

September 2008



ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA CATHOLIC CHURCH
AUSTIN, TEXAS

Mission to Mexico News

October Focus: Blankets, Coats and Sweaters

By Rachel Fannin
Mission to Mexico, Ministry Director
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX

The August mission trips have always been my favorite ones. I believe that we are empowering the people of the colonia by helping support education. "Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish you feed him for a lifetime." This is what I believe we are doing when we focus on educating the children. Children are our future whether in this country or across the border. They will have a better life because of education and will be better sons, daughters or parents to the future generations. I am humbled by the opportunity they give me to be a part of their futures. "Education is our hope in helping fight poverty in the colonia." I will continue

saying this as long as I have a voice. For me the school supply trip is the best trip of the year, and I always look forward to it. It's Christmas in August!

It takes many volunteers to make a school supply trip a possibility. I thank everyone that gave of their time, talent, and treasure; you made this trip a reality. Special thanks to all of our regular donors, to those of you who gave large donations to help purchase new shoes and to the school children's sponsors. God bless you all!

Following are some facts and numbers from the recent August mission trip.

- 8 volunteers went to the colonia in early July to sign kids up to be sponsored
- 78 kids were sponsored and received a full school uniform, shoes and supplies
- We distributed 1,000+ pairs of new school shoes and lots of socks
- A small team of volunteers meas-

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How do I make
HOTEL RESERVATIONS?
What should I bring with me?
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Mission to Mexico Future Trip Dates

October 3-4, 2008
 December 5-6, 2008
 February 6-7, 2009
 April 3-4, 2009
 June 12-13, 2009
 August 7-8, 2009
 October 2-3, 2009
 December 4-5, 2009

October Focus *(continued from page 1)*

ured each child to ensure they received the correct size shoes and socks

- 1,000+ children received backpacks filled with school supplies
- It took about 2 weeks and 10 volunteers to purchase the shoes and school supplies
- We were blessed to have 3 doctors and 2 nurses give medical attention and medications to our brothers and sisters
- Approximately 200 babies received diapers and clothing
- 600 bags of groceries (dispensa) were distributed
- 2,000 sack lunches were assembled and distributed
- Hundreds of bags of “loaves & fishes” were given away
- Over 2,000 of our brothers and sisters came through the line and received
- 2 groups meet while the mission is

going on: “Prayer Group” led by Berta Garcia, Deixter Serrano and Deacon Mike Meismer and “Shannon’s Girls Group” (2 young ladies have graduated from high school and are going to college! Congratulations to them and to Shannon for supporting them. I’m very proud!)

- We hire and pay some of the men and women from the colonia to help us
- 70 volunteers came to help—folks from all over Austin, Kyle, San Marcos, Katy, Houston, 2 from Louisiana and those great guys from St. Catherine’s KC’s
- Joe Sigel hooked us up with radio announcements on RELEVANT RADIO 970 AM; tune in before each trip
- We are starting up a SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM (details will be sent out via email soon)

Please continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in the colonia and for continued support of our mission.

Next mission trip is October 3-4; the focus is blankets, coats and sweaters!

Amor y Paz,

Rachel

How may I contact

Rachel Fannin?

Phone: (512) 288-1621

Email: rfannin@austin.rr.com

October **Special Needs**

- **CASH donations** to help purchase 900 blankets
- **VOLUNTEERS** for October mission trip
- **Coats & sweaters**, all sizes (new or gently worn)
- **Vehicles and drivers** to haul the “love cargo”—especially on Friday morning
- **Bikes**, all sizes (especially for men—they use them to get to work)
- **Baby items**
- **Tarps & rope**, new or gently used

Second Mission Trip

By Deborah Thompson
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX

This was my second mission trip. I was not as nervous this time, and as a result felt more present and familiar with the routine. I was anxious to get started since there is always a lot to do in a short amount of time. It was exciting to know that the children would be receiving much needed gifts this trip. I felt supported and encouraged to have my partner (John Hammond) with me. It helps to have someone to share the experience with.

Again, the organization under the direction of Rachel and her repeat volunteers was amazing. It is so touching to see the amount of love that is poured

into each task.

The generosity was overwhelming from the community and private contributions. I don't recall the numbers, but we were able to feed more families and supply shoes and school supplies for a greater number of children this time.

