



My Friend Mari

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

What I love about the mission is the relationships that I get to build and to enjoy the lovely people living in the colonia.

I met Mari several years ago. She was special from the first day, and I wanted to get to know her. Mari has the most beautiful eyes, a smile as big as Mexico, and a bigger heart. What also caught my attention was her offer to help the people from the colonia. She wanted to be a volunteer *like us* and give back to her community. She did become a *volunteer*. She became **Peggy Gornik's** assistant outside the fence, organizing the people in line and handing out tickets—the hardest job during our missions. A few years back, as I got to know her, I asked her where she lived. She invited me over to her home; she pointed toward her house, near the church in the colonia.

Her home is one of the shacks built from bits and pieces of things she

and her husband found on the landfill that the colonia sits on. She shares her home with her husband and young daughter—a one room, 10' x 10' with a dirt floor. It has no electricity, run-

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April Special Needs

- CASH donations
- VOLUNTEERS for April 3-4 mission trip
- Vehicles and drivers to haul the “love cargo”—especially on Friday morning
- Shoes, all sizes—please, no high heels
- Strollers
- Baby clothes
- Bikes
- Men’s work gloves
- Small coolers
- Deodorant
- Soap
- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Vitamins, children and adult
- Over the counter pain medications

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Mission to Mexico Future Trip Dates

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

My Friend Mari *(continued from page 1)*

ning water or sewer; it has a small outhouse. The roof was a piece of plastic. I could see the plastic blowing in the wind. When she pointed that out, my heart sank.

As soon as I walked in I could feel the love in her home. It was so clean and tidy. At some point in time, during one of our distributions of "loaves & fishes", she had been given some sheets and decorative pillows that, to my surprise, had come from *my* home. Both she and I cried when I told her that these had been mine. We embraced each other and were connected from that point on.

Last October Mari and her husband were forced to send their 8 year old daughter to live with her grandparents eight hours away. Mari has had medical issues this past year, and they could not afford to keep her with them. On our February trip, Mari announced to Peggy and me that she is expecting a child, and she and her husband were going to live with her parents and their daughter. Peggy and I will miss her very much.

Mari had told me that they were living at the border with hopes and dreams of a better life, but circumstances beyond their control have them making the decision of going back to find comfort and support from her family. She said that after the baby comes, they might return to the colonia. I hope and pray that they are moving back to a better situation and never have to return to the colonia. I know Mari will be happy to be with her daughter. I know that no matter what, she will be smiling and hopefully thinking of us fondly.

Amor y Paz,

Rachel

How may I contact

Rachel Fannin?

(512) 288-1621

or

rfannin@austin.rr.com

And she has more to say...

Thanks to the 68 wonderful volunteers who worked tirelessly throughout the weekend, February's mission trip was one of the smoothest trips we've had in some time. We were blessed to have 12 first-time volunteers join us. Hope you will join us again very soon. A special thanks to **Tony and Maria Carrillo** for taking care of getting the groceries ordered, purchased and delivered to the colonia. What a blessing that was for the volunteers on Friday. Hope to get them delivered every time.

Over 1,000 children received school supplies to help get them through the end of the school year. 2000 sack lunches, 600 bags of dispensa that included rice, beans, oil, flour and soap were distributed. When the dispensa bags were gone, about 300 large bags of "loaves & fishes" were distributed.

Our fine medical staff, led by **Dr. David Joseph** and several nurses, took care of the needs of over 200 of our brothers and sisters.

The baby department had an abundance of baby clothes. What a blessing!

February was the start of a new group—a young men's group modeled after **Shannon Donahue's** young ladies group. **Frank Maldonado** has volunteered to be the leader and mentor for 20 young men (ages 13 through 18).

Please pray for these young men and women as they face the same challenges that our teens (in the USA) are faced with, but under much harsher living conditions. God bless these 2 wonderful ministries within our larger ministry of serving our less fortunate brothers and sisters in the colonia.

Contributions to help purchase personal hygiene items (soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste and deodorant) for these teen boys and girls would be greatly appreciated. Make checks payable to Mission to Mexico, note "**teens**" on the check.

We are in need of a few more sponsors for some of Frank's young men. If you would like to become a sponsor, please contact me.

Our next mission trip is April 3rd and 4th; the focus for the trip is SHOES. Donations can be dropped in the MTM barrel in St. Catherine's Johnson Hall.

