

# Baltimore seminarians spend break serving in Guatemala

Three seminarians for the Archdiocese of Baltimore spent their winter break in Guatemala, working alongside and getting to know the native people.

The men were among 10 students from St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore who visited San Lucas Mission Feb. 17-24 on the first of what the seminary plans as an annual mission trip. John Bilenki, Matthew Himes and Deacon John Streifel and represented the archdiocese.

For Himes, a third-year theology seminarian from St. Isaac Jogues in Carney, the greatest gain from the trip was interacting with the locals.

"It was very easy to connect with the people," Himes said. "The Guatemalan people were good in just being themselves."

Himes said that not all of the seminarians were able to communicate in Spanish, but every day as they rode in an open flatbed truck to work sites, they would exchange cheerful waves with the residents of San Lucas. The simple act of acknowledging the other, he said, seemed to bring a great deal of joy.

The seminarians ranged from pre-theology, such as Bilenki, to those in their temporary diaconate year, such as Deacon Streifel. They spent mornings building homes side-by-side with Guatemalan tradespeople. In the afternoons, they took hikes, sorted coffee beans and learned about the people.

On their first morning in the Central American country, the seminarians attended Mass in nearby Santiago Atitlán, in the room where Blessed Father Stanley Rother, a graduate of Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, was martyred.

One of Blessed Rother's peers, Father Greg Schaffer, moved from Minnesota to San Lucas in 1963 to serve as a parish priest. He developed the San Lucas Mission to start programs in education, land ownership, healthcare, construction and coffee production to help the Maya population fight discrimination.

Since the founding of a school at the mission more than 50 years ago, the literacy rate has jumped from 2.5 percent to nearly 85 percent.

Himes said that going on mission trips “really helps shape our hearts to be better priests, better shepherds.”

Support for the pilgrimage included St. Ignatius, Hickory; St. Mark, Fallston; various Knights of Columbus councils; the Serra Club of Baltimore, which promotes vocations; parishes from outside the archdiocese; and individual donors.

Also on the pilgrimage were: from the Diocese of Erie, Pa., Brandon Feikles and Kevin Holland; the Diocese of Wilmington, Del., Brennan Ferris; the Diocese of Richmond, Va., Patrick Walsh; the Diocese of Syracuse, N.Y., Nate Brooks and Brendan Foley; the Diocese of Worcester, Mass., Jose Carvajal; and Father Scott Detisch, professor of systematic theology.

For more information about supporting the seminary and future mission, telephone 410-864-4264.

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