



AMERICA/HONDURAS - "An intense missionary work even in prisons": the testimony of Mgr. Lenihan, the first Bishop of La Ceiba

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - "In the new diocese of La Ceiba, on the northern coast of the country, of which I am Bishop, the main problems the Church has to face are of political and social origin. Lately violence related to drug trafficking and corruption has also been added, which increases the poverty of the people." These are the words by His Exc. Mgr. Michael Lenihan, Bishop of La Ceiba, in Honduras, who is participating in the Seminar organized by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples in Rome for Bishops ordained in the last two years in the territories dependent on the Congregation (see Fides 01/09/2012). Fides Agency asked Mgr. Lenihan to illustrate the situation of the local Church entrusted to him. This is his testimony:

"In my diocese there are so many Catholics, we can say that almost 80% of the people are Catholic, however, this does not exclude an increase of sects and other groups. The Catholic Church, however, has its weight in the national tradition and a presence in the life of the country, even at the Episcopal Conference level.

An issue that weighs heavily on the population is the lack of health care for all: there is a lack of infrastructures and doctors, and those that exist are almost always on strike for low wages or lack of resources. Even in school, teachers are poorly paid, and this causes discomfort and protests.

Prisons are where missionary commitment is being carried out with great enthusiasm. Following the example of Mgr. Romulo Emiliani, Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese San Pedro Sula, our mother diocese, even in our diocese there is Penitentiary Pastoral care that does a great job, inside and outside the prisons. I was in the main prison in La Ceiba, where there are 40 people who receive complete assistance: education, catechesis, and various kinds of aid. With the support of the Catholic Movement of Renewal in the Spirit, a tremendous job is being done. Even in Tela, where there is another prison, one works a lot with the families of prisoners and the prisoners themselves, because there are situations that are not very clear and cases of injustice. The courts are slow, and there are people who remain in prison, not having had a final conviction, perhaps resulting eventually even innocent!"

Monsignor Michael Lenihan, O.F.M., Bishop of La Ceiba, was born in Abbeyfeale, in Ireland, in 1951 and has been working in Central America (El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala) for 28 years. On 30 December 2011 he was appointed first Bishop of the new diocese of La Ceiba, with jurisdiction on the islands of Roatan, Guanaja and Utila. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 12/09/2012)