

January 2009



ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA CATHOLIC CHURCH
AUSTIN, TEXAS

Mission to Mexico News

Christmas In the Colonia

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

As we all prepare for Christmas, we try to make our December mission trip a festive one in hopes of bringing joy to our brothers and sisters in the colonia. With Christmas music playing throughout the day, over 100 volunteers worked tirelessly preparing for a huge distribution. Joe Mandy, aka Santa, distributed toys to over 1,500 very happy and excited kids. Over 300 babies received diapers, blankets and clothes; 1,000+ adults received blankets; 3,000 sack lunches were given to each man, woman and child. 900 families went home with

a dispensa bag filled with rice, beans, oil, flour and soap. Others

(continued on page 2)

February Special Needs

- CASH donations
- VOLUNTEERS for February mission trip
- Vehicles and drivers to haul the "love cargo"—especially on Friday morning
- Blankets
- Coats—all sizes
- Baby clothes, baby blankets & other baby items
- Strollers
- Men's work gloves
- Small lunch coolers
- Small water jugs

How do I make
HOTEL RESERVATIONS?
What should I bring with me?
See page 5 & 6

Inside this issue:

Christmas In the Colonia	1 & 2
<i>By Rachel Fannin</i>	
Christmas Celebration In the Colonia	2
<i>By Melanie Fannin</i>	
Dáselo a Diós/ Give It To God	3
<i>By Shannon Donahue</i>	
Teresa's Mission Experience	3
<i>By Teresa Aguirre</i>	
It Was My Time	4
<i>By Mileyva Ortiz</i>	
Sponsorship Update	4 & 5
<i>By Melanie Fannin</i>	
Interviews With Sponsored Children	5
<i>By Melanie Fannin</i>	
February 6-7 Mission to Mexico Trip	5 & 6

Mission to Mexico Future Trip Dates

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

Christmas In the Colonia *(continued from page 1)*

received “loaves & fishes”, bags filled with clothes and other goodies.

We were blessed to have 3 doctors and several nurses give medical attention to about 300 patients.

How may I contact

Rachel Fannin?

(512) 288-1621

or

rfannin@austin.rr.com

I had a great time and I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to work with such wonderful volunteers. “Thank you,” volunteers! You gave so generously of your time, talent and treasure so that our friends in the colonia might have a happy Christmas.

Special thanks to our financial supporters; we could not do this without you. God bless you all!

I want to thank everyone that helped make our December 13th fundraiser a huge success. Special thanks go to the volunteers that

helped prepare our delicious meal, to the Knights of Columbus Council 8156 for serving, set-up and clean-up. The Raffle was a hit and a big moneymaker. GRACIAS to all of the ministries that helped fund our raffle items.

See you on our next mission trip February 6-7. The focus for our trip is to distribute school supplies to the children to help them finish the school year.

Amor y Paz,

Rachel

A Christmas Celebration In the Colonia

By Melanie Fannin
Austin TX

On Friday afternoon, December 6, an unusual sight was evident on the basketball court at the colonia; a table bedecked in red and green with garlands draped lazily around its edges with a poinsettia gracing its center. The table was laden with cookies and glasses filled with lemonade (alas the instant kind) and plates and napkins emblazoned with images of Santa. Chairs were set out awaiting the guests who were anxiously lining up outside the gates of the churchyard. Excitement was evident on the faces of the sponsored children who were arriving with their mothers for a surprise Christmas celebration.

As soon as everyone checked in and received refreshments, Rachel took the opportunity to speak to them about the goals of our sponsorship program—particularly, the importance of education. To reinforce our message, our Spanish speaking volunteers interviewed each child and their mother about how their school situation is going this year, and what their needs are so that we may help ensure that they complete their course of study. As the students waited to be interviewed, a group of volunteers helped them select a special Christmas gift for their mothers from jewelry donated just for that purpose. The children were so thrilled to be

able to give their Moms such a special gift, particularly because it was so unexpected, and the Moms were both surprised and delighted to receive it.



As the party ended, the guests' faces radiated joy as each child received either a pair of gloves or socks as a Christmas gift from their sponsors. They said that they had not had an opportunity to attend such a party before and were grateful for the experience. “Gracias” echoed throughout the parking lot as they departed with a promise to return the first Friday in February for the next sponsorship activity. The volunteers received a wonderful gift in return—the true spirit of Christmas—love for our fellow man.

Melanie Fannin

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.”

