

Remembering Father Tovar

Boys' activist devoted his life to rescuing abandoned and abused boys

By Donelle Manton

For 34 years, Father Pedro Tovar Cortes was an icon on Mazatlán streets, devoting his life to rescuing homeless, abandoned or abused boys whose families could not properly care for them. With his death on July 21st, his passing leaves a voluminous void and a legacy that may never again be replicated.

Born July 5, 1928 in Guachinango, Jalisco, early on he had the desire and awareness of the need to help others. After studying for the priesthood, Father Tovar entered the new Diocese of Mazatlán in 1958 and was ordained a priest in 1961. Over the years he realized the great need for a safe home for boys – first by providing temporary shelter for boys whose fathers were inmates at Islas Marias, a penal island located 90 miles south. While boys were allowed to live with their fathers during their incarceration, Fr. Tovar offered the boys a place to live during the school year because the penal island initially had no schools. His caring for inmates' boys evolved into rescuing abused boys living on the streets throughout Mexico and into Central America.

Initially Fr. Tovar welcomed boys into his own parish home but the numbers quickly increased and he needed to find a larger facility. On a prayerful walk up Cerro de Vigía one day in the mid-1970s, Fr. Tovar came upon an abandoned Carmelite convent, vacated after

Hurricane Olivia in 1975. His prayerful walk had been divinely answered.

Over the years, Fr. Tovar helped approximately 1,000 boys find the home they deserved – at Hogar San Pablo, making sure they knew they were special and deserving by setting aside money from the weekly offerings for treats for the boys during the week.

In 2006, members of the Tres Islas Orphanage Fund, which provides food, school, medical assistance and structural upgrades to Mazatlán's orphanages, approached Fr. Tovar about renaming Hogar San Pablo in his honor. Embarrassed at having a facility named after him, the humble priest politely declined. The next day, after explaining to him that his good works would live on, inspiring others and helping the boys who grew up there because it would be named after the man who was the boys' father figure as well as their spiritual figure. It would tell boys in the future that a man loved them very much – enough to create this home for them. Then, a big smile crossed Fr. Tovar's face and he humbly agreed.

Not long after, in front of a newly-painted sign, "Father Tovar's Home for Boys Hogar

San Pablo, A.C., Established 1975", Fr. Tovar cut the ribbon to rename the orphanage in his honor, surrounded by fine young men he'd raised over the years.

Knowing his work would soon be over, Fr. Tovar selected Fr. Arnoldo Villa Peinado of Escuinapa to assume his role as principal caregiver for the boys. Fr. Arnoldo has already begun his endeavors, working hand-in-hand with the Tres Islas Orphanage Fund to ensure that life continues for the boys exactly as Fr. Tovar envisioned.

Fr. Tovar's ashes are interred behind the chapel at the orphanage, so he can be close

to the boys to whom he devoted his life.

If you would like to continue Fr. Tovar's legacy, you may make a donation in his honor by visiting www.orphanagefunds.org and printing a copy of the donation form to include with your gift, or phone 1-888-459-8463 to learn more. One hundred percent of every donation helps the boys, no administration fees.

Vaya con Dios Padre Tovar y gracias por todo. *Your good heart was in Heaven long before your sweet soul ever left the earth.*