If you can join us on the mission please get in touch with Kelly Contois for your reservations (rkcontois@sbcglobal.net or 291-1623). We really need your help.

God bless you for all you do for MTM and please continue to pray for our ministry and for those we serve.

Rachel

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

How God Speaks To Us

David Joseph, M.D.
St. Theresa, Austin TX

I have to admit, I was irritated that he had squirmed into the group of people waiting at the medical clinic Saturday morning. After all, the line for the clinic had officially closed over one hour ago. It had been a busy morning for Joanna, Maria, Mary and me. Frank was doing a good job at crowd control, but the last little group of folks seemed to keep replenishing itself—like fishes and loaves!

He was wearing a vest that designated him as one of the *workers* which, I suppose, made him feel like he should be given special consideration. When I saw him let a frail elderly man go ahead of him, my thinking started to go soft. Finally, it was his turn.

Only his right eye worked, half of his teeth were missing, and his story went like this: he was out of

seizure medication and couldn't afford more. He really needed the stuff.

When he didn't take it, bad things happened, and when he took it, things went better. He had brought a bottle marked "Fenobarbital." With my translator's help, I finally understood that he only took two 100mg tablets a day.

Phenobarbital is an inexpensive epilepsy medication. Unfortunately, we didn't have any. He was very thankful when I explained that I would try to make sure that someone coming the next trip would have a supply of it. His expression of gratitude was so large and sincere that I felt bad about being angry with him initially. Here he was asking for so little despite needing so much—and being gracious about receiving nothing.

Anyway, I've been thinking about how God speaks to us in the most unexpected ways and from the people we least expect. It may be the last patient of the day, the first person we see in the morning or someone you're standing by at the grocery store. I guess we are all walking to Emmaus. I wonder if the disciples failed to recognize the Lord, not because he had changed in appearance, but because he was too familiar?

How amazing if these words by CS Lewis are one day experienced by us all: "When we see the face of God we shall know that we have always known it. He has been a party to, has made, sustained and moved moment by moment within, all our earthly experiences of innocent love."

Dr. David Joseph

My Trip To Mexico

Ella Clipper (Age: 7 years)
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX

It was a four hour ride to Mexico. When we got there, we had to unpack the medical supplies. I helped with the baby stuff. It was really fun. I put baby food in some bags and the next day I gave them to the mothers that came.

I made a lot of new friends. I saw a lot of smiles after they got their food and school stuff. It made me so happy to do such a nice thing for them. It made me smile too. I was tired on the way home.

Ella Clipper



Young volunteer, Ella Clipper helping Mary Elva fill bags of baby formula.

(Ella's mother, volunteer, **Bonnie Clipper**, added a note with the above photo of Ella packing baby formula. "She loved it and plans to go back in June with me.")

Website for Mission to Mexico

Check it out for more information on this ministry.

www.stcatherine-austin.org

Select **Community Ministries, Organizations**, and then **Mission To Mexico**

Information includes:

- **Video: See the Mission in Action"**
- **Recent Mission to Mexico trip photos**
- **Newbie Guide**

We Now Have a Young Men's Group

Frank Maldonado
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX

During our February MTM trip, we met with about 25 young men from the colonia—18 are registered and about 6 are sponsored.

One of the young men is Juan Sanchez, a college student, studying computer science. Juan is also a youth community leader with the church. He is currently working with and leading some of the young men in preparation for their conformation.

One young man is attending High School (Perpatoria) and the rest all were attending Middle School (Segundaria). All are attending school.

We introduced ourselves and spoke about our favorite thing or

things—our school grade level, our favorite subject in school, and our favorite sport. Like young men their age everywhere, all loved sports, mostly soccer (futbal), some aspect of school and the girls. School and their education were our main topics of discussion.

Visiting with these young men was like talking to young men everywhere. Their hopes and dreams were like the kids here in Austin. It was humbling in hearing these young men speak about their hopes and aspirations, about some day having a good job and driving a car. It was as if they did not live in poverty. Somehow we have to continue to keep those hopes and aspirations

alive.

One of our MTM volunteers met Luis, the young man she will be sponsoring. She will be providing him with school supplies, a uniform, a winter jacket, shoes and lots of encouragement.

We need more sponsors for these young men. Your support will go directly toward their education.

Education is the most powerful tool in helping to keep their dreams alive. We have to keep these young men in school and interested in their education. Education is one of the most powerful tools in breaking the poverty cycle.

