



## Emiro y Mercedes (cont.)

There was an old structure on a strip of land adjacent to the school. Initially a community center, it now sat abandoned, the grounds covered with weeds and littered with garbage. With the help of Dc. José Malavé, who played a major role in the life of the fledgling community, they received provisional approval to use the building for Mass. Families took turns preparing and selling food after Masses to raise money to convert the building into a church. Not all neighbors were in favor, however. It was technically public property, and some wanted the land for a park and soccer-basketball court instead. Eventually, they reached a compromise to divide the property in two parts, one for the church and the other for sports, but how much land would be allocated to each? Folks came up with a creative solution. Two teams faced off at the center of the property on either side of a large iron cross. Each team was to try to move the cross forward against their opponent. Wherever the cross ended up would be the dividing line. The church team had the better of the match, acquiring over two-thirds of the property, leaving enough for the soccer-basketball court which the church later helped raise money to build. A hole was dug and the cross planted and cemented to mark the dividing line.

The Catholic community now had their church and was soon designated by the diocese as the new parish of Jesucristo Resucitado. Having their own parish, the community now needed a parish office and meeting space. By that time, Emiro and Mercedes were already heavily involved. Mercedes was a leader in the prayer group and member of the fundraising committee. Emiro, with his electrical and construction skills, was head of the buildings and grounds committee. Recalling those days, Emiro chuckled. The men had just finished laying the concrete floor for the meeting room. The women, excited about the new space, decided to “christen” it with an impromptu prayer meeting, not realizing that cement takes some time to set up. The men were called back to fill the holes and patch up the imprints left from the women’s high heels.

That original church and parish office were replaced some 20 years ago by our current beautiful church and office complex under the leadership of Fr. Pat Ryan and Fr. Greg Schaffer and through the generosity of many folks back in Minnesota. “Thanks to everyone in Minnesota for your help over the years,” Mercedes commented, “especially for helping build our church when being able to do so was only a distant dream with the little money we could raise on our own. We thought the best we could ever do would some day build a larger simple structure, but we now have the most beautiful church in the entire diocese.”

The strength of a parish depends not only on its facilities but even more on the participation of parishioners in a variety of active ministries. Emiro and Mercedes became catechists for parents in the faith formation program and leaders in the marriage preparation team, a program in which they still serve. They visit families in their barrio and bring communion to shut-ins. When there is a death, they lead a rosary and prayer service in the home of the deceased for eight days. It is their service at and care of the church, however, for which they are best known. It began a couple years back with their being asked to help set up for Mass...turn on lights and fans, set up the sound system, and prepare the chalice, ciboria, water, wine, lectionary and sacramentary. In a familiar gospel text, a fellow is told, “Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities.” Such is the standard reward for trustworthy people like Emiro and Mercedes. Bit by bit, other tasks were added. Emiro is present helping out at every Mass at our church. He is our St. Peter, the keeper of the keys, opening up before and locking up after every Mass or other event. When albs and altar cloths need cleaning, they go home to Mercedes for washing and ironing. He checks the church every evening and returns each morning to open up and ring the bells calling people to worship.

In their early years, Emiro and Mercedes, as with many a young couple, planned to build a nice home of their own, but with Mercedes’ mom living in a rundown earthen-wall dwelling they thought, why not build a place where they and other relatives could all live together? And so it was. Mercedes’ mom, a sister and her son, their four boys and two others they took in lived together in the home Emiro built for them. After years of loving care, Mercedes’ mom passed on a couple months ago to a heavenly home God prepared for her, where God also has a place prepared for Emiro and Mercedes, built with the same love with which they have loved others.

### Points to ponder

What is the history of your parish? What are the committees and ministries that serve your parish community?

*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.*