

March 2008



ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AUSTIN, TEXAS

# Mission to Mexico News

## April Focus: Shoes and Socks

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

When we arrived on Friday afternoon, people were lined up in anticipation of our coming to help. By distribution time on Saturday, there were over 2,000 people in line. School supplies were distributed to over 600 children; groceries were given to about 600 families. Our volunteers made 1,500 sack lunches to give out, but it was not enough—we ran out early. Our baby department distributed baby diapers, some strollers and clothes to about 300 moms and babies.

Fortunately, we had two doctors with our group, Dr. Bill Stavinoha and Dr. David Joseph. Along with a few volunteers, they set up the clinic and helped many people that would not have been able to afford medical at-

tention and medications.

We distributed lots of “loaves and fishes” to those who were not able to receive groceries. Almost all of our brothers and sisters went away with

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### April Special Needs

- CASH donations
- Shoes (all sizes)
- Socks (all sizes)
- VOLUNTEERS for April mission trip & their vehicles to haul the “love cargo”—especially on Friday morning
- Bikes
- Baby clothes
- Baby strollers
- Medical items *(see page 2)*

#### *How may I contact Rachel Fannin?*

Phone: (512) 288-1621

Email: rfannin@austin.rr.com

#### Hotel Reservations

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### Mission to Mexico Future Trip Dates

**April 4-5, 2008**

**June 6-7, 2008**

**August 1-2, 2008**

**October 3-4, 2008**

**December 5-6, 2008**

## April Focus: Shoes and Socks *(continued from page 1)*

something. Thank God.

Mike Gwynn replaced his carpeting in his home and wanted to donate it to the folks in the colonia. He cut the used carpet in small sections, rolled and tied it up for easy transporting. It was given away to many very happy recipients, many of them young teenage boys. It was a great gift since some of the families still have dirt floors in their homes. Mike, thank you; it was a great idea!

Only 11 volunteers were on the roster one week before the trip. The



Fr. Oliver Johnson, retired St. Catherine of Siena pastor distributes school supplies to the children.

word went out to our MTM community and volunteers responded—48 volunteers were present to serve our brothers and sisters in the colonia.

Father Oliver was one of those who stepped forward to join us, and he did some recruiting too. I appreciate his support of our ministry, and the love he expresses to the people in the colonia.

Special thanks to all who gave of their time, talent and treasure for our February mission. What a blessing our volunteers are! GRACIAS!!!

The focus for our next trip will be “SHOES and SOCKS”.

NOTICE—It is getting more difficult for us to handle sorting, transporting and distributing clothes. We never seem to have enough volunteers to handle this huge task. Other than baby clothes and until further notice, we will *not* accept clothing donations for distribution in the colonia. Thank you for under-

standing and for your support.

Please consider volunteering for our April mission trip. We are always in need of volunteers to help drive our “love cargo”. Many hands make work light! Please pray for our mission and especially pray for the people in the colonia.

Amor y Paz,

*Rachel*

### April Medical Needs

- **Vitamins (children, pregnant women and adults)**
- **Advil, Tylenol (children and adults)**
- **Pepto-Bismol or equivalent**
- **Antibiotics (children and adult)**
- **Cough drops**
- **Neosporin**
- **Antacids (Tums or Mylanta)**
- **Medicine for stomach aches for babies and toddlers**

## It's Not What Can I Do...

By Katie Muzos  
Oak Hill United Methodist Church, Austin, TX

This February Mission to Mexico was my second time to travel down to Nuevo Laredo with the team. My first trip had been August 2007 and I knew that I would be back again. It was something about those whom we served. It was also something about the people who were on the team. I felt called to return and looked forward to another trip.

A lot of work was done on Friday afternoon, our first day, as we prepared and organized for the following day. School supplies and clothing were sorted into bags. Medical supplies were set up. Tables and tents were put together.

Food was unloaded from trucks. We were getting everything ready to be distributed.

It was after we got back to the hotel Friday night that I began to think about what I could *really* do to help my neighbors who were in need—neighbors who started standing in line on Friday in order to receive on Saturday. What could *I*, a 24-year old, really do to improve the wellbeing of those who seemed to be hurting so much?

As I reflected on this, I was reminded and comforted to know that it's not about what *I* can do, but what God can do *through* me. I was reminded that we are instruments in

God's hands and that God moves through us. He moves through each of us in different ways. On our trip, some of us were able to connect with those we were serving by conversing in Spanish. Others of us were simply able to offer a warm smile. We were all able to show love and compassion to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ through our actions. We don't always know or understand the good that comes from serving others, but God does. He can work through all of us. If we are willing, He is able.

*Katie Muzos*

# Reflection From First-time MTM Volunteer

By Deborah Thompson  
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX

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The February trip to the colonia was my first experience with the MTM group. I can't remember when I have ever felt so drawn to participate in something outside of myself. I feel very blessed that I listened to the voice in my head that kept telling me to call and volunteer.

