

2015 Mexico Service Trip



Summary Report

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Hola!

The service adventure to San Quintin, Mexico was really quite amazing. It's hard to find the words that accurately describe how it felt to participate in the activities and projects that took place. Your donation enabled the delivery of love to the people of San Quintin, Mexico. Your generosity is the miracle that made it possible, thank you! In the spirit of accountability and good stewardship, we wanted to report back to you on how the donation money or gifts were used, and some of the things that happened in Mexico. (Report written by Lindsey and Jennifer Roberts, with contributions from others)

First, no donation funds were used to pay for anyone's travel or vacation expenses. 100% of all the donated funds went directly to help in the process of benefiting the people in San Quintin. Each person in the service group paid for their own travel/lodging expenses. In addition, the participants also each provided donations and gifts to be used in this year's projects. Your donations were sacred funds and were treated as such.

This year's efforts were centered around 4 main projects:

1. Orphanage Visit
2. Christmas giving for 35 families
3. Food Drive
4. Celebration of the Family activity.

Tuesday morning, Dec. 22, 2015, we approached the border in San Diego/Tijuana, with our group that consisted of 4 families, 25 excited people. They x-rayed the entire motorhome, and found nothing that concerned them. Crossing the border with the gift items is legal, but there is always risk that items can be taken, or assumed to be for re-sale purposes and taxed at a high rate. We had 20 suitcases full of gifts and service goods. There were about 100 blankets that were made up onto the beds to not raise suspicion. The process went smoothly, whew. We then drove the last 200 miles, down the Baja coast through Ensenada, and on to San Quintin. We settled into the "Los Olivos" campground (The Olives. It was once a producing olive orchard), which is a very nice and well-kept place, away from town, and very secure. We always felt safe back at home in the campground.

Orphanage Activity:

Wednesday the 23rd we had scheduled some time with the kids at one of the local orphanages. The orphanage has 82 children ranging from a few months to 18 years of age. We ate lunch with the kids, which turned out to be their big special Christmas meal. The dinner had 4 items, tortilla, shredded turkey, refried beans, and a macaroni salad. Simple but yummy.





Then on to the gym, to prepare games and activities for the kids. First was the Balloon Smash. Picture this....107 children (well, 82 of them, 25 of us), all with a bright red balloon tied to their ankle, running around popping every balloon they could! It was wild and crazy and hilarious. Next, each child was given a bottle of bubbles. The kids blew bubbles, and jumped to pop them with joy.





After the games, it was back to the kitchen for a big cream party for them. 13 gallons of ice cream... poof just like that. They loved it. Ice cream is a special treat, since it's quite expensive. If you take the average wage in the area as compared to the average wage in Utah. The ice cream is an equivalent cost to them of about \$142 per gallon.



After the ice cream party the group moved into their little evangelical chapel. As the kids entered the chapel each one as given a blanket, and a hug. Jana sat down to the piano and we sang Silent Night together, in both languages, and the spirit filled the room. Randy was able to share a few words about Christ's love for them. We felt so lucky to have arranged to do some activities with kids. They are being well cared for, and have a happy glow about them. We went hoping to give them something, but we were the ones who left feeling served and filled.



Gathering all the blankets before the trip was remarkable experience of how willing and loving people can be. Lindsey lead her YSA ward in a service project, where they made and donated over 30 fleece blankets in one night for these darling kids at the orphanage. In all we ended up taking 110 new blanks. Enough for all 82 kids and the adults caring for them.



Christmas Giving:

Thursday the 24th we opened the Mexican division of Santa's Workshop. 35 families in total were provided with a nice Christmas, which was every active and semi-active family in the LDS branch. At home, 2 boys tackled this as their eagle projects. Each boy took charge of gifts for 15 families. There was a combined effort to cover the remaining 5 families. Each boy was able to get a family in Utah, to 'adopt' a family in the San Quintin branch and provide 2-3 gifts per person. We had gathered a list of names, gender, ages and sizes, so the boys could pass that on to each family doing the Sub for Santa. People are so generous! There was a buzz of excitement around, as friends and family were putting their gifts together. We were not without challenges though. The 5 families not covered by eagle projects were assigned out, but the people who took them forgot about doing it. We found out the day the gifts were supposed to be picked up, which was the day before we were to leave. Nichole went through her home, and gathered all she could of their own personal items to give as gifts for these families. Some of the donation money was used to purchase items as well. We knew it wasn't enough yet. Time was short and we had to get on the road to meet our schedule, we all prayed that it would work out somehow, and hit the road.

