

MEETING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS - PART 3

This year we celebrate a Golden Anniversary of ministry (1972 - 2022)

Following are a few opportunities we have had over the years.

Many don't realize that the ministry actually began in a tiny village town called, San Miguel de Allende in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, now a popular tourist town and retirement village. It then moved to Salines de Hidalgo in the state of San Luis Potosi, then to the missionary children's home, farm ministry of former missionaries Ted and Wanda Murray. There they lived in the former horse barns converted into a children's home to care for the many children now in its care. Finally in 1977, they began renting a run down one story home in the inner city of San Luis Potosi and later purchased that same property with a major remodel of the current site in 1987.

All during those first years it cared for orphaned and handicapped children and was fundamental in working with the Murray's and other missionaries in the area to establish the Bible College (Colegio Cristiano del Centro) in 1974. Since the ministry was located in the inner city it soon began providing activities for the neighborhood. Inside the mission it held a children's home, handicapped ministry, day care and after school care for children. They started 3 churches inside the ministry and one outside the city limits from 1977 to 1991.

In 1992, the Ontañon Church of Christ was established inside the children's home with one promise to the families in the neighborhood that it would not move outside of the area. We have had the opportunity to build and establish churches in the states of Oaxaca, Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Coahuila, and San Luis Potosi all the while caring for hundreds of children.

Do missionaries take mission trips? The answer is yes and we have taken many of them over the years inside the country of Mexico. One such trip was for 2 weeks with 15 boys camping out on the ground. Our snacks were from mango trees, and banana trees throughout the trip. We visited a family camp where the boys sang and enjoyed the wide open air classes and cooking. From there we visited other villages where we sang and preached along the way. On another trip Jose and I traveled deep into the forests of Oaxaca, to a tiny village only accessible by vehicles with 4 wheel drive. The village was called Las Flores or some called it Las Maravillas. After hours of traveling the rough, rocky and slippery trails we entered into a paradise of fruit and vegetables grown by all the area farmers and villagers. Grapefruit the size of a soccer ball and mangos were in abundance as well avacados. We arrived with Bibles in hand, toys and a message. The little village seemed deserted but soon we found a little boy who said he would ring the village bell for everyone to come in from working in the fields of coffee and bananas. Just like that in the middle of the day they all put down their hoes and shovels and we had a church full of children and adults. Everyone sang with so much joy and truly worshipped and listened to the Word being preached. These humble and happy people were like no others we had ever met.

Since its beginning, the ministry has had only two directors, 1972 to 1991 and 1991 to present. Two forwarding agents with the same dates all to which can be accredited to the ministry's success for the Kingdom. Jose is our first full time Field director (2018 to present).

An interesting event happened in 1999, when we began to accept inner city street boys into the home. Jose, our now field director, came to us at the age of 10 from living alone in the streets from ages 6 to 10. He showed us where he was living alone in the main downtown park and soon we opened up a soup kitchen for dozens of homeless children in that area. Food and clothes were their first need but soon we found ourselves helping drug addicts, prostitutes, and homeless children with the gospel. Sheri would sit on the sidewalk with a Catholic Bible and her Bible and simply share the gospel message. They were fascinated that two Americans would take the time to sit with them, feed them, hug them and even pray with them. They adopted us as Mama Gringa and Papa Gringo. After weeks of meeting their physical needs we began a Sunday afternoon service right there in the downtown slum area of the city. The response was overwhelming from the children and adults in this area of the city. The kids just loved singing and were preparing a Christmas drama when the police came and did a raid of the area, they tore down everything and closed our door to the kitchen. They put several of the children that they could catch in jail and took our visas with strict orders to never open up the ministry kitchen again. We never told many about our visas and the restriction that was written on them. It clearly stated we were not allowed to perform religious work or be ministers in a church. Crazy as that seems we had our soup kitchen just a half block away from the main police headquarters in the city. The police didn't like the fact the kids were getting cleaned up, reuniting with their families but mostly because the police were known to use the kids to traffic drugs and prostitution. This was our 2nd confrontation with the law over our visas for doing religious work during our first 20 years in Mexico. The first time we were under house arrest close to a year until we received our visas back with the main Immigration director telling us, "we need more people like you helping us but if you do more religious work like this again just do it more quietly please".

Trying times, but many street children were reunited with their families. Sam Stone, then the editor of the Christian Standard, wrote us "If you saved just one child your time and efforts were worth it". That one was Jose our little miracle boy who lived under a bridge and became a Christian at the age of 12. He learned to play the guitar, loved to sing in church, graduated from Bible College and now is our minister of the Ontañon congregation and field director for E.M.M. That alone is a miracle worth remembering. What better person to lead the ministry into the future than Jose. He has said many times if he hadn't been accepted into the home at that time he would not be alive today.

He confessed at an early age he consumed drugs to stop the hunger pains, slept with dogs to keep warm in the winter under the bridge, stole and begged for his daily bread. February 4, 1999, is a day Jose says he found more than a home he found a family and

Jesus Christ. Jose had the reputation and still tells the story of being the absolute dirtiest child we ever received.

Fifty years of building, establishing, teaching, preaching, providing, sharing, feeding, saving and loving the most unwanted and forgotten of Mexico. Providing for children who were abandoned, abused and neglected to preaching and establishing churches in remote areas. Jesus was there with us all the time, Emanuel, God with us!

The story will continue next month as we remember where we came from in order to better share the future ministry of E.M.M.

Thank you for listening to a missionary tell a story of how God has worked miracles for over 50 years.

Jose Manuel Gonzalez
Field Director of E.M.M.

David and Sheri DeBolt
Directors of E.M.M.

All gifts are tax deductible.
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