I am amazed at the response when I talk about the mission to my friends and family. People really do care and want to help in some way. I pray the circle of volunteers keeps growing, so that in turn will the number of people we touch.

Deborah Thompson

Website

Check the Mission to Mexico website at www.stcatherine-austin.org (select “Community Ministries,” “Organizations” and then “Mission to Mexico”) for the current newsletter, future mission trip dates and “Video: See the Mission in Action.”

100% Goes to Those We Serve

By Pat Gavia
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX

The Mission to Mexico Board wants to keep you, our faithful supporters, informed on the cost of our trips to help the people of the colonia we serve. In our last newsletter, we detailed the cost of groceries for our April trip for 600 families and sack lunches for 2000 people. The total cost for these basic necessities was \$5,140.98. In June, those same items cost \$6,043.42 (an increase of \$902.44) and in August, the amount spent for groceries and sack lunches was \$6,498.17 (an additional increase of \$454.75).

We are so grateful for the support we receive from donations. Your donations provide these basic necessities and the special projects we provide on certain trips (school supplies and shoes, blankets for the winter, fans for the summer, baby supplies, and toys for

Christmas). Of our total budget for this fiscal year, 99% of the money donated goes directly to benefit the poor. The remaining 1% is for operating costs to allow us to serve the poor (such as storage supplies, fencing materials, and ice for water for the people waiting in line for the distribution).

Our total budget for this fiscal year is \$87,510. However, we can only spend what we have in donations. Please prayerfully consider donating to the Mission to Mexico. Our brothers and sisters in Nuevo Laredo will benefit directly from your donation.

Refer to the information in the box on the right about how to make a monetary donation to Mission to Mexico.

Pat Gavia

How may I make a monetary donation to the Mission to Mexico effort?



Checks can be made out to **"Mission to Mexico."** Put in the collection baskets at Mass or mail to:

St. Catherine of Siena

Attn: Mission to Mexico

4800 Convict Hill Road

Austin, TX 78749-2202

MTM...a Humbling Experience

By John Hammond
Austin TX

The August trip to Nuevo Laredo was my first. My partner, Deborah Thompson, had been before and had invited me to go. I had wanted to volunteer before this trip, but, in most cases, my work schedule doesn't allow me weekends off. We met other volunteers early Friday morning at St. Catherine's. I had been told by Deborah that this trip was going to provide shoes and uniforms for school. It was obvious that some of the volunteers had been there before, and when Deborah and I arrived, we finished helping take new shoes out of their boxes and loading them for transportation to Mexico. We stopped briefly at the hotel to check in and headed for the border crossing.

I have worked serving the homeless and less fortunate back in Salt Lake City and I thought that I had seen

poverty—I was wrong. As we drove further into Nuevo Laredo, the businesses and nicer homes became fewer and were replaced with small buildings made of almost anything you can imagine. After about twenty minutes or so, we left the paved roads behind. As we approached the small compound that held the church and a couple of other small buildings, I noticed that there were many women and children lining up across the street from the church. I found out that some of them had already been there for a few hours and that they would spend the night waiting for the distribution the following afternoon. It was at least 105°! Small children were everywhere and most of them were shoeless. My Spanish isn't the best, but as I helped set up, I would ask a question here and there. We left around 6:00 pm. I was told to get a good nights

sleep for the next day.

When we arrived the next morning, I couldn't believe how many women and children had lined up—not many men at all. The organization was amazing, I had only seen thirty or so volunteers the day before. There seemed to be three or four times as many volunteers on Saturday and by 1:00 pm, there were 1,200 hundred sack lunches prepared, 600 bags of food, each containing rice, beans, oil, flour and bar soap and over 1,000 pairs of shoes, each with a pair of socks. All of these items had been set up outside. I hadn't been inside the church since the previous day, and when I walked inside, I couldn't believe the transformation. Tables had been set up with notebooks, pencils and crayons, backpacks and medical items. There were a few strollers and some toys. I thought that they couldn't possibly distribute everything.

...We had so much to give and it did not even come close to what was needed...

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MTM...a Humbling Experience *(continued from page 3)*

The bags of food were gone within an hour, the strollers were gone within minutes, all the school supplies and backpacks were gone within an hour and a half. And all the shoes found bare feet to protect. We had so much to give and it did not even come close to what was needed.