Frank Maldonado

An Ode To the Mission To Mexico

By Martina Gehrke

Last November, when an email about the Mission to Mexico found its way into my mailbox, I wanted to contribute. Instead of sponsoring a boy to attend school, which is what the mail asked for, I decided to offer assistance by joining one of the trips to the colonia. Before I came to the US, I had spent some years in South America. I was familiar with the concept of assisting the less fortunate people in the Andes by giving away clothes and food—stuff that is easy to spare by us privileged. I had never offered my hands to work or the gift of time, and I am so glad I took the opportunity to being enriched with this experience.

We set out early on Friday morning with about twenty people, adults and children, in pickup trucks loaded with purchased school supplies, which was in line with the

theme of this trip. We also carried donated clothes, shoes and other supplies ranging from kitchen utensils, toys and blankets, to many more items for daily use. The food was to be bought on the Mexican side of the border—lots of food.

The border crossing was one of the easiest and safest imaginable. It took us about two minutes flat to pass through from Laredo to Nuevo Laredo. Back was just as easy, on both days. I did not expect that, I had seen totally different borders in South America.

In the colonia we did not waste any time. The trucks were unloaded and mountains of supplies were piling up in no time inside the shed/church. I do not know how exactly it happened, within minutes everybody seemed to make a meaningful contribution,

without being externally organized or controlled. While Rachel had a firm hold on the overall smoothness of the operation, by arranging the materials to be piled into their respective areas, general clothes here, baby stuff there, school supplies somewhere else, individual groups organized their areas. The aim for the rest of the day was to organize piles and fill bags with a cross selection of things that could be then given away to fit a family. I heard it then first: we would expect over 2,000 thousand people the next day. In fact, people were already lining up in the street for an event that was over 24 hours away. That was big. I realized that my efforts in the past were so pin-pointed compared to what was going on here.

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An Ode To the Mission To Mexico *(continued from page 4)*

Upon our return the next morning, the street was lined a good couple of blocks with people, most had waited overnight. Our own ranks had strengthened as well. We were now about forty people, as some had made the 4-hour journey from Austin later on Friday. With the school supplies and all the other giveaways already in bags, we concentrated on the grocery and lunch bags this morning—2,000 of each. I loved the teamwork and the calm and positive energy throughout the process. It was a joint effort, where young and old produced a whole that was so much more than the sum of its parts. Again, everyone quickly found their place. The veterans took the newbies under their wings,

all working together, working hard, chatting away and getting to know each other better. I felt welcomed and embraced by this crowd that I had never met before.

When the locals were eventually invited in, everything was organized—like towards an airline counter, one line led to primary school supplies, one to secondary, another to baby supplies. The main circuit allowed people to be handed their grocery bags (sugar, beans, oil, etc.) and lunch bags (bananas, hot dogs, sweets, etc.). It was incredibly orderly, the result of 12 years of perfecting the process.

Before handing out bags, I was involved in interviewing and registering prospective sponsees for the



Martina Gehrke with newly sponsored Uvaldo

school program. 80 have already found sponsors—well 81, as I decided to sponsor Uvaldo; surely, not because I needed a reason to come back to the colonia.

Martina Gehrke

How Much Work Just a Few People Can Do

By Rick Valdez
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX

My son Joey and I made our first MTM trip on February 6th and 7th. Our family has been parishioners at St. Catherine for many years and while we have contributed funds, clothing and toys to Mission to Mexico, up to now, we had never made a mission trip. We considered it, but thought that perhaps it wasn't a good idea, especially when our children were younger.

I was totally wrong. There is no better way to teach your children than by example. There were a few parishioners that brought their young children, and it was refreshing to see a smiling 4-year old placing school supplies in plastic bags. She made a *significant* contribution to the overall effort, and no doubt, she is learning the gospel message, first hand... "*For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink,*

a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me."

For the past few months, most of the news we see and hear is about decreased profit margins, layoffs, foreclosures, bailouts, greed and corruption. Perhaps the news is already so depressing that the news organizations don't bother telling us how the global crisis affects the poorest of the poor.