Dáselo a Diós/Give It To God

Shannon Donahue
St. Austin, Austin TX

Several weeks prior to the December 6-7 mission trip, I had met with other volunteers to brainstorm activities and topics of discussion. As the mission weekend approached, I was feeling uncharacteristically prepared for my gathering with the Young Ladies Group. That's until I arrived at my hotel room in Laredo and realized that the copies with scripture passages in Spanish were back in Austin...so much for my plan!

To complicate matters, my hoarse voice quickly disintegrated into no voice at all—it was completely gone by Saturday morning. How would I lead a discussion group of over 40 young women when I could barely whisper? In the midst of my frustration, I tried to remind myself that God must have a better plan...but what?

With the assistance of some young ladies from the San Marcos youth group, we divided the 47 young women from the *colonia* into

four smaller groups to promote discussion. I called (whispered) forward one person from each group and asked that they serve as a facilitator for their group. After explaining a revised version of my plan for topics of discussion (the outcome of the U.S. presidential election and the significance of Christmas), the facilitators returned to lead their groups. Unable to contribute verbally to the activity, I floated between groups to listen. What I heard made me so proud! Not only did I observe intelligent comments made about the U.S. President-elect, but I witnessed budding leaders in action. The facilitators successfully kept their peers on topic, mediated turn-taking, prompted input from shy participants, and did an overall fantastic job at their task.

It was then that I became convinced that God did indeed have a higher plan than mine. Through my temporary disability, He allowed me to see the capabilities of these tal-

ented teenagers. Most importantly, He provided an opportunity for future leaders to practice their skills. And personally, I learned that although preparation is helpful, it's necessary to leave room for divine direction.

In addition, I was able (via a "human microphone") to share with the young ladies that nearly all of them had been "adopted" by a sponsor. I explained that these sponsors not only contributed monetary support, but also had received their photographs and would be praying for them. Their smiles at this announcement were followed by a hush as they seemed to absorb this idea that foreigners cared so deeply about them as individuals.

Thanks to all sponsors for your commitment to the youth of the *colonia*—I am certain that it is a worthwhile investment.

Shannon Donahue

Teresa's Mission Experience

Teresa Aguirre

I can't wait to go back! I want to talk more with the kids, the families (after brushing up on my Spanish, that is). What little I could communicate, I had such fun talking and joking around with them. I stood at the front of the distribution line the whole afternoon and watched every single person come through....To live in the conditions that they do, and to still have a smile on their face was beyond remarkable. I get grumpy if I can't shower for more than a day, or wash my car when it gets dusty, or have to lug my clothes

to a laundry mat, or if I'm too cold or too hot or hungry....I feel unbelievably ridiculous complaining about these things now.

Thank you, Celinda, for having that article in the agency newsletter and answering all my pre-travel questions.

Thank you, Rachel, for starting this Mission to Mexico ministry all those years ago for these beautiful people.

I created a montage online at onetruemedia.com. Click on the link below to see it. You don't need to have an account.

May all God's peace be upon you.

Teresa Aguirre

[See Mission to Mexico 12/6/08 online.](#)

It Was My Time

Mileyva Ortiz

Amid unpaved roads, dust filled air, in an overlooked corner of our neighbor, Mexico, shine the smiles of hundreds of children and their families that gather every two months to receive gifts—gifts of necessity: food, medical care, clothing (just to name a few). Also, the gift of recognition; that there are individuals that see, know, and want to make lives in Nuevo Laredo just a little better, a little brighter.

The first weekend of December was my first experience in sharing my strength to help others in need. For some time I have been craving to be able to do something, to belong to something, to enrich my life with experiences outside of home. I had come across information about St. Catherine's Mission To Mexico

community over the internet while working back in September. There was not one doubt in my mind as I read over the volunteer brochure that I could not do this.

It was my time to sacrifice my material needs to help someone else. And, I did just that. In one day I had helped feed over 3,000 people. I had helped bag, what seemed like an endless sea of toys for the children that were going to walk through the gate the next day. I even got a hug and a kiss from a young boy who I carried through the line to see Santa Claus. This was what I felt life should be about. This was the experience I had been searching for. I even made a few friends in the process. No, not friends—I was welcomed into a fam-

ily of many different colors, backgrounds, you name it.

I knew that working as a volunteer for the Mission To Mexico group was only a small taste of the poverty spreading all over the globe, but, to save the world, you have to take it one life at a time. I know I will be joining and continuing these trips for as long as I am here in Texas.

