

## MISSION STATEMENT:

*We are St. Therese parishioners who seek to deepen our faith and connection to the universal Catholic Church by listening to God's word as spoken through the poor of our Sister Parish in Chiapas, Mexico. By listening with open hearts and entering into relationship with our sister parishioners, we hope to understand how our faith might take shape as we link hearts and hands to build God's kingdom of justice and peace in our world.*

*The St. Therese Sister Parish Ministry provides opportunities for parishioners to renew and deepen their faith through retreats, prayer gatherings, and celebrations; pilgrimages to our Sister Parish in Chiapas; educational events and resources; active collaboration with various projects and programs in our sister parish; and advocacy opportunities to support justice and peace in Chiapas.*

*These are some of the activities & projects the Sister Parish Ministry offers:*

- \*Monthly Prayer & Potluck Gatherings*
- \*Annual Retreat, Prayer Gatherings & Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebration*
- \*Pilgrimages to Chiapas & Hospitality for Visitors from Chiapas*
- \*Blankets for Babes*
- \*Educational Speakers, Movies, and Resource Materials*
- \*Embroidery Cooperative*
- \*Fair Trade Coffee Project*
- \*Support for Human & Indigenous Rights in Chiapas*

**A Brief History:** St. Therese Parish began our journey with our Sister Parish in Chiapas, México in 1997, after almost two years of discussion, discernment, and prayer. Since 1998, we have sponsored pilgrimages of parishioners to visit our Sister Parish in Chiapas. Over the years, on several occasions, we have hosted visitors from Chiapas at St. Therese. These direct interactions between our parish and theirs are some of the many ways which help us to deepen our connection to each other as people of faith, despite the geographical distance, political border, and cultural, linguistic and economic differences between us. As brothers and sisters of the same God, we are invited to enter into each other's lives to journey together with hope, faith and gratitude. We learn to walk together with "one, equal heart."

**Who Are the People of Our Sister Parish?** In 1958, the Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, México, asked the Jesuits to establish a mission in a remote and mountainous region of Chiapas, the southernmost state in México. At that time, the region had been abandoned by the Catholic Church for nearly 100 years. The Mission was inaugurated on December 3, 1958, the Feast of St. Francis Xavier. The first Jesuit priests and brothers, and a few years later, the Sisters of the Divine Shepherd, attended the people of our sister parish by walking to their villages and hamlets deep in the mountains and jungles.

The people of our sister parish are primarily Tseltal (pronounced “Sell-tahl”) indigenous, one of several groups of Mayans who live in Chiapas. They live in some 550 villages and small towns in the mountains and jungles of Chiapas. Today, the Tseltal people number approximately 300,000—about the same population that the Spanish Conquistadores encountered when they invaded México in the 1500s.

Although the Tseltales all speak the same language and trace their history to the same general region, they actually identify themselves as part of five distinct “traditions” with special histories, ties to specific lands, and unique customs. Since the Spanish Conquest, the Tseltales, like other indigenous people of México, have suffered poverty, discrimination, and oppression. They are the “poorest of the poor” in México.

### **What Does it Mean to Be a Sister Parish?**

*Our principal task is to be present and to listen.*

As Fr. Pepe Avilés, SJ, wrote to us in 1997:

“Among other things, we would say that it would be a relationship of mutual participation and inter-relation, a mutual understanding of the work of God in our lives, of exchange of spiritual experiences, of mutual accompaniment and support in faith, of commitment to encourage us to build together, here and now, the family of our God, seeing ourselves by our actions as sons and daughters of the same Mother and Father.”

The Tseltales have taught us to think of our experience as Sister Parishes as a journey of the heart. They say that when people live in harmony, they live with “one, equal heart,” and when they are touched by God’s love, their hearts grow larger.

### **How Can I Be a Part of Our Sister Parish?**

All St. Therese parishioners are a part of our Sister Parish when they unite in prayer with our sisters and brothers in Chiapas. Every Sunday, we remember our Sister Parish in our collective Prayers of the Faithful, and you are invited to offer your individual prayers for our Sister Parish at any time.

### **The Sister Parish Ministry offers a variety of ways to get involved:**

**Monthly Prayer & Potluck Gatherings:** The Sister Parish Ministry sponsors a monthly gathering at various parishioners’ homes where we enjoy time together over a potluck supper followed by time to reflect, share and pray together.

**Retreats, Prayer Gatherings & Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebration:** The Sister Parish Ministry organizes an annual retreat open to all parishioners, drawing upon what we have learned from our indigenous sisters and brothers about spirituality, prayer and faith-sharing. Each year, parishioners provide reflections about their experiences in Chiapas at all the masses and through the bulletin. We invite parishioners to join a “prayer chain” to pray for specific intentions requested by our Sister Parish. We also plan the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe to remember and celebrate our sister parish in Chiapas, Mexico.

**Fair Trade Coffee:** The Sister Parish Ministry works with the Parish and School to encourage informed consumption of organic, shade-grown Fair Trade Coffee as a way to offer our support to our sister and brother parishioners. Fair Trade coffee ensures that small-scale coffee farmers, who strive to feed their families by growing and selling coffee, receive a fair price for their harvests. St. Therese Parish serves only organic, shade-grown Fair Trade coffee at parish gatherings and meetings. We encourage parishioners to make a personal commitment to purchase and consume Fair Trade Coffee. We also work with parishioners who want to bring Fair Trade Coffee to their workplaces and schools. We continue to look for ways to support the Coffee Cooperative of our Sister Parish.

**Embroidery:** The Sister Parish Ministry helps support our Sister Parish's embroidery cooperative, run by indigenous Tseltal women who create products from handmade embroidery. We offer the parish regular opportunities to purchase embroidered handicrafts from the cooperative and to donate needed supplies.

**Blankets for Babes:** Parishioners sponsor the creation of quilts, crocheted blankets and knitted hats for the children of our Sister Parish. Parishioners deliver these beautiful handmade items, and the Sisters of the Divine Shepherd see that they go to the most vulnerable of our Sister Parish. Part of the proceeds from this project go to support children's programs.

**Pilgrimages & Visits:** The Sister Parish Ministry organizes an annual pilgrimage to our Sister Parish. We facilitate discernment for parishioners who are considering making the pilgrimage. We coordinate the 4-6 weeks of preparation prior to departure; provide volunteers to lead the pilgrimages; assist with travel preparations, translation and orientation in Chiapas; provide follow-up discussions for pilgrims upon their return; and support how they might share their faith stories with the parish and community. We also plan and coordinate hosting visitors from our Sister Parish: facilitating visa applications, arranging housing and food, and coordinating various events, gatherings and outings.