

FR. ROBERT J. KUS*MARCELINO*

It was two days after Christmas 2006, and I was looking at the brick wall that two Hispanic men had just finished repairing on the St. Mary campus in Wilmington, North Carolina where I am the pastor. As they were finishing their work, I saw a young man walking down Ann Street and greeted him. His name was Marcelino, and he told me that he was from Honduras and was living at Mercy House, a local mission for men on Red Cross Street.

Marcelino did not speak any English, and I was very glad that all Catholic priests of the Diocese of Raleigh must speak both Spanish and English. Marcelino told me he had come to St. Mary Church—later to be named the Basilica Shrine of St. Mary—a couple of times. With that short interaction, he continued his walk.

For the next month, I saw Marcelino on and off at our Sunday Mass in Spanish, and he always stopped to say hello.

The relatively warm winter weather that we were enjoying began turning markedly colder. And as the nights became frigid, I began having nightmares. I began feeling incredible guilt at having a large, warm rectory to myself, when one of my parishioners was living in a mission.

When I got to the point that I could no longer live with myself, I drove to Mercy House just as it was getting dark. Marcelino was standing by himself outside, the only Hispanic among the group of men milling around. The men always stood around at that hour because the mission did not let them in the house until 6 p.m. sharp.

He was very happy to see me, and he readily agreed to go out to dinner at the Golden Corral. As the dinner progressed, I told Marcelino that I had a huge rectory with four bedrooms, and I asked him if he would like to live there for a while. Not only would it be good for him to have a decent place to live, it would also benefit me immensely because I would have an opportunity to improve my conversational Spanish. Naturally, he was thrilled with the