I felt the spiritual energy before I ever arrived at Nuevo Laredo. I knew I had to prepare my heart for what I would experience. Seeing the faces of the children and aged, my heart opened to a much greater cause. The memory of the people and the events of that day lingered with me long after the trip ended. Having witnessed true humility, I came away with a softer heart, I felt calmer and more present than I can ever remember and less distracted with my insignificant struggles.

During the first day of preparation I was not sure where I would be

needed, but it all fell into place as the many seasoned volunteers made their way around and gave me direction. There was this amazing organization! Everyone knew what needed to be done and there was a lot to do. There were clothes, blankets, school supplies and food everywhere, thanks to the generous donations. All the volunteers were so gracious, kind and willing to answer my many questions. As the people, who had lined up many, many hours before, came through the gate, I felt nervous. I do not speak much Spanish, but it soon became apparent how accepting and grateful they were. The excited children were anxiously awaiting their much needed school supplies. Young mothers with their babies received food, clothing, diapers and hopefully a stroller to help carry it all. The elderly were so humble and yet smiling to hide their obvious

weariness. There was such a feeling of community as family after family was served. However, the abundance finally ran out and several children and adults passed quietly, still smiling, never expecting more than what was left. The children who had seen the others receive their donation, had to go without on this mission trip. It broke my heart to know there could be more—there should be enough. No one should be turned away. There is such a need and we could all be more generous.

I pray more people will listen to their hearts and come out to help next mission trip. The more volunteers, the more people we can serve. We all have so many gifts to share, and it is such a small task with life changing rewards.

*Deborah Thompson*

## MTM Is Alive and Well

By Andrew Gallo  
St. Austin, Austin TX

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It had been about seven years since the last time I participated in a Mission to Mexico trip. Back then, my son, Grant, was about nine years old, and we attended Mass at St. Catherine's. Subsequently, Grant began attending St. Austin Catholic School and, as a result, we began attending Mass at St. Austin. Recently, I began thinking about the MTM group again and visited St. Catherine's web site to see if the MTM trips still occur. Much to my delight, I found that the ministry is alive and well at St. Catherine's. After a few quick emails, I was set up to participate in the February trip. This time, Grant (now 16) and my

daughter, Gabrielle (11), would join me on the trip.

After school on Friday, I packed up the kids and a few belongings and headed to Laredo. Early on Saturday morning, we met up with the MTM group for breakfast and a short prayer before heading across the border. When we arrived at the church near Nuevo Laredo in Mexico, I was surprised to see that much of the area had changed. Although the small, tin-roofed church was essentially the same as the last time I attended, the surrounding area seemed to have improved somewhat. A large (albeit modest)

apartment complex was nearby, as was a small school. Otherwise, the small "houses" in the area looked the same. (I'm reluctant to call them "houses" because most of them are made of plywood, shipping pallets, cinderblocks and scrap wood).

Rachel put us to work as soon as we arrived—setting up tables, moving supplies, loading sacks of groceries and toiletries to distribute later in the day and, finally, preparing 1,500 sack lunches for the children of the area. My children worked hard—lifting boxes, moving

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## MTM Is Alive and Well *(continued from page 3)*

furniture, setting up chairs and, basically, doing whatever was asked. As a Dad, it made me very proud to see the children's willingness to chip in wherever needed. Several other youngsters participated in the trip, and all of them performed admirably.

Shortly before noon, I gazed outside the fence to catch a look at the clients waiting for the gates to open. The line was between one-half and one mile long. Most of the people were in line and waiting for us when we first arrived at about 8:00 a.m. I have no idea when they began lining up. A short time later, we opened the gates and the long line of clients began entering the church compound. There were ladies (and some VERY young girls) with babies. They went

into the church to go "shopping" for diapers, clothes and other family items. A separate line—of children—went to the area where the sack lunches were served. They also received school supplies. The third line went to the "groceries" area where people received a sack full of rice, beans, flour, oil and toiletries. Finally, after several hours, the lines began to dwindle and, ultimately, we ran out of supplies and closed the gates.

At the end of the day, after cleaning up the church compound, everyone was exhausted. But, it's a **good** kind of exhausted. In the years since my last mission trip, I had forgotten how uplifting and special it felt at the end of the day after

working so hard. It always feels a little better when you are doing God's work!

When we were packing up and preparing to return to Austin, I asked Gabrielle what she thought of her first MTM trip. She excitedly exclaimed, "I want to come on every trip from now on!" I couldn't agree with her more.

The MTM slogan comes from Matthew's Gospel, "When you did this for the least of my brothers, you did it for me." Matthew 25:39-40. There's no doubt that each of the MTM volunteers lives that Gospel on the first weekend of every other month.