While we enjoyed a comfortable stay at the hotel in Laredo, Texas, little did I know that just on the other side of the Rio Grande river, people were lining up in the colonia outside the church to wait for the "dispensa"—beans, rice, flour, oil and soap. And after sleeping outside and waiting in line, I did not see anyone complaining. In

fact, I personally passed out the last lunch bag, and there were still people in line. That was probably the hardest part of the day for me, but it won't serve as a deterrent for making future trips. We were safe at all times, and best of all, we contributed to the overall effort of distributing school supplies and food to those in need.

At the end of the trip, what impressed me most are the humble, generous and loving people of St. Catherine that *routinely* give of their time, talent and treasure. It is truly amazing to see how much work just a few people can do. If you have been thinking about making the trip, I urge you to consider it.

Rick Valdez

Developing Relationships

Peggy Gornik
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX

"Remember that face" is a funny joke we have down at the mission. The joke is how do you remember one face in a sea of faces. With over 900 adults and thousands of children, to remember one face is a challenge, but truly a possibility. As a MTM board member, I think I hold the title of "THE GRINGO" that knows the least amount of Spanish. However, this has not stopped me from having friendships with our people at the Colonia.

Arturo—Anyone who knows me down there knows that I love Arturo. I think his name is Author, I try my best. He speaks English! I felt like God sent me an angel when Arturo stepped up and asked if he could help me. He is another volunteer out of the sea of humanity down there. Arturo has a very, shall I say, interesting life. He is a man who has reconciled with his past and is trying to live a good Christian life. He has taught me not to judge someone's past, to see the goodness that he wants to be and is. Presently, his job is a garbage collector.

Using the megaphone, Arturo talks to the crowd, calms them, helps me organize them, and directs them. He reminds me to count to ten, because he knows what I look like when I am about to blow up, or

cry. He has proudly introduced me to his huge family; sisters, brothers, mother, aunts, who are waiting down the line. I always let his family know how much I value his help.

Manuel—This man also speaks English. There are many men back from the states who have no work and live in the Colonia. He is dependable, kind and a hard worker. He is a father of three cute little girls. He may be my new Mari and help me pass out tickets.

Kookie—I am spelling these names like I pronounce them. For the longest time, I called this sweet friend the wrong name until Rachel corrected me. You pronounce her name like "spooky". She gives big bear hugs and has the sweetest smile. She is our water lady who supplies water to the crowds all day. She is VERY dependable. She is lovable and is always surrounded by her many nieces. The only way we really communicate is by hugging.

My newest friends are our sponsored children: **Edith, Maria,** and **Viviana Morales.** These young ladies are very good, decent, sweet, young women. My husband and I feel so fortunate to have sponsored these girls. They are bright and ambitious. They wanted Steve and me to meet their mother

and also to show us their great report cards. We felt honored to meet their Mom. Steve joked with them and we tried to see how much English/Spanish we could exchange. Not much, but we laughed.

Missial—This young man is who I have decided to befriend. I think he is about 12-years old. He has been one of those kids that vacillate between being a friendly little guy and a trouble maker. This may be where the MTM saying began, "Remember that face." Well, I do. The teacher in me says focus on the good. He doesn't know it yet, but I am hoping to get him in Frank Maldonado's young men's group. I think his Mom (who looks much burdened) would really appreciate the help. This boy has been coming to the mission since he was very young. He likes us, but only knows how to get attention in a negative way.

These are my dear friends at the Colonia. To tell you the truth, I do remember 100's of faces in the community, and I am blessed to get to know some of them even better. We are fortunate to be serving such good, kind, grateful people.

Peggy Gornik

Passport Required—June 1, 2009

Mike Gartner
St. Catherine of Siena, Austin TX



On June 1, 2009, the U.S. government will implement the full requirements of the land and sea phase of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). The proposed rules require most U.S. citizens entering the United States at sea or land ports of entry to have a passport, passport card, or other

travel document approved by the Department of Homeland Security.

Please check the U.S. Department of State website for required document details:
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc_2223.html

MTM Newsletter

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

Contact **Jeanette Terrell**

jeanettetterrell@austin.rr.com

or

Phone: 512 444-3179

April 3-4 Mission to Mexico Trip

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 30** (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.

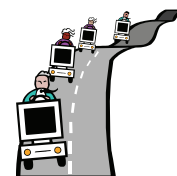
What to bring with you -

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://travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc_2223.html
- Helpful information: "Newbie Guide" on MTM's website—<http://www.stcatherine-austin.org/documents/MTM%20Newbie%20Guide.pdf>

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, April 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