I hope other parishes, other communities, the country, and the world will one day see and take, as an example, to follow what this fantastic group of people have achieved. More so, I pray that more young persons, like my self, will see and feel a call to help as well.

Mileyva Ortiz

Sponsorship Update

By Melanie Fannin
Austin TX

Our sponsorship program is surpassing our grandest expectations! We currently have sponsors for 34 Seniors and 137 school aged children.

To date we have provided the Seniors with a winter jacket, blanket, groceries and nonprescription drugs as well as a winter scarf and a Christmas gift.

The school aged children have received a winter coat, shoes, school supplies, and in the case of those children who were part of the initial sponsorship program, a school uniform. All 137 of the children will receive a school uniform in August that will include shoes and a backpack filled with school supplies. And, each child also received a Christmas gift.

At our December Mission trip we took the opportunity to interview the students and their moms to assess how things are going with their schooling. (See a sampling of related interviews on page 5) It was so gratifying to hear that, with the exception of two children who have health issues, they are regularly attending school and, for the most part, enjoy it. The interviews reinforced the importance of our school supplies program in that every child mentioned that they are in need of paper, pens and notebooks. That need will be met in February when we will be replenishing the school supplies, not only for the sponsored children, but also for over 1,000 other children in the Colonia.

We cannot adequately express

(continued on page 5)

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:**

jeanettetere@austin.rr.com
or
512 444-3179

Sponsorship Update *(continued from page 4)*

our thanks to the many members of our Mission community who stepped forward as sponsors. Many of you have received photos of your sponsored child(ren). For those of you who have not yet received a

photo, do not despair. We are in the process of rounding up the errant blue background photos and hope to have them out to you very soon. If you can't wait for the photo, join us for the February trip

and you may meet your child or Senior face to face! Either way, please know that your generosity is truly helping those who cannot help themselves.

Melanie Fannin

Interviews of Sponsored Children

By Melanie Fannin
Austin TX

Following is a sampling of recent interviews with five of the children in the sponsorship program:

Edna Yocary Gutierrez Martinez, #30. 12 years old, and attends 1st of Secondary school. She loves geography and wants to be a kindergarten teacher. She needs manila folders, backpack and notebook paper. She needs winter pants (uniform) and a jacket.



Andrea Medina, #66. Attends Octavio Paz (school), Monday thru Friday, 8 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., and is in the 1st grade. Teacher is Saul (male) and according to her progress report, is doing well in class; wants to be a doctor; likes all school subjects. She wants to continue school past this year. Needs colors, pencils, tablets.

Arturo Augustin Ortiz Amaya, #57. He attends 6th grade at Alberto J Arguella Asabej Arwayes school five days a week. His favorite subject is math. Currently, he is studying math, history, Spanish, English and geography. He needs pencils and notebooks. His progress report indicates "a bit low" in history, otherwise "good". He plans on continuing school (secondary) past this year. He wants to be a dentist.

Esteban Emanuel Moreno Cabrera, #47. He is a first grader in Primero de Primaria, San Augustine deLaredo school five days a week. His favorite subject is math and according to recent progress report, is "doing well". He needs uniforms, shirts and cold weather clothing. He plans to continue school after this year.

Julisa Crestal Moreno Cabrera, #8. She attends kindergarten at Archetecto Medina dela Rosa school five days a week. She states that

she likes all subjects; has difficulty, or yet to learn that she does not like something; likes to color. She cannot write her name and needs extra help in school—special education. She plans to continue school after this year.



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

February 6-7 Mission to Mexico Trip

Are you planning to be a volunteer on the February 6-7 MTM trip?

Please notify Rachel Fannin or Kelly Contois at least one week prior to the mission weekend, that is, no later than Friday, January 30. 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

February 6-7 Mission to Mexico Trip *(continued from page 5)*

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, February 2 (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 -

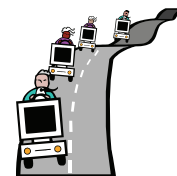
VOLUNTEERS please bring these personal items with you for Friday and/or Saturday:

- Bring enough drinking water and a sack lunch for Friday and/or Saturday to be consumed while at the colonia.
- Sunscreen.
- Comfortable clothing, shoes (preferably old, not sandals), 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/xtrvlsec/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, February 6 to load the vehicles (cars, trucks, SUVs, vans, trailers, etc.). We will be leaving for Laredo as soon as vehicles are loaded. Thanks.



Rachel

