



## Emiro and Mercedes

“Bong...bong...bong...” It is 6am and the church bells are calling people to our 6:30am weekday Mass. We don't have an electronic tolling mechanism to control the bells. In this country where electrical outages are common, we have something more reliable...Emiro Garcia. Of all the volunteers who make up our parish community here at Jesucristo Resucitado, none have a longer history or so much involvement in the life of our parish than Emiro and his wife Mercedes.

Their story begins in Caripito, a city around 175 miles to the north of us in the state of Monagas, a city whose development was, in many ways, a precursor for the evolution of our city of San Felix from a small river town to an industrial city. After oil reserves were discovered on the plains of Monagas in 1924, Standard Oil had to figure out the best way to process the petroleum and ship it to the US and Europe. A port would be needed. Standard Oil chose the village of Caripito, 53 miles up the San Juan River from the Caribbean Gulf of Paria, as that site. Prior to Standard Oil's arrival in 1930, less than 500 people lived in the isolated village accessible only by river and rugged trails wending through the thick jungle of the surrounding mountains. By 1939, Caripito boasted a large refinery, a dock for ocean-going vessels, even a country club with a golf course, and a population estimated at 5,000. By the mid-1940s when Emiro's and Mercedes' parents relocated there, the population had risen to nearly 15,000.. As God's will would have it, the two families ended up living back to back as neighbors and good friends.



Emiro was born on February 5, 1949, the sixth of eight boys. Some years later his mom finally got a girl, bringing the baby daughter of her sister home with her from Caracas. Raising the children of relatives who are unable to care for them is fairly common in this culture. Emiro and Mercedes themselves would later raise a niece and a nephew in addition to their own four boys. Mercedes was the eldest of four girls, no boys. One day her mom, still pregnant with Mercedes, was chitchatting with Emiro's mother who pointed at little 1-year-old Emiro and said, “Someday these two are going to be married.” Although Emiro's mom was only 13 years old when she married his dad, she would have to wait another 23 years before her prophecy became reality.

Output from the southern Monagas oil fields and the resultant output from the refinery at Caripito began to decrease in the mid-1960s. New more extensive reserves farther north closer to the Caribbean coast were being developed. In 1976 the refinery at Carapito was closed. By then many families, including those of both Emiro and Mercedes, had relocated to the new boom town of Ciudad Guayana. Emiro arrived at his new home with a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education, the highest most Venezuelan kids received in those days, but with the need for skilled workers at the aluminum and steel mills and in the construction industry, a few technical vocational schools had opened. Emiro enrolled in a program to be an electrician and received his license in two years. Years later, during his 16 years as an employee at the Alcasa aluminum plant, he returned to school once again, earning his certification as a mid-level metallurgical technician.

Emiro's attention wasn't only on work, of course. Mercedes had always been the girl of his heart, and on December 22, 1973, the two were married at San Buenaventura in the nearby barrio of El Roble. They rented a small house here in Guaiparo but continued to attend Mass at San Buenaventura since the parish of Jesucristo Resucitado had not yet been established. In 1981 Fr. Leo Huber, as part of our Venezuelan mission, rented a room in Guaiparo and began visiting families, celebrating Mass in homes, and gathering people for prayer meetings. Before long the fledgling Catholic community Fr. Huber was developing was given permission to use the facilities at a local elementary school for Mass on Sunday and prayer meetings during the week. With a regular space to gather, more and more people, Emiro and Mercedes included, began attending the Mass and prayer meetings. As numbers increased, so did the dream of having their own place.

*Emiro and Mercedes' story will be continued in next week's article.*

### Points to ponder

How have the faith and participation in the life of parish and community been passed down in your family?

*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 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at [ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org](mailto:ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org) or 651-368-7324.*