan.

Friars from the Province also served the missions in the Holy Land, helping to staff parishes and schools and ministering to the pilgrims who came to visit the holy places, as well as assisting the work in the Holy Land through the Commissariat in Washington D.C.

There were also home missions in the South where friars of the Province served in parishes that were created because of segregation, beginning in Virginia and stretching all the way to Florida. Many of these parishes have since been returned to the various dioceses.

In more recent years, friars have also worked with Hispanic and Haitian migrant workers especially in Florida and New Jersey.

Mission has been at the very heart of all the works of the Holy Name Province, and as the province begins a second century, there are signs of growth and new life.