**Andrew Gallo**

## Why I Go

By Ken Mahler  
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX

As an MTM volunteer I am a relative newcomer. Many in this ministry have been involved for years, giving of themselves joyfully time after time, and dedicated to the hard work at hand. My 'calling' was not unlike others that I have read or heard about. I was in the right place at the right time when it was mentioned that for this next particular trip we were short-handed and needed help. That was my invitation. It was my turn—loud and clear. How could I refuse?

There was the initial shock on my first trip. How can people live like this? I thought I was no stranger to hard-times, but witnessed poverty only from a distance. Here are the poorest of the poor—the young, the old, mostly families led by young women with their babies. No money, few belongings, houses made of cinderblocks, scraps of sheet metal, and if lucky, a

few pieces of wood that would eventually be burned for heat on a cold night on their hard dirt floor.

Despite this lack of material necessities, I see no despair on their faces. Yes, I see hungry faces, babies with colds, girls with infants and expectant again, men and women with various ailments, but, there is hope written on their faces. That is what I see—hope, and that is what we provide.

We provide hope when we are consistent with our promise to re-

turn to bring them the food, blankets, fans, school supplies and medicine that they need. We provide hope when they know they are not forgotten. We provide hope when they know we see them as equal children of God who happen to have more wealth than them because of a different blessing. An unspoken mysterious reciprocity exists between the 'givers' and 'receivers;' that is why I go.

**Ken Mahler**

### ***Mission to Mexico News***

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

Notify **Jeanette Terrell**: jeanetteterrell@austin.rr.com

512 444-3179 (home) or 512 426-4363 (cell)

# Come To See, To Taste, To Feel...

By Anne Muzos  
Oak Hill United Methodist Church, Austin TX

Entering Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, with my husband, Steve and our interpreter, Shannon in June 2007 was an exciting moment. Filled with a little trepidation, but anxious to see what the colonia would be like, I immediately took in the busy streets, the shops and vendors, and the bright colors of the town. We had been to Nuevo Laredo before with our children, but this was different—now we were entering to serve and give to others, not to be waited on, barter, and shop.

We distributed new box fans to families who lived there, as well as baby items, bags of groceries, and sack lunches. Little did I know that when we left, I would be feeling such gratitude that God had allowed me this opportunity to be a servant—to give, rather than to receive.

Our next opportunity to participate was in August 2007 with our 24-year-old daughter, Katie. Children of the community eagerly ac-

cepted shoes, and backpacks that were filled with school supplies—a necessity for them to be able to attend school. Katie and I returned again in February 2008 to work with a very excellent team of volunteers, that also included our good friend, Richard, who lives in Laredo. It's addictive! On this trip, St. Catherine's volunteers once again distributed school supplies so the children could continue with their education.

We all knew we would be returning yet again; often there are too few hands and the need is so great. Perhaps the need was for us to be humbled and serve our fellow Christians more than it was for the very grateful residents of the colonia to receive our offerings to them.

The April 2008 Mission to Mexico trip is already written into our calendar. In touching base with Richard, he was so moved by his experience and the good that is be-

ing done in the colonia that he, his wife and his son will join us on the April trip. I invite others to come, to see, to taste, to feel, and to be humbled.

*Anne Muzos*

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



Checks can be made out to:

**"Mission to Mexico"**

St. Catherine of Siena

4800 Convict Hill Road

Austin, TX 78749-2202



**Website**—Check the Mission to Mexico website at [www.stcatherine-austin.org](http://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."

## Passport Will Be Required!

Jeanette Terrell  
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX



Eventually, travel by land between Texas and Mexico **WILL REQUIRE A PASSPORT**. That means MTM volunteers participating on mission trips **WILL NEED A PASSPORT!** This includes all adults and children.

Currently, for land travel between Texas and Mexico, adults must have a passport *or* a government-issued photo ID, such as a driver's license, plus documented proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate. (Oral declaration of citizenship is NOT accept-

able.) Children (ages 18 and younger) must have a passport *or* proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate.

Soon (depending on the government), a passport will be the requirement for adults and children.

Please check for details and updated information on the website for the U.S. Department of State at <http://www.dhs.gov/xtrvlsec/>

*Jeanette Terrell*

# April 4 & 5 Mission to Mexico Trip

## **Are you planning to be a volunteer on the April 4 & 5 MTM trip?**

Please notify **Rachel Fannin** or **Kelly Contois** at least one week prior to the mission weekend, that is, no later than Friday, March 28. 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, March 31 (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.



## **Transporting Supplies & “Love Cargo”**

**THURSDAY** — Those volunteers who are unable to load their vehicle at 7:30 a.m. on Friday, April 4, and want to assist with transporting “love cargo,” may load their vehicle on Thursday, April 3. Please make arrangements (where & when) with Rachel, phone 288-1621 or rfannin@austin.rr.com.

**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, April 4 to load the vehicles (cars, trucks, SUVs, vans, trailers, etc.). We will be leaving for Laredo as soon as vehicles are loaded. Thanks.



*Rachel*