



NEWS RELEASE

DIocese OF ERIE

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## **Mission of Friendship prepares for 50th anniversary**

*Dioceses of Erie and Yucatán celebrate ongoing effort*

As the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mission of Friendship approaches, the Diocese of Erie and the Archdiocese of Yucatán , Mexico, continue to strengthen and solidify the relationship established in 1971.

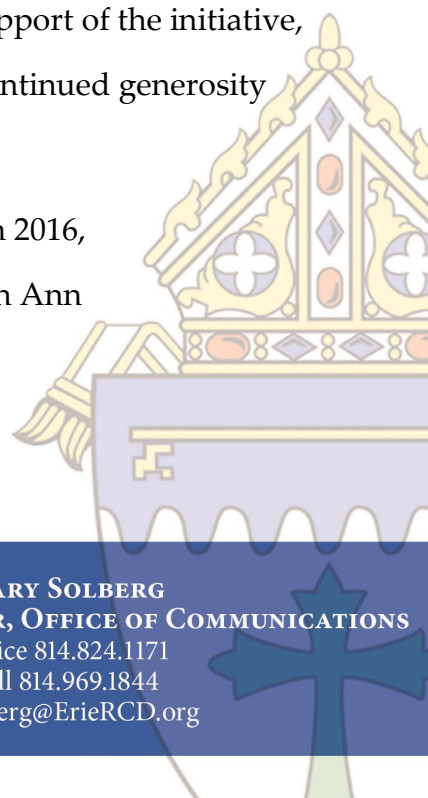
“The anniversary presented an opportune moment for us to evaluate the outreach effort with Archbishop Gustavo Rodriguez Vega, whom I have come to know and respect over the years,” said the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie. “I am pleased to say the mission has matured to the point that the Archdiocese of Yucatán can now play a more direct role in its operation. The Diocese of Erie will continue as ambassador in full support of the initiative, and plans to increase its financial support going forward, with the continued generosity of the people of northwest Pennsylvania.”

The dioceses first began discussing the future of the mission in 2016, when Bishop Persico traveled to the Mission of Friendship along with Ann Badach, executive director of Catholic Charities for the diocese, and

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**ANNE-MARIE WELSH**  
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS  
Office 814.824.1167  
Cell 814.746.6889  
[amwelsh@ErieRCD.org](mailto:amwelsh@ErieRCD.org)

**MARY SOLBERG**  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS  
Office 814.824.1171  
Cell 814.969.1844  
[msolberg@ErieRCD.org](mailto:msolberg@ErieRCD.org)



Indira Suarez, who oversees the Office of Diocesan and International Missions. Several important steps have occurred in the interim, ensuring the mission's future under Mexican law by entrusting it to the Archdiocese of Yucatán.

"I am grateful for Bishop Persico's personal understanding and commitment to the Mission of Friendship," said Suarez. "The need is great. Taking these steps frees us to concentrate on garnering the support of people in our region for those in need." Among the initiatives overseen by the Mission of Friendship are a subsidized preschool to help working families; an after-school program providing a meal, academic support and enrichment classes for middle-school girls; a medical clinic; a program for visiting groups providing opportunities for adults and college groups to experience another culture; and the Amigos Program, a sponsorship opportunity that supplies essential financial support to impoverished families. The Sister Parish Program, which pairs entire parish communities in the Yucatán with parish communities in the Diocese of Erie, also will continue.

Although the bishops had hoped to meet in Mexico in October to celebrate the milestone anniversary together, plans have been adjusted as a result of the pandemic. Livestreamed Masses will be offered by Archbishop Vega at the Cathedral of St. Ildefonso in Mérida on Saturday, Oct. 23, and by Bishop Persico at Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Harborcreek on Friday, Nov. 12, at 5 pm. Receptions will follow in both locations.

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