

Juarez 2000
Reflections

Mary Ann Maglia

What a joy to watch these young people serve God. Their work on this mission trip is a powerful witness to all of us at home. We are so easily impressed and persuaded by the lure of nice clothes, good looks and "cool stuff." Our young people's actions spoke loudly in an example of Christ-like love. They opened their hearts and poured out His love in hard labor under a *hot* sun, taught bible school, prepared meals, played games (sometimes gruesome: soccer!) and prayed with the Mexican men, women and children. Nothing brings a smile to my face more quickly than the memory of our teens with the Mexican children! The laughter, piggyback rides, hat chases, hugs...it was overwhelming!

We are so blessed in our service.
Thank you, Jesus!

I've spent the time since I've been home pondering how to keep the flame of the mission experience alive. I find if I continue to celebrate the Spirit's work in those who were with me in Juarez, the flame burns brightly. The Spirit within me is moved to continue to take action in service to our Lord. I have seen miracles in our teens as they served the poor. Conversions of the heart and attitude for many of them! What a joy! Yes, I can keep the experience alive in my heart...by celebrating the Holy Spirit's work in our teens and being *active* in Christ-like service- everyday.

Lord, please give me the wisdom to know how to serve.
Use my gifts as you see fit.
Lead me.

Mike LaPorte

Mexico 2000 Reflection

June 23, 1999. 11:00 P.M. Teens, and parents were saying good bye to the volunteers that made a commitment to go to Juarez, Mexico. As the chaperones + teens head on the bus, you could just see the tears drop down on almost everyone's face. As the bus ride went, and us anxiously waiting to get down to Mexico, we were discussing amongst ourselves about going to Mexico.

June 25, 1999. 4:00 P.M. We finally arrived to the border of Mexico after waiting in El Paso since 7 o'clock in the morning. We wouldn't exactly make it to our destination for another ten minutes.

This trip brought out ^{the best} of me caring for others and my will to help out the community, From VBS teaching lessons about God, making arts & crafts to working on a worksite tarring roofs and cementing.

One of my favorite things I did was when we walked up this gigantic mountain and at the top there was a cross, It was without a shadow of a doubt the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

To sum it up, this mission was an unforgettable & a life changing experience for me. I hope I can ~~go~~ go next year.

It's a million miles away – or it could be, if you ever thought about it. Sure, you've heard of Mexico, you know that large country to the south where all the immigration problems happen. But there is a lot more to Mexico than you ever thought. You've taken the step; you've signed up for the mission trip with St. Julie's this summer. Should be a nice break, kind of a vacation, maybe even a topic for my 'What I did over the summer' paper. It's even an opportunity to go down there and help the needy. Besides all your friends are doing it so it must be ok.

Fast forward, you're sitting in the Activity Center at St. Julie's, only month from the start of the trip. What are you thinking? Are you having second thoughts? Are you excited? Or worried or simply wondering what you will see and do? You walk into a classroom in the wee hours of the morning and one of the adult leaders asks you to sit down, get comfortable, and close your eyes and listen to a reflection on Mexico. Your mind wanders, the reflection begins, and you just begin to think.... You soon wake up and realize you are standing in the parking lot of St. Julie's, it's midnight on the 23rd of June. Your duffel bag, with way too many clothes is securely packed beneath the bus, your pillow, books, and blanket are in your seat, and you are looking into the face of your parents & family. Are they crying? Laughing? Concerned? Happy? Either way this is it, they wish you well, give you their love, and tell you to 'be careful' and watch as you board the bus. You know it's only a week, but it seems like forever before you will see them again. You know, in your heart, they

are with you and wish you the wonderful experience this trip is destined to be. As we pull out of the parking lot you are looking out the window at them and they are waving. Will you miss them? Do you feel the deep down tear? It's ok – they love you too.

Someone from the back of the bus asks the proverbial question – how long of a ride is it? “32+ hours” comes the answer from the driver. You'll be in El Paso Sunday morning. You settle into your seat and listen to the ‘bustle’ around as the rest of the teens begin to unwind, work off some of their energy, and come to grips with the fact that you are all ‘stuck’ on this bus for the foreseeable future. Someone puts a video on the player, yup, Top Gun, the staple from last year's trip. You close your eyes briefly to rest just for a minute and the next thing you hear is breakfast! We're stopping at McDonalds! You look out the window, still in Illinois, but at least it's down state. You find your shoes, put them on, and pull your bag from the overhead and think, why did I want to do this again? Oh yeah – I want to help some people less fortunate than I.

You're back on the bus, only 4 more McDonald's stops to go! Fast forward through the day Saturday, lots of video's cards some reading and a lot of talking and story telling. You realize this group is ok, these 45 people on a mission trip to Mexico to help the needy will make a difference. Evening approaches the driver finds a local park and you are informed that we are going to have a cook out. Time to stretch out the legs, play a little soccer, or simply go for a walk. Maybe, if you are really adventurous you offer to help with the cooking, it's the

staples, hot dogs and hamburgers, but it sure beats McDonalds! It's a break from the ride and it's great. You have a chance to talk, without the drone of the bus engines, and really get to know these other people who have been on this bus with you for 20 hours. You even play a game of 'tag' to end the picnic. Back on the bus, and into the home stretch. Saturday night approaches and you realize it's a lot quieter than it was last night. Maybe the energy is gone; maybe the 'tiredness' is setting in. Maybe everyone is thinking about the trip. You look around the bus and ½ the teens are listening to their compact CD's and the other half are dozing, curled up in their seat with their blankets. You look out the window and before you realize you too are off to sleep. The bus hits a bump and you awake, look out the window and see the sign, El Paso, 60 miles. Only an hour to go!

We pull into the Econo-lodge parking lot, around back, and stop. What now? This is Mexico? You hear the announcement. "We are waiting on the bus that will take us over the boarder. You can get out and stretch but don't go walking off. The camp coordinators should be here shortly". A few minutes later an old beat up school bus and a van approach, you think, no way can we get the entire luggage and people on that bus and travel any distance. Now you know you packed too much. You begin to help loading the van and as you open the door you realize it's almost full of food! Someone is going to have to walk you think. Up pulls the pickup – a place to throw the entire luggage. Shortly there after your luggage is loaded and you board the bus. It's hot, you're tired, and the bus has twice the number of people as it normally

would and just then you're 'welcomed' by the Youth Works staff! You're in for an exciting week they promise – all you can think about is some food, a shower, and some rest. Off you go, out of the parking lot, down the highway, past the new construction, office buildings, stores, etc. towards a bridge, which leads to the Mexican border. Have you ID's ready, we may be stopped and questioned. No talking back to the border guards, better yet, no talking when we're stopped. Let the driver do the talking, let's just get there with no problems. You start thinking to yourself, problems? What could happen, I'm on my way to another country in an old school bus without any idea of what to expect, what could go wrong?

Luckily nothing, you cross the border a begin moving through Juarez. You notice that there aren't as many buildings, stores, offices etc. As a matter of fact you realize you are in a different world, you don't understand the signs, the people all look different, the homes are smaller, less (and older) cars. You continue on the bus heading west for a few more blocks and suddenly turn off into a what appears to be a very poor, run down (by our standards) neighborhood, guess what – it is. The road is has litter all over it, few, if any cars. Homes in disrepair, or are those really homes? You pull up next to a small compound in the center of the neighborhood, your home for the next week. It's small and well kept a house, a bunkhouse, community room and a church. You find out the bunk house is for all 45 of you, 12 to a room! Electricity is available, but only in the last 2 years and it's limited. Water is available, but not for drinking and as you'll come to find out, not much for showering either.

Let's get unpacked and go over the ground rules – you start to pitch in and you see the first reason you're here – the children. They appear to come out of every nook and cranny. They are happy, smiling and full of energy. Unfortunately you don't get to really get to know them until later.

Bunks are claimed meetings are pending and you're thinking what have I gotten myself into? What should I expect? What am I going to do? I can't talk to these kids – how will I understand what they are saying? How can I help them if I can't talk to them?

Meetings adjourned, group sessions begun, and you realize, as listen to others around the room talk and question that the feelings are universal, your not alone, everyone is thinking the same thing. You break out into small groups and think what's this going to do for me? I'm not usually one to share my feelings, to actually talk