SO.....Thursday, Christmas Eve, the group went to the church where we had room to sort and wrap everything. The full time missionaries spent the day helping, as did the branch president and his wife, Pres and Sis. Inda. It ended up taking about 10 hours in total. All of the bags of donated items were opened, to make sure we got it right, as some of the bags had lost their labels in the packing/unpacking process. We also discovered that in addition to those 5 families that didn't have gifts, the original lists we were given were not complete and had multiple people missing from families. This meant there were gifts for some of the family members but not all of them. Of course, this is all being figured out through translation, as there were only 2 Spanish speakers in our group that could understand the Branch President and his wife. But now it was hours past lunch, and we needed a break.





Lunch time we took everyone and the missionaries to get fresh fish tacos. The tacos were Mako Shark meat and it was sooooo good! (this was the only meal where donation funds were used to feed the people who were working on the projects)



After lunch it was back to the church to finish preparing and wrapping the gifts and figure out how to make sure everyone in all the branch families would feel included and loved. As all of the bags were sorted, it was apparent that the generosity of friends and family would be an answer to prayer. Extra items had been included in almost every bag. Coats and hats and many other extras had been donated. That same buzz of excitement that was felt at home, was alive and well as we worked and worked. These extra items seemed to corresponded exactly with the genders and ages of those who still needed gifts. The day started with the concern

that there would not be enough for everyone on the list, but we ended up with 3 large black garbage bags full of clothes left over! We spread out extra gifts, giving every family member more than the 3 gifts per person that was originally intended. It felt like a 'loaves and fishes' experience.





To deliver the gifts, the group was divided into 4 groups, and each took 8-9 families. The branch knew we were coming to town, but didn't know we were bringing gifts, at least we told Pres. Inda to keep the gifts a secret. What a treat to be able to be in their homes, and wish them a Merry Christmas, talk of Christ, and feel of their spirit. We were welcomed into their homes with smiles, and hugs. Many

were having some kind of treat for Christmas, and without hesitation, they offered/insisted to share their food with us. Each group was given something a little different, one had large cups of fresh strawberries and cream and one group got to try cooked chicken feet. (yes an actual cooked chicken foot.) Still, another group joined in the karaoke fun at one home, and even got to see Sis. Inda sing Shakira!

The fact that these gifts came from families in Utah to families in Mexico was a powerful part of this night. The power of family was so evident, as they joined together with their families on this Christmas Eve, and welcomed our families in their homes, and they marveled that a family so far away had taken time to share thoughtful things and words with them. There was a true feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood in the gospel that night. As we met back at the church after our deliveries, we talked of all of our experiences.

One of the mothers in our group wrote this –

"I was assigned to go with my 3 children, Coy and Haven with Branch President Inda. We climbed into his mini-van and were off. We proceeded to stop by homes; small cement homes with only dirt in the front, mean ol' barking dogs in the front and all houses surrounded by fences. The President got out of the car, called out then tapped on the metal fence with his keys. When he saw that the people were home we all piled out of the car and brought their gift bag with us. We handed them the bag, said, "Feliz Navidad", sang to them a Christmas song, and then went on our way. We didn't know the situation of any



of the families, but sometimes the President would say in his broken English something about them like, "This woman is alone. This woman's husband left her. The father in this home works away from home. This family's dad just lost his job." etc. It was always so humbling to walk into their home. Most had a concrete floor. The families wearing coats inside their home; a sheet for a door. A few families had a fire going in the inner court of their yard which we thought was normal but found out it was only because of their Christmas celebration. Wood is too expensive to be burned like that regularly. A few families had lots of people over to visit and for dinner. Only one of the families had a Christmas tree or was decorated for Christmas at all. All of the families invited us in and wanted us to stay. They all offered us food of some sort. One family gave us a yummy drink called "ponche". It was a warm drink that had chunks of fruit in it... pineapple, guava, strawberries, mango, cinnamon and a big chunk of sugar cane. It was so deliciously yummy. One family gave us a small sample of a tamale. Everyone was so grateful for our visit. They all had so little, but wanted to offer us something. We took a picture with each family before we left so we could remember them and also share with the donors who donated the items.

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At one house we sang our Christmas song to them I invited them to sing a song for us. I assumed they would just whip out a Spanish song or some Christmas song. Well, the dad



went over to the shelf and got the hymn book and the whole family proceeded to sing all 4 verses of "Count Your Many Blessings." How perfectly perfect for us to be hearing that song on Christmas Eve in Mexico. We were beginning to see that we indeed had many blessings to count and our blessings didn't always equate to THINGS. These Mexican members also had many blessings and from the way they sang that hymn we could tell that they knew it! After we got in the car the President told us that that family was inactive and he was impressed that they would choose that song to sing for us. I said little prayer for that family that they would feel the Spirit that we hopefully left with them."

We were so blessed to be able to participate in this special feeling, what a great way to spend Christmas eve. So amazing.



Christmas Day! Friday 25th. We took this day to be with our own families to celebrate the holiday in the campground. It felt nice to relax and process what we had experienced so far. Kids opened their stockings, we ate our traditional sugar cereal for breakfast, and prepped for a big Christmas meal together with all 4 families in the big pavilion at the campground. The missionaries also joined us for our potluck Christmas dinner of burgers, hot dogs, stuffing, chicken, green beans and mashed potatoes, it was a feast. We didn't have pumpkin pie, but rather tres leches cake, made by Hermana Leti, the RS president. Yum! Mexican Christmas wouldn't be complete without a piñata!



That evening Ramon and Randy and I went to Hermana Leti's home, to pay her for the cake. We had a feeling she wasn't going to let us pay for it, because she wouldn't give us a price when we ordered it. We had a backup plan though. Hermana Leti earns income in her own little baking business and does most of her mixing by hand. In an effort to help her, help herself, we were able to buy at home and bring with us, a Kitchen-Aide mixer for her business. When we offered to pay for the cake, she refused, so we told her we would trade her something for it. She laughed and agreed. We brought the mixer in and thanked her for the cake. She became emotional. She said she had used one of them in cooking school, but had never even seen one of them since. They are about a month's wages to purchase and simply out of reach. She was so grateful, and overwhelmed. Pretty fun to see her excitement for what she will be able to do to improve her business.



Food Drive:

Saturday the 26th was busy, busy, busy. That morning was the Food Drive. There were more funds donated this year and we were able to purchase more than 4x the food than last year. We provided a large bag of food to 20 families in need. (These were different families than those who received Christmas gifts). Best estimates are between 1500-1800 pounds of food.

Each food bag contained:

- 12 lb. bag of flour
- 2 bags of rice
- 2 bags of beans
- 2 bottles of cooking oil
- 2 bags of sugar
- 2 frozen chicken halves.
- 1 large meat stick
- 1 box of powdered milk
- ½ gallon of fresh milk
- 1 bag of onions
- 2 bags (about 20) oranges
- 12 pack of toilet paper
- 1 bottle of dish soap
- 1 Cleaning scrubby



While we were sorting things outside the store, an older lady (appeared to be in her 70-80s) approached Ramon, and asked if we were giving food away. He said that this food was intended for some families, but asked her what she needed. She hesitated, and didn't want to ask, but said that she had come to buy some food for her family. He took her inside the store and here's what happened: "When we went inside I told her to gather all of the things on her list and we would cover the bill. I was curious to see what her shopping list would contain. She went down her list, 1 small bag of flour (smaller than you can even purchase in our stores), a zip-lock sandwich sized bag of rice, and one of beans, and 3 oranges. That was it. Once I saw what she was going to purchase, I removed the small items from her basket and replaced it with a larger bag of each item. With that she was done and ready to head to check out. I asked her what thing she would buy if she had enough money to buy any item in the whole store. She thought and thought about the question, and then smiled and said, "Aceite?" Cooking oil, her dream purchase ended up being, cooking oil. I said, "perfect let's get some oil." She walked over to the cooking oil and picked up the smallest bottle of oil. (about 2-3 oz). I said, "no.. larger." She pointed to one slightly larger, and I said, "no, larger." She pointed to the next largest size. I pointed to the largest size which was 1.5 liters. She threw her hands in the air, and turned her head. She wouldn't even look the bottle saying, "Demasiado, demasiado", (too much, too much). The oil had an equivalent price for her of about \$40 per bottle. I picked up a 2nd bottle and said, "Ok then 2 bottles." She smiled and said, "Ok, one bottle." As we walked to check out, I realized that she had some staple food items, but nothing special for Christmas. I asked what treat would her family like that they don't ever buy? She was silent, but then she smiled, and I could tell she was thinking of something. I said, "Ok, that thing you are thinking about, go get it." She hurried off and came back with a big smile and a bag of animal crackers. We went through check out. The total bill was the equivalent of \$290 for her. On the way out of the store, she hugged my arm and said thank you several times, and asked me, "Why?" I told her, "The reason why, is because of Christ. He is the best gift any of us could ever receive, and this gift to you is because of Christ. Merry Christmas." I gave her an invitation to the Celebration of the Family for a free family photo and off she went. She was so humble and grateful.

So, with 3 cars stuffed full of food, we drove to a section of town that is called 'Paradise'. It was far from being a paradise. The homes are made out of cardboard, plastic, and plywood, and a few with cement. Dirt floors were common, but solid roofs, not as common. Sheets were a common front door. We said a prayer, and drove up and down the streets with each person getting to choose a house to stop and share food. Someone said, "Let's be Heavenly Fathers hands today, maybe we'll get to be the answer someone's prayer."

The families we visited, and feelings we felt for the next 3 hours are hard to describe. I'll do my best with just a sampling of them.



One lady we gave food to asked if we could deliver to her niece, the Mozo family, next door. We walked next door and saw that her niece was very pregnant... due any day. She had 2 other young kids. I can still picture what she was wearing, a big purple coat, winter boots and a hat that came down with flaps covering her ears. She was so kind and so grateful for the food. She invited us into her home, and we noticed right away how clean it was. It was VERY small, humble and bare.

We noticed the second of two rooms only had a single bed in it. It wasn't really a bed, rather it was a door slab, held up by cinderblocks with some blankets folded on it. I tried to imagine that very pregnant woman laying on that board trying to get some much needed sleep, perhaps with her 2 little toddlers all trying to get a good night's sleep when her hips and back were already aching. My heart ached for her a little, knowing she didn't have a comfy bed with a lot of pillows that pregnant woman deserves. Yet, she seemed to be happy and contented, and was grateful for the food. As we did with everyone we visited, we gave her a flyer and invited her to the missionary activity we were holding with the branch that night. If she came she would be able to get a free family photo at The Celebration of the Family. She was grateful for our visit.



We stopped by a home, which had an outhouse in the front yard. As we drove up, the wind blew open the door and we saw a cute little 3 year old boy, taking care of his outhouse business. He smiled at us as the wind blew the door closed. When he came out, he saw we had something for them, so he ran to get his mother. The little boy had a cleft pallet, which hardly covered his big happy smile.



When we handed him a bag of oranges, and his face lit up. He jumped up and down, up and down holding the oranges close to his face as he smelled them. He squealed with joy, and hugged us and waved to us.



We stopped to give food to the Rios family as well. An older father, and his daughter and her husband were so happy and so thankful for the food. It was apparent they didn't have running water, or heat in their home either. As best as we could tell, the amount of food in each bag, would probably last them a month or more. I don't think many of the places we visited had any utilities and they all had an outhouse. A rare few did have a lightbulb or two in the house.





As we were walking to the car after a delivery, a young lady approached Ramon and said, "I don't want to bother, but if you are giving food, we could use some" she said. Come to find out, she had a C-section and delivered a baby 2 months before. She was so small and frail, and she was having a tough time recovering from the surgery. Her husband had been staying home to take care of her for those 2 months and as a result was not able to work. She invited us into single room home that was about 8'x12'. It had some shelves, a table, some blankets and a little propane Coleman stove type cooker. We could only guess that they must move the table aside at night to sleep on the floor. The only food we could see was a bowl of picked over chicken bones, and a small 2-3 ounce bottle of cooking oil. The husband was holding the baby all bundled up in winter clothes. The baby was just darling.



Here are some of the other families we got to meet.

There was the little girl with the biggest smile, wearing only underwear.



The mother who was trying to grow a garden. Our kids loved the little puppies.



The 13 year old that was tending her 6 younger siblings while her parents were at work.



The family with 4 little girls dressed in their best princess dress, wearing a towel for a crown.



It was about 2:00 in the afternoon and most of the kids we asked had not eaten a full meal yet that day. There were so many families, and we hoped that a few would know they were loved, and that someone cared.



Celebration of the Family activity:

The Celebration of the Family was a missionary event, where people from the community could come to the church to get a free family photo. We had talked to the branch president about this idea in June, and had been working with him and the branch to advertise, and put it together since then. Nichole is a professional photographer, and she brought all of her equipment, umbrella lights, backdrop, etc, as well as 50 picture frames, for the event. The branch members and missionaries brought their non-member friends and people from the community. We started in the gym, where the photo station was set up, and many tables and chairs.



The missionaries and Randy said a few words, welcomed them, and divided them into 3 groups. Each group went to a different classroom, where the branch had set up 10 min classes to teach. The Relief Society taught about 'The Family, a Proclamation to the World', and handed a copy of the Proclamation to every person. The Young Women taught about temples, and how families can be together forever. One young woman wore a white dress to show we wear white in the temple.





The Young Men taught about the Strength of Youth, and had a pamphlet to give to everyone. AND the young women and young men did the talking not their leaders! When each class was done, they rotated to the next class, so everyone that came, heard all the info. When they were done with all 3 rotations, they came back into the gym, where the Relief Society served tamales and hot chocolate. Everyone had a chance to eat, to visit and meet branch members,

and get their family photo taken. To get their picture, they went to the table where the missionaries were sitting. The missionaries told them they would personally be delivering their framed family picture to them. They gave the missionaries their name, address, and phone, and any helpful directions to their home. Then they were able to go sit in front of the camera. If they liked, they could stay and eat some more, visit and relax. Most of them did. A number of the kids that were in our group could play the piano, so they took turns playing background hymns for the whole event. We hoped the branch members would really take ownership of this activity, and really make it their own....and they did!!!

The missionaries ended up with 17 new families to contact, that were non-members and weren't already investigating the church. That's 17 families, who cared enough about their family to come and get a picture! WOW! 3 of those 17 families were families from the food drive we had done that morning. The Rios family, the lady that was pregnant (Mozo family), and one other. The excitement was real! Seeds were being planted. This activity had brought people into a Mormon chapel who might not have otherwise come. The missionaries were on cloud 9, and couldn't believe so many people came. Of course, all the branch members got to get their picture taken too, everyone seemed so happy. We were so thrilled with how it turned out, how this branch stepped up, and knocked it out of the park. Nichole spent hours photoshopping the pictures, and they are being mailed to the branch president. The missionaries will put them in frames, and go deliver the photos to each home with a message about the family.





By about 8:00 pm, we had all the family pictures taken, and everyone that was left were branch members and they kept hanging around. Well, we soon found out why. The ward council had planned a dance party after the Celebration of the Family, for us. They gave all the branch members strict instructions not to say anything to ‘the Americans’ about the dance party because it was supposed to be a surprise, HA, it worked! They brought in

a sound system, and dropped a big sling full of balloons and confetti. It was crazy fun, and all the adults, youth and children got involved and were having a blast. They blasted the music till 10:30 pm. We got to have such great interaction with the members, all evening long! The Rios family (new investigators) even stayed and watched and danced with these crazy Mormons.





Sunday morning, church was at 10:00. At about 9:30, Ramon got a text from the branch president asking if a bunch of us could talk in sacrament meeting. How many do you need? "As many as you would like," he said. Ramon told him he would ask some of us, and would he like us to do a musical number too? YES was the answer.

We walked into the meeting, and you'll never guess who we saw, sitting there visiting with another family. THE RIOS FAMILY from the food drive and the Celebration of the Family! We went to the missionaries, excited that they were there, and they said they had not invited them to church the night before. A branch member must have invited them, or they must have come on their own.

Jana spoke and made everyone cry, while Randy translated. Randy spoke, and Elder Ramirez spoke. Ramon said a few words to finish it up, then all 25 of us got up to sing, I am a child of God. The spirit was so strong, I couldn't keep the tears in any longer. The man conducting announced that before Sunday School, everyone was to go to the gym, they were going to take a branch photo with all of us. We now have a picture of all of our new friends in the San Quintin branch.



A couple of us went to gospel doctrine class, and some went to gospel essentials. Marcia shared this powerful experience.

"In the gospel essentials class, the teacher, Eduardo, asked the question, "How have you seen the hand of God in your life as you have had service done to you?" There were a few people that raised their hand and answered the question which I didn't understand. Then, the young looking guy next to me raised his hand and began to speak. I didn't understand anything of what he said but he kept looking at Jana and me and smiling. He had such a nice smile. He spoke and smiled and looked at us. We knew he was talking about us because he would interject a "familia's de Utah." I can still remember what he looked like and if I passed him on the street I would definitely remember his smile. Eduardo roughly translated what he had said so that Jana and I could understand. He said that he hadn't been to church in a long time. He stopped going for a few reasons. When the families from Utah came to his house on Christmas Eve he saw the Light of Christ in our faces. It pricked something in his heart and he remembered the feelings of the Gospel that he had been living without. He wanted it back. He was so grateful for the reminder of God's love and he decided to come to church that Sunday. He wanted to keep that feeling with him always. As I sat there and listened to Eduardo translate I had the strong feeling that if we came to Mexico to only bring this one man back to church then it was worth it. Delivering the gifts on Christmas Eve to

the members of the branch was a great use of our time. I knew that all of our efforts had been accepted by the Lord and He was pleased with the work we did and the sacrifice others had made at home, to send gifts from one family to another. It made me cry to have this experience just minutes before we were to leave our beloved San Quintin.”

Jana shared this experience about leaving,

“Oh, it was hard to leave. Diego's mother, whom I don't even know, took a precious handmade shawl from Oaxaca, Mexico and placed it around me. I tried to give it back and she wouldn't take it. Her son said she really loves the shawl and it is a keepsake for her. We took home so many beautiful gifts from our time with those precious people. They have nothing that we have, but have everything we want. Their eyes shine with the joy of life, they have close families and their entertainment seems to be each other. They love their neighbors. Life is so beautiful, there, in its simplicity. They dance together, from 1 to 100 years old. They don't seem to have time to worry about negative emotions, they are too busy working to survive and taking care of each other and too busy feeling the joy of a warm fire, a bowl of strawberries, tamales at the home of a friend. They make do with what they have, but what they have is each other, and the very fabric of their lives seems to be those precious relationships. They live with and on the earth in a more intimate way than our heated protected homes provide. They see more sunrises, feel more earth, see more stars. How is it that with our wealth and substance we are more distant, distracted and discontented? What a strange and surprising emotion it was to envy them, but I felt admiration as constant undercurrent, and this turned to envy often. That was a surprise of the trip for me.”

It's hard to summarize the amazing week into a few pages. Our service trip was blessed and spectacular. One we will never forget. The sign over the door in the orphanage explained the whole experience perfectly. It said, “You will never be the same.”



Thank you again for your generous donation. I believe that it provided a positive change in the lives of many.

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