

Mexico Trip Report, March 2022

After a 2 year absence a dozen of us led by Tomas and Brenda journeyed into the mountains of northern Mexico to encourage our friends in ministry there. Our group was made up of people from Riverton WY, White Sulphur Springs MT, Rapid City SD, and myself, now from MN.

A lot can change in 2 years:

- The orchard trees are bigger, producing good fruit, and have such promise for the future; also, we harvested nearly 80 tons of corn to distribute to the mountain tribes.
- The farm at El Dos is temporarily deserted as Rosinda has moved away (we hope she will be back); all the animals/chickens are in pens at Rio Chico.
- After a season of violence from the cartel battles (Monsi lost a brother, others lost friends), there is now a time of quiet...we saw no evidence of any fighting.
- The town of Las Pomas no longer exists after the burning by the cartel; the people who had attended our church for years now have moved to other communities. It's quite sobering to think of living in these uncertain conditions.
- The churches are growing with new pastors being raised up; Gonzalo and Rosie's return to ministry in Independencia is a big boost.
- Some of the elderly stalwarts (Monsi's dad) have passed away; the children are growing up and becoming the adults we need to lead the churches into the future.

Our primary focus was to host a 2 day retreat for the pastors, missionaries, and leaders of the region. These dear servants live in difficult and often isolated areas. It gives us a chance to love on them and bring them together where they can rest, fellowship, and be encouraged. We had about 35 attend. We did Bible teaching, a marriage seminar, and activities for the kids.

- We expected about 25 children and were ready with a VBS. Their interpreter was sick, however, so there was no one to translate. Game time! When the public school was dismissed, the number grew to over 60. It must have went well, because the next day 93 kids arrived. Our team did an awesome job!
- One of my sessions ended with a directed prayer time from the prayer of Asa (II Chron. 14). What lengthy, passionate, top-of-their-lungs praying (all at one time) for their communities and each other! So different from our reserved churches in America. When I was done leading Tomas thought we should have more and asked for a 2nd round of intense prayer. The group responded with equal enthusiasm!
- We celebrated Tomas' 70th birthday in Juarez just before the trip...a 4 hour long party, including a Mariachi Band. Many in the mountain churches didn't get to be there, so they had a party at the retreat. And...since it was the year of my 70th birthday, I was included. I think they just like the excuse to celebrate. It was special to be included with Tomas.

There are always work projects to help them with in their overwhelming tasks. We put new beds on the trailer and horse trailer. Turning the small, disorganized tool storage room into a very nice tiled laundry room was a big improvement. Fixing the light above the stove while the cooks were cooking (sheet rock dust, etc) was interesting. The dam needed some upgrading and by the end of the week we had a 40 yard 2-3 feet deep pond. Getting the greenhouse ready for planting is always on the list...hopefully we were able to teach Gilberto how to garden in our few hours of working together.

While we are there we see some improvements that are badly needed. "El traino" (the water tanks used to carry water to our El Dos farm) has rusted beyond repair. We need a \$5000 plastic tank to replace it. "Yes, we will help you" I said again to Tomas. If anyone wants to help with this, you can send your offering to the Rocky Mountain District, 2545 St. John's Ave, Billings, MT 59102.

It is always about the people! Here's a brief update on some names you might remember:

- Sandra, leader of the pastors in the Copper Canyon, cooked for us with a gracious spirit and even served admirably as my translator. Her husband, Manuel, did manual labor with us through the week. Their beautiful, adopted 14 year old daughter is one of the 2 children rescued from starvation as infants.
- Alex and Irene serve with such joy, though Irene and the boys now live in a different town so the boys can go to school.
- David and Claudia lead the school in the canyon and do Bible studies for the pastors in the mountains who have no Biblical training. They just know that Jesus has saved them.
- The youth band at the Pena Blanca church is so talented and amazing. They make you smile and bring such energy to the church. Alma and Guillermo give dynamic, yet stable, leadership to that church.
- Tomas and Brenda serve unwaveringly. They are so respected and loved! I believe that God has healed Tomas of the heart problems he had 10 years ago.

They want us to come back in August. I'm planning on a trip July 31-August 9. Are you able to join me? We primarily do work projects, children ministries, and help the churches with outreach. If you have a special skill, we try to find ways to put that to use. God always puts the people and projects together in a way that builds His kingdom; we trust Him to use us.

Thank you so very much for your continued interest and support over these past 18 years of assisting Tomas in his mission to bring Christ to the Indian tribes of the Sierra Madres.

Jim Stumbo