



### MEXICO MISSION LEADERS

Debbie Herbeck and Butch Murphy led Renewal Ministries' mission trip to Mexico with high school students from Fr. Gabriel Richard in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Butch is the Country Coordinator for Mexico.



## Spreading the GOSPEL in Mexico

“THIS IS WHAT WE DO: WE CARE FOR OTHERS.”

For thirteen years, Renewal Ministries has been taking area high school students on a mission trip to Mexico, where they minister to people who live in a garbage dump, visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and spend time at a home for special needs orphans and at a government-run facility for elderly men. About thirty students went on this year's mission.

“It's grown to be a part of the school's culture,” said Debbie Herbeck, who helps lead the trips with the students from Father Gabriel Richard High School (FGR) in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The school faculty also is making its second mission trip to Mexico this summer. “The mindset is: ‘This is what we do: We care for others.’”

“The students who go get more deeply evangelized,” she continued. “You see freedom and joy on their faces as they give themselves away for a week. Also, the ability to disconnect from their teenage world—they have to leave their phones at home—is life-changing. It teaches them to communicate face to face with others, to be present and attentive, to listen, to love.”



Students praying at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The week begins with a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

“We dedicate our mission to Our Lady, tell the story of what happened there, and climb up Tepayak Hill as Juan Diego did,” said Debbie, “it's no longer just a story, but a message for us too. The Virgin Mary appeared, and within ten years, eight million native Mexicans were converted, baptized, and came into the Church. Now, the Lord and Mary are sending us to share the same message.”

One of the services Renewal Ministries offers in the dump is a basic medical tent. Since mission teams return to the site every few months, medical personnel are able to distribute medicine for things like high blood pressure, diabetes, and thyroid problems. The team also distributes clothing, shoes, and toiletries for the people living in the dump. The students' fundraising efforts also allow for the purchase of two tons of food, for almost 1,000 people. The team also offers haircuts; spends time playing and doing some catechesis with the children; and provides prayer ministry and—thanks to a priest on the team—offers Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Unfortunately, a fire completely destroyed thirty “homes” and the roof of the handcrafted chapel just two days before the team's arrival this year. Thankfully, the team learned about the fire in time to have each member pack a tarp and rope—enough to provide some shelter to each family that lost a home. Donations also came in for a new roof, and the team was present to pray as the chapel was re-dedicated.

In addition to playing soccer or coloring with the children, the youth also practice the “ministry of presence,” said Debbie. They learn to notice people who may be sitting on the outskirts—people who may just need someone to sit with them, hold their hand, and listen: “We're there to love, to show them they are valued, and that they have much to teach us,” she explained.

The team also visited an orphanage that is home to 230 mentally handicapped children and young adults. According to Debbie, when you are with Mother Inez, who started the home fifty years ago, you have the clear sense that you are in the presence of a saint. Mother Inez, now in her early nineties, spoke and prayed individually with the students.

Debbie described the most moving part of their visit:

“As the students gathered around Mother Inez, she told them, ‘I won't be here much longer; my time on earth is almost done. I am asking you and pleading with you to carry on the work I've begun.’”



“This was more than a plea to continue visiting the orphanage,” Debbie continued. “She was commissioning the students to be disciples of love in the world. In fact, the reading the next morning was Jesus' commissioning of the apostles. Many students were deeply touched by her message and heard the Lord personally call them. I felt the Lord gave a few of them His heart for the poor and for love in a very significant way.”

The team also visited a home for elderly men who have no families. Debbie explained, “It is very moving for these men to have young people want to spend time with them, listen to their stories,



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and pray with them. In a place that sees little joy or hope, we livened it up with dancing and singing Disney songs. One young woman on our team had recently experienced the death of her grandpa, and it was very healing for her to talk and pray with these men. There were so many ways God was present and caring for us throughout the week.”

At the end of the week, the team gathered to pray for a deeper outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. “After a week of encountering Christ in the poor and one another in such a profound way, everyone was open to a deeper anointing of the Holy Spirit,” said Debbie.

“That night, in the ‘upper room,’ our meeting place at the top of our hotel, the Holy Spirit came, and began to prepare these young disciples for the mission ahead of them back home—in their own families, friendships, and schools.”

The lessons from Mexico, and God's work in and through them, stay with many students for the rest of their lives, said Debbie:

“They encounter Jesus in the poor, and they learn, in very simple yet profound ways, what it means to be His love to others. It gives them a window into the potential of who God is calling them to be and opens their eyes and hearts to a world that desperately needs to know God's love—through them. It also gives them a genuine experience of what it means to be a community of missionary disciples. This deep connection with one another is what they desperately desire.”

### I AM CHANGED

Testimony of a former mission team member

University of Michigan junior Lauren Yurko exemplifies the impact the Mexico mission can have on a student's life. Because of her time in Mexico, Lauren added Spanish to her Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience major. She feels called to do mission work and wants to be better able to converse with people—something she hadn't considered before her trip.

Lauren recalls three experiences with people in the dump that she reflects on nearly every single day:

- ▶ The first was with a boy named Alexis, who offered her a sip of his water—even though he hadn't seen fresh water in months.
- ▶ The second was with children who used their bubble solution—a precious and rare toy—to help wash her face, after she had let them paint on her skin.
- ▶ The third was with a girl named Lupe, who—after other children were flocking to Lauren to ask for cheese, when she was cutting it for sandwiches—said she didn't want the cheese; she only wanted to sit with Lauren, because she looked a bit stressed out. While Lauren sliced cheese, the girl sat with her, braided her hair, and rubbed her back.

In each instance, “they were giving everything they had for me and not focusing on themselves,” said Lauren.

“The joy I experienced in the dump changed who I want to be.”

“Every day, I think about how they had so little and gave so much. It's inspired me to live more simply and to give whatever I have—to look out for others, to serve my community, and to be more of a friend to people.”