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Mexico Beginnings

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MEXICO

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When most Canadians hear about Mexico, their thoughts likely turn to sunshine, sandy beaches and holiday resorts – in places like Acapulco, Cancun or Puerto Vallarta. For those of a more political bent, Mexico probably brings to mind “the Wall” or “the Dreamers”

and other contentious political debates south of Canada and the USA.

For the Spiritans, however, Mexico means one of our most vibrant missions that started literally “on a whim and a prayer” back in 1971. Three U.S. West priests – George Reardon, Patrick Townsend and Charles Coffey – were



BEGIN

heading home to the States after their mission in Peru had closed in 1970. They stopped off in Mexico City where they celebrated the Eucharist at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, asking her, if that was the will of God, to show them where they might work in Mexico in a place in keeping with the Spiritan charism.

After their visit to the basilica, they spoke to several people and were directed to the diocese of San Luis Potosi, a 19-hour drive north of Mexico city. The bishop welcomed them, but said that if they were looking for a place with the greatest needs, they should go to the three-year-old diocese of Ciudad Valles, badly in need of priests and missionaries.

In Ciudad Valles the bishop offered them some large parishes. When they asked, "Are there any other places with greater needs?" the bishop spoke of "a few parishes up in the mountains" in need of missionaries.

So they came to Tanlajas on the morning of February 22, 1971 – a market day. As they climbed the road near Tanlajas they saw many people going to market with heavy loads on their back. They looked like people who were over-burdened and needy, laden down by the loads they were carrying: their kind of people.

A small mud dwelling at the back of the church was the only parish house. A local woman had the keys. No running water, no light. They decided to stay, put up curtains to mark off rooms – and settled in.

A few days later they heard that on the previous December 12, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Tanlajas All Night Adoration Group had spent a special vigil pleading with her to send them a priest. She sent them not one, but three priests. ■



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