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ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

July 30, 2016

Dear Friends in Christ,

This year we joyfully celebrate sixty years of missionary service in our Latin America Apostolate. In 1956, my predecessor, Archbishop Joseph Ritter, sent the first three St. Louis priests to serve as missionaries in La Paz, Bolivia. This was a monumental occasion, as it was the first foreign missionary work of diocesan priests in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. The missionary work of these three priests originally began because of the severe shortage of native priests in Bolivia. While we have had a presence in five different parishes over the last sixty years – four in Bolivia and one in Chile – the goal has always been to turn over these parishes to the local clergy.

In the history of our Latin America Apostolate, over 45 priests from St. Louis have devoted some or most of their priestly ministry to our missions in Bolivia. Two of our native sons became Bishops in Bolivia. Bishop Andrew Schierhoff (a cofounder of our Latin America Apostolate in 1956) and Bishop Morgan Casey (part of our Apostolate since 1965) have both served as Auxiliary Bishops of La Paz, and later as Apostolic Vicars in the Vicariate of the Pando.

Today, three St. Louis priests continue the tradition of serving in Bolivia. The primary work of Fr. Pat Hayden, Fr. Jim Michler and Fr. Tim Noelker involves serving as missionaries at Maria Reina Parish – a parish of 70,000 located on the steep hillsides of La Paz, the highest capital city in the world. They proclaim the Gospel message, celebrate the sacraments, form Bolivian seminarians, and help form lay leaders to become missionary disciples. Maria Reina Parish also has a health clinic to assist the poor with medical care, dental care, food and medicine.

In addition to their work at Maria Reina Parish, our priests also serve at the rural Santiago Parish, located in the altiplano, or high plains. There, they celebrate the sacraments among the native Aymara people. There are more than 30 villages within the parish boundaries. Because there is no resident priest, these villages only have Mass celebrated three times per year when our priests are able to visit them.

None of this missionary work would be possible without the prayers and sacrifices of the people of the Archdiocese of St. Louis. The faithful have contributed beyond measure over the last sixty years. Please help to continue this tradition. The annual collection for our Latin America Apostolate will take place in all parishes during the weekend of August 6-7.

Asking God's blessings on you and your families, and grateful for your support of our Latin America Apostolate, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson
Archbishop of St. Louis