

# SPREADING THE GOSPEL IN MEXICO



In April 2022, Renewal Ministries resumed its annual high school mission trip to serve the poor who live and work in the garbage dump in Mexico City. It had been nearly three years since we last served there with a group of high schoolers, since the 2020 mission was canceled due to Covid. Renewal Ministries' Editor Heather Schultz (RM) recently spoke about the trip with Be Love Revolution Director Debbie Herbeck (DH), who assisted Country Coordinator Jim Murphy.

**RM: How did this look different from prior Mexico mission trips?**

**DH:** Jim Murphy and I considered how to enrich the trip, live more closely with the poor, and limit possible Covid exposure—and these things created a closer mission community. Instead of going to restaurants, we ate simple catered meals in the closed hotel restaurant. There were fewer distractions, we were more relaxed, and we had some great conversations. One evening, we had Eucharistic Adoration and encountered the Lord together.

These changes also enabled us to better connect with the hotel staff. We met in the employee locker room to sort our supplies and have daily Mass, and at times the employees came in while we prayed. We got to know the waiters who served us each day, and at the end of the week, we gave them the mission T-shirts we made. The manager said, "I want you to know how much your presence in the hotel has impacted our staff." It was the witness of these young people who had given up their vacation time to come all the way to Mexico to serve.

The Lord worked through our team just by us being there and being present to the people we served. I see ripple effects in the lives of our young team; they learned to trust the Lord more deeply, to see others and their own lives with different eyes, and to live each moment with gratitude.

**RM: The team also visited the special-needs orphanage run by Mother Ines. Jim's report said, "her health is declining (and) she now is bedridden." Please tell us about Mother Ines.**

**DH:** They call her the Mother Teresa of Mexico. For the past fifty-three years, she has created a place called Divine Providence, where each child is lovingly cared for and treated with dignity and respect. She is a living icon of God's unconditional love. People from all walks of life are inexplicably drawn to visit her: Christian Harley riders, Orthodox Jews, politicians, missionaries, families, social workers, and even St. John Paul II. This is what saints do, they draw everybody to the Lord through the witness of their lives.

**RM: When you returned from the mission trip, you shared the stories of two amazing priests from Mexico with our staff. Can you also share those stories with our readers?**

**DH:** Several years ago, a newly ordained American priest in Mexico reached out to us after hearing about our work in the dump. He now brings a team of university students from Mexico City there to do catechesis twice a month. Next fall, a hundred youth in the dump will receive First Communion and Confirmation. We didn't interact with these university students, but they saw us and asked



why American teens had come to the dump. When Father told them that we come every year during our vacation to be with the poor, they responded,

“We were flagging in zeal, but seeing those young Americans come into the dump made us want to serve harder.”

We offered a witness by sacrificing what they perceive to be our prosperous lives in America just to be with the poor. Our students were inspired by their team coming into the dump to catechize people, and our example encouraged them as well.

The second priest we mentioned is Fr. Manuel, a holy parish priest who says seventeen Masses throughout his diocese every weekend. We attended a weekday Mass at his parish. Afterwards, he spoke with our team, encouraging us to live heroically for Christ no matter what. Just minutes before, a woman had told him that her motorcycle—her only means of transportation—had been stolen during the Mass. She said, “I’m still going to praise Jesus. I’m still going to serve Him. I’m still going to love Him.” Fr. Manuel wanted our young people to know that it’s worth it; people are making heroic efforts even today to love Jesus no matter what their circumstances. The enemy can’t steal that joy from us unless we allow it.

The mission was a mix of joy and sorrow. We saw the depth of suffering that people are going through, particularly since Covid, and we couldn’t alleviate most of it on an earthly level, but we could bring them the Lord’s love in some small measure.

**RM:** In his mission report, Jim shared that visiting the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe is “always an important part of the mission.” Why is that?

**DH:** It puts the whole conversion of this nation in context: God had a plan for Mexico, a nation that was under the dominion of darkness. Millions were sacrificed in the Aztec culture of death, when the Lord sent his Mother to a simple peasant. Understanding how quickly the country converted through the witness of Juan Diego’s obedience gives us hope, even as we see what is happening in our country today with abortion and people’s hearts turning away from the Lord. The Lord works through his mother and through the simple and the poor to convey this message that the faith is alive. It is beautiful to walk up the hill in Juan Diego’s footsteps, to the place where Mary first appeared. At the top of Tepeyac Hill, we point out where Juan Diego had to run to talk to the bishop. It’s far! Juan Diego needed to respond, and the response had a cost. We put that into the context of their lives as disciples.



**RM:** What do you see change in the young people during the trip?

**DH:** Gratitude is a big thing. These seniors in high school can view their futures in light of the parable of the talents: “What am I going to do with the talents God has given me? Am I going to bury them or am I going to invest them for the kingdom of God?” Being with the poor in a mission context brings you into the Lord’s presence in a unique and formative way. Being without the distraction of phones, electronics, and technology also is an important part of learning to be present to others and most importantly to God’s voice. It is beautiful to watch these young people come more fully alive in their faith and be more firmly rooted as disciples. Since 2005, hundreds of young people have participated in this mission, and some have returned with us several times. I believe God used their time with the poor in Mexico to plant a seed of faith, hope, and love that continues to bear fruit.



See our Mexico mission team in action by scanning the QR code below or going here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_IHiatToy2E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IHiatToy2E)