I had been assigned to hand the bags of groceries to people that had a ticket for one. When we ran out of gro-

ceries and began handing out loaves and fishes, you could see disappointment in some of their eyes, but the smiles never left any of their faces. I am not an emotional man usually; it was one of the most beautiful things that I have had the pleasure to be part of. It was also one of the most tragic things that I have ever seen. Many of these women and children had been waiting for as much as a day and a half

in the heat with little or no protection.

We take our quality of life for granted, we take running water, air conditioning and food for granted. It was humbling. I could go on and on. The experience affected me that much.

Thank you for allowing me to be part of this mission; I will continue to help where I can.

John Hammond

My First Trip With Mission to Mexico

By Laura Cavazos
Austin TX

My mission trip to Nuevo Laredo was quite an unforgettable experience. I had never heard of the MTM until Joe Mandy invited my friend and I several weeks ago. At first I was dubious about going to Nuevo Laredo because of the city's high crime rate and not to mention, the high temperatures that we had been having in the past several weeks. I was trying to put it off until the fall, because I thought that by then, the temperatures would drop. After seeing some of the pictures that Joe emailed me, I was curious and I decided to stop making excuses and join the rest of the volunteers. The next thing I know, my friend and I were trying to catch up to Joe on IH-35 to Laredo.

We were up at 6 am and by 6:30

we were eating breakfast with the rest of the volunteers. I had never felt such a warm welcome like I did when I met the MTM volunteers on Saturday morning. It was like a big family reunion at the hotel lobby. We left at 7:15 am from the lobby and arrived in Nuevo Laredo in less than 20 minutes. I was assigned to the measuring station for the children's school shoes. It was impressive how Rachel had a system set up to facilitate the distribution of the shoes. The line seemed endless and I thought it was going to take all morning to get everybody's feet measured. Amazingly, it only took a couple of hours or at least that is what it felt like! It was so nice to see the children's faces lit up once they got their shoe size



written on their little hands. In the entire time that I was there, I never heard anyone complain of how hot or tired they were from waiting in line for so many hours just to get their feet measured. God bless them for having such patience. The day proceeded with the distribution of the backpacks, groceries and Shannon's teen group meeting. By 4 pm, we were ready to leave the colonia.

Overall, I feel very blessed to get invited to the MTM by Joe and hope to continue this amazing journey that Rachel has started. God Bless all of the volunteers who put all of their time and work to make this mission possible!

Laura Cavazos

Girl Power!

By Shannon Donahue
St. Austin, Austin TX

For the past two years or so, I've had the unique opportunity to get to know some of the teenage girls at our colonia. During each trip, a group of about 40 young women participate in discussions, "prayer partner" exercises, and other activities. Of the ladies who've been involved in the group consistently, Viviana has always stood out as a special person. As one of the senior members, she sets an example of quiet servitude by volunteering to assist with

tasks, even before being asked to do so. As the eldest of four siblings, she has demonstrated dedication to her family by choosing to delay her further schooling after high school in order to help care for her ill mother.

Thankfully, Viviana's choices of duty and sacrifice have led her to what promises to be a rewarding path: she's going to college! In June, she shared the good news with me that both she

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Edith, Shannon Donahue and Viviana

Girl Power! (Continued from page 4)

and her sister, Edith, who is one year younger, will be attending Universidad Tecnológica (Technological University) in Nuevo Laredo. They'll both be studying "aduanas" (customs), presumably to pursue work as customs agents. In a community where many struggle to find work in factories and other labor-intensive jobs, it seems likely that Viviana and Edith's career choice will allow them to secure higher wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. I am overjoyed that these young ladies will be able to further develop their talents of intelligence and leadership by attending college!

As supporters of MTM, each of you has played a role in planting the seeds that influenced their decision to pursue higher education. Your financial contributions enable us to provide 40 young

women with a bag of hygiene items on each trip. The connection that these items have to education is more direct than you might imagine! One young woman once confided in me that she often used to miss school due to lack of feminine products. In addition to this material support, the opportunity to meet as a group every other month allows these ladies to grow in community with one another. It is my great hope that the friendships built among them will foster long-standing relationships to help them work together as leaders of their community. Our support helps to bring the light of God's love to each of these young women, and in turn, they radiate that light to others.

Viviana and Edith requested that I pass on their words of gratitude,



Edith and Viviana

"¡Muchísimas gracias!" (many thanks) for the special backpacks containing materials needed for college that they proudly received this August. More importantly than the school supplies, they each carry a sense of empowerment that is a symbol of hope for the colonia.

Shannon Donahue

Thoughts On My Second MTM Trip

By Joe Sigel
St. John Neumann, Austin TX

So what was my second MTM trip (August) like? Before we left, Rachel asked me to be the "official" photographer. Why me? I don't know. I even had to go out and buy a camera. But let me tell you that being the photographer, turned out to be a wonderful experience. There were specific shots that Queen Rachel wanted, such as photos of each of the children (about 80) who were receiving uniforms (as well as shoes and backpacks). These photos are to be used to recruit sponsors here in Austin for the kids. I found shooting their pictures a really fun experience, seeing the so-cute yet bewildered expressions on their faces as we sat them down in our makeshift "studio" (folding chair in front of a blue fold-up screen with 2 digit numbers hanging from push pins—hey it worked). I really wondered what was going through their curious, imaginative minds as all this was happening—and



happening VERY quickly. We got most kids to smile as you could tell they thought that, whatever it was, it was fun, cool and different. A few were scared, but their moms were not far away.

The second group of required photos was of the "houses" where these kids live with their parents—all around the neighborhood near the church. This sojourn of mine through the "streets" (thank God it wasn't raining like when eight of us went down in mid July to measure for shoes and uniforms—what a sticky mess that was) around the church led to a lot of posing and even more curiosity from parents and kids. You can see when you view the Picasa website

<http://picasaweb.google.com/missiontomexico1> with the pictures that the conditions are very poor, very basic.



Maybe it is a roof over their heads, but none of the houses appeared rain-proof or secure. Many have no doors, and windows are rare. I hate to think how cold it gets in the winter in these plywood and tin homes, Of course they are all just one room—one small room at that. I was invited into one and I found a very neat, organized setup with a small stove, a food and utensil cupboard, a bed—one bed—and a few old chairs. No running water. No toilet. No heat. Nonetheless, I saw happy people.

After that I got to roam around during the weekend taking pictures of the hundreds of people that had been waiting in line for days before we arrived. Patience and fortitude are two virtues these people have learned very well. Our modern American society doesn't even understand, let alone value, such virtues.

Next came taking pictures of the kids getting their shoe sizes measured—

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Thoughts On My Second MTM Trip *(Continued from page 5)*

probably about 1,000 kids' feet measured in two hours, thanks to great planning on Melanie Fannin and her crew's part.

Some of my favorite shots were in the clinic watching our three—yes three—doctors and two nurses see over 150 patients on Saturday morning. I got some candid shots of the kids as they played and waited. I guess there are “hams” everywhere.

Random thoughts: Though still a rookie (but not a newbie), I didn't get lost once, and was able to find the church without help. Driving into or around Nuevo Laredo was just no problem at all. If you have not volunteered yet, just do it. If you can't get off work on a Friday, then come Friday evening—many people (the majority)—do. You don't even have to drive. There are lots of other people driving that will be happy to take you. The best part of the trip: Seeing the faces of

so many people that are so thankful for what we are doing. The worst part of the trip: waiting at the border to cross back, but even that's not so bad if you use the Colombia Bridge. Typically a 15 minute wait. And if you think that it's all work and no play...well, Friday evening around the pool at the hotel drinking wine was just the relaxation and camaraderie we needed. Hasta la vista.

Joe Sigel

Our First With Mission To Mexico

By Dr. Terry Irwin
San Marcos, TX

I was asked to write a few words about our impressions of the recent Mission to Mexico trip we participated in the first weekend in August. My husband and I have participated in several medical mission trips with other groups previously, but this was our first trip with MTM. Our initial impression, which kept recurring over the course of the weekend, was how amazingly well organized and efficient this mission was. My husband, a family physician, my two older sons, 7- and 9-year old, and myself, an Obstetrician-Gynecologist, attended the mission trip. My husband and I find it very important to include our children as part of missionary work, for several reasons: to have time with them and teach them important principals in life, but primarily, to expose them to those who are much less fortunate

than us. We hope that this will give them an appreciation for not only what they have, but for the hard work others have to go through to have the very simple things that we take for granted. There is so much more to be learned from others by being around them. We can describe other societies that are less fortunate, but there is no better explanation than actually seeing what is being described. Although this was a short trip, it accomplished A LOT. It was hard work, but so very fulfilling. What made this work so special was hearing the comments that our boys had to say. On the first day of the trip, when the hard, hot work of preparation was being done, the boys were a little less than enthusiastic. On the second day, however, when the patients were being seen and the school

supplies and food staples for the families were being distributed, the importance of the work became apparent to them, and the comments changed. One such comment was, “Mommy, did you notice the smile on that little girl's face when you handed her the backpack!” and, “I am glad we are doing this.”

What is truly most impressive is the great work, organization, and dedication of those who have organized this incredible gift of God. It is truly an amazing present that these missionary leaders have not only given the people of Nuevo Laredo, but also to those of us, who benefit from the genuinely good feeling of being able to give of ourselves.

Dr. Terry Irwin

MTM Newsletter—

Do you want to add someone to the *MTM Newsletter* list, have you changed your e-mail or mailing address, or, are you having difficulty receiving the newsletter?

Notify **Jeanette Terrell**—jeanetteterrrell@austin.rr.com,
512 444-3179(home) or 512 426-4363(cell)



October 3-4 Mission to Mexico Trip

Are you planning to be a volunteer on the October 3-4 MTM trip?

Please notify **Rachel Fannin** or **Kelly Contois** at least one week prior to the mission weekend, that is, no later than Friday, September 26. It is vital to know ahead of time how many volunteers to count on for the weekend, so that mission activities can be planned for Friday and Saturday. It is very important to know if you are willing to help haul “love cargo.”

Rachel Fannin—(512) 288-1621 or
rfannin@austin.rr.com

Kelly Contois—(512) 291-1623 or
rkcontois@sbcglobal.net

Budget-minded? Share a Room!

We try to keep your expenses down to a minimum by making arrangements for you to share a room with other volunteers if you request it.

Please work out details regarding roommate(s) and payment arrangements when requesting a hotel room reservation with **Kelly Contois**.

Riding Back to Austin—

In the interest of not leaving anybody behind in Laredo, we try to keep track of who is riding back to Austin with whom. Please let Rachel Fannin know who you are riding back with.

Want a room reserved at Marriott's SpringHill Suites at MTM's special church group rate?

Marriott's SpringHill Suites group rate is \$70 per room—2 beds, sleeper/sofa, refrigerator, microwave, continental breakfast, etc.—no limit on guests per room. Notify **Kelly Contois** no later than Monday, September 29 (preferably prior to that date), if you want a room reserved at MTM's group rate.



Driving directions to Marriott's SpringHill Suites:

I-35 south to city of Laredo; take exit 4, stay on I-35 access road/San Bernardo AVE. The hotel is next to Golden Corral.

Address: 5940 San Bernardo AVE, Laredo TX
Phone: (956) 717-0800

Late arrival, after 10 p.m.?

Notify **Marriott's SpringHill Suites Hotel** directly at (956) 717-0800; request to HOLD your room.

Cancellation of hotel reservation—

If cancellation is necessary (for whatever reason), notify **Kelly Contois AND Marriott's SpringHill Suites Hotel** (956) 717-0800 and request to CANCEL your room reservation.

What to bring with you -

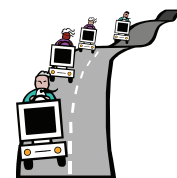
VOLUNTEERS please bring these personal items with you for Friday and/or Saturday:

- Bring enough drinking water and a sack lunch for Friday and/or Saturday to be consumed while at the colonia.
- Sunscreen.
- Comfortable clothing, shoes, cap, hat, etc.
- If you are riding with someone else, bring money to help pay for gas.
- Legal document(s) for border crossing purposes (passport, photo ID, driver's license, birth certificate, etc.). Check for details and updated information on the website for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security at:

<http://www.dhs.gov/xtrlsec/crossingborders/>

Transporting Supplies & “Love Cargo”

FRIDAY — Those volunteers who will be helping to transport supplies to Mexico on Friday morning, please be at St. Catherine's parking lot (near garage area) by **7:30 a.m.** on Friday, October 3 to load the vehicles (cars, trucks, SUVs, vans, trailers, etc.). We will be leaving for Laredo as soon as vehicles are loaded. Thanks.



Rachel