

# Bolivian medical missionary program puts faith into flight

By Michael Wamble  
NEW WORLD STAFF WRITER

Why not here?

That was the question Juan Hinojosa asked himself when he learned of the accomplishments of the Joliet Diocesan medical mission program.

But instead of keeping that interrogative inside, Hinojosa, director of the Hillenbrand Institute of the Center for Development in Ministry, asked Cardinal George about starting a mission out of Chicago. Hinojosa told the cardinal that such an undertaking would provide lay Catholics an opportunity to put their faith into flight—to Bolivia.

"The cardinal thought it was a good idea. And out of that came the decision to travel to Bolivia and explore the possibilities," said Hinojosa.

On March 4 and March 5, Chicago/Bolivia Medical Mission informational meetings will be held at the Cardinal Bernardin Parish Center of Holy Name Cathedral. Both meetings will begin at 7:30 p.m.

The first medical mission trip, sponsored by the Hillenbrand Institute and the Mission Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago, has been tentatively scheduled for late October.

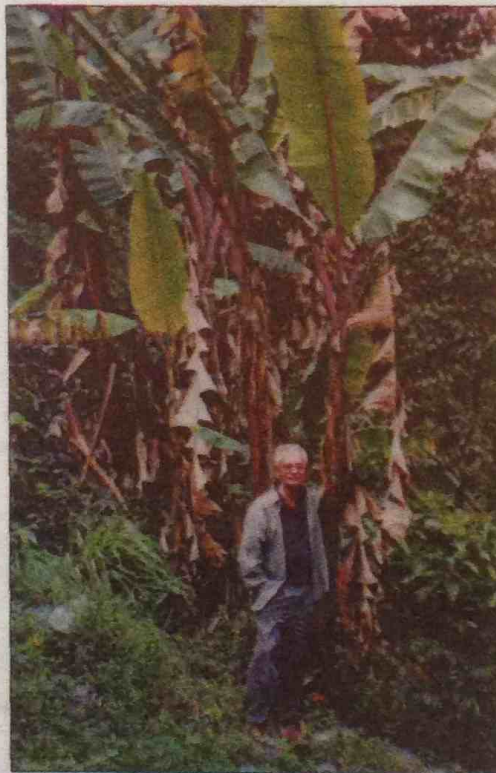
Hinojosa and Holy Spirit Missionary Sister Maria Burke, director of the archdiocesan Missions Office, traveled to Bolivia last October. The two chose Sacred Heart Church Hospital on the outskirts of Santa Cruz after visiting two other sites: one in La Paz, another in El Alto, a rapidly growing satellite city of La Paz at 13,000 feet above sea level.

"The needs were probably greater in El Alto but beginning there would be more complicated, more expensive. And because it is a two- to three-week mission, it will be much easier for people to adapt to Santa Cruz where the altitude is much lower," said Burke.

Hinojosa said the short-term nature of the mission lends itself to promote surgical medicine.

"We are especially asking surgeons to join us on this mission," said Hinojosa.

The vision of the medical mis-



Juan Hinojosa visits Bolivia to set up the new medical missionary program.

sion is best articulated through Mother Teresa's memorable quotation that, "The poor everywhere in the world are Christ who suffers. In them the Son of God lives and dies. Through them, God shows his face."

For Cheri McEssy, a pediatric intensive care nurse at Children's Memorial Hospital and medical coordinator for medical mission, the project gives people the chance to grow spiritually while helping others.

"Beyond our faith, most of us entered the medical profession to do good work and see it make a difference and this is a way you can see it impact people's lives," said McEssy, a Holy Name Cathedral parishioner.

Good work is coupled with sacrifice for people interested in the mission since all participants must pay for their own way to Bolivia. McEssy, along with Dr. Enrique Via-Reque, a Bolivian-born Chicago area anesthesiologist, have been instrumental in making the Chicago mission possible.

Via-Reque is one of over 100 Catholic Bolivian doctors in the Chicago area who have provided support to mission efforts.

From doctors and hospital visits Hinojosa and Burke learned about chigas, a parasitical disease that enlarges the heart to the point of death.

"This is an example of a condition that could be treated if only the medicine for it wasn't so expensive to many people," said Burke.

In its later stages, a pacemaker is the only means by which chigas victims can survive. Currently, 53 percent of the blood supply in Bolivia has been infected with chigas.

In the past, the question of "Why not here?" might be asked in reference to those areas in Chicago where people are in need of medical services and supplies. Hinojosa said

that question was answered recently during the visit of a Catholic pilgrim to Mexico City and St. Louis.

"I know that you will hear my plea to open wide your hearts to the ever-increasing plight and urgent needs of our less-fortunate brothers and sisters throughout the world," said Pope John Paul II shortly after his arrival to the United States.

Another goal of the mission partnership is to build bonds of solidarity with Bolivian counterparts through the sharing of medical skills and knowledge.

"We see our goals very much in line with the pope's requests made at the recent Synod for America for many more physical and spiritual connections between North [America] and South [America]," said Hinojosa.

"It doesn't have to be Bolivia, but ought to be outside of Chicago because Christ called us to reach out, to reach beyond ourselves to others, so why not start here?" he said.

For more information, contact Hinojosa at (847) 970-4927 or McEssy at (312) 563-1586.