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## Father Chuck's memory lives on in homes built in his name

By Lou Baldwin

The short letter in halting English tells the story.

"I Renaldo Diaz Ubeda, I direct to you this formal request for a decent home that I have seen others have, the opportunity for a decent home, I want this blessing as I have fought to have a nice home, but in my house I only work and have responsibility for my family and furthermore, and I am and we are of scarce resources. Waiting for consideration of my petition — Reynaldo Diaz Ubeda."

Thanks to Father Chuck's Challenge, a Philadelphia-area ministry, chances are Ubeda's dream will be realized.

Father Charles (Chuck) Pfeffer, a

Philadelphia priest whose ministry was mostly among youth and young adults with the archdiocesan Office for Youth and Young Adults and the Newman Apostolate, died way too young — at the age of 52 in 2004.

His memory lives on in ways he never could have imagined, especially through Father Chuck's Challenge, an outreach program begun in 2007 by Msgr. Francis X. Schmidt, a predecessor and mentor at OYYA.

Working mostly in the highlands of Nicaragua and a bit in Haiti, in less than seven years 830 homes, 13 community centers, two medical clinics and four school houses have been built, thanks to the indefatigable fundraising done by Msgr. Schmidt and his loyal band of followers.

That takes care of the corporal works of mercy, but the spiritual works of mercy haven't been forgotten. Three chapels have been built, three more renovated and two rectories have been built.

A small group of pilgrims representing the donors led by Father Charles Kennedy, who has been working with Msgr. Schmidt, visited Nicaragua in June to see first-hand the progress that had been made. Older sites were revisited, and houses and other facilities were blessed by Father Kennedy and group members.

"The people were very open and friendly; when we visited the chapels they participated in the Mass," remarked Father Kennedy, who with years of experience in Hispanic ministry speaks fluent Spanish. "I learned things and there is still a lot to learn," he said.

Especially remarkable to him was the cleanliness of the houses and the people. "They have no electricity for washing clothing yet everything was so clean," he remarked.

Father Chuck's Challenge raises the money that is passed on to Florida-based Food For the Poor, which along with other agencies, especially



**Visitors with Father Chuck's Challenge walk down a road in the town of San Sebastian de Yali in Nicaragua and past homes built with donations to the charity named for Father Chuck Pfeffer, a deceased priest of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.**

the American Nicaragua Foundation, actually oversees the construction of the houses that are deeded free and clear to needy families.

The houses, which measure between 360 and 400 square feet, might cost about \$3,200 including the luxury of a private outhouse.

What kind of house do you get for \$3,200? They are beyond basic by American standards. But this is Nicaragua, where a good part of the rural population lives in shacks built of lumber scraps and tarps with a dirt floor.

The new houses are concrete, either blocks or pre-cast walls sectioned off into about three rooms

with a concrete floor and sturdy metal roof. They are provided with running water, and if service is available, very basic electricity. For good measure, basic furniture is included and often as not chickens, fruit trees and even goats.

Mike McCarthy of St. Ann Parish in Phoenixville, who went along with his brother Joe, was impressed to see how the villagers had taken ownership of their new community, planting flowers and adding little personal touches. A community center built for the village had been changed into a school, for which the people thought was the greater need.

"One woman told me she never dreamed in a million years she would have a house of her own," McCarthy said.

The names of the villages erected reflect donor parish names or patron saints of donors — San Augustin, San Patricio, Corpus Christi, Santa Maria Goretti, Santa Teresita, San Francesco Javier and of course Father Pfeffer's Village.

Deacon Peter Niche of St. Maria Goretti Parish in Hatfield was especially interested in revisiting St. Maria Goretti Village, where 75 homes and a community center were built.

"This is what we need to do — look at those less fortunate than ourselves," he said. At one house where the new owner is a welder by trade, he had finished off the house with ornamental grill work on the windows. The new owner told Deacon Niche, "This isn't my house, it is your house."

For Kathy Statton of St. Philip and James Parish in Exton, this was the first time she traveled to the region and it was a culture shock because pictures viewed ahead of the trip just do not do justice to the poverty that is prevalent. Nonetheless, "It was a good experience to see it," she said.

## NEWS BRIEFS

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### Inn Dwelling: Rehabbing homes and turning around lives

Inn Dwelling, one of the community groups to receive a local grant through the 2013 Catholic Campaign for Human Development, is an example of a community-based group that has evolved to meet additional needs in its Germantown neighborhood.

Based in St. Vincent Parish, it was founded in 1981 by Vincentian Brother Al Smith with an original mission of acquiring and rehabilitating decaying houses and making them available to families in need.

The program looks for working families who have never experienced home ownership and provides the house at below market rent.

The tenants must attend mandatory meetings on issues involving ownership, and after three to five years, if they are ready, they are afforded the opportunity to buy the house or are encouraged to buy a house elsewhere.

Over the years, Inn Dwelling has rehabbed about 40 houses, Brother Al es-

timates, and a number of them have been bought by former tenants.

"We have about 18 houses now, and we are working to rehabilitate three," Brother Al said.

While housing remains one facet of the work of Inn Dwelling, in more recent years education has come to the forefront. That largely came about when Missionary Servant of the Most Blessed Trinity Rosemarie Jefferson arrived in 1994 first as part time but very soon full time and education became a very large part of Inn Dwelling's ministry, which makes perfect sense. Nothing eliminates poverty quicker than sound education.

In the after-school program there are 30 kids in grades six to eight and 60 in grades nine to 12.

Part of it all is exposing the young people to new experiences, helping them to realize their potential. A great stress is made on preparing the teens for the SATs.

Although most of the children are not Catholic, faith in God is instilled in them. Through this example there have been a number of conversions to Catholicism, she noted.

### Archbishop Ryan High School names LePera new president

Denise LePera has been named president of Archbishop Ryan High School in Northeast Philadelphia.

The appointment, which was announced July 14 by the archdiocesan Office of Catholic Education and Faith in the Future Foundation, became effective July 28.

LePera previously served for six years as executive director of institutional advancement at Roman Catholic High School.

LePera holds a Bachelor of Science degree in liberal studies and a Master of Science degree in strategic leadership, both from Neumann University. Prior to her position at Roman Catholic, she was director of corporate and foundation relations (1999 to 2006) and director of institutional gifts and donor relations (2006-2008) at Neumann.

Her sons Steve (class of 2002) and Dan (class of 2004) are both proud graduates of Archbishop Ryan High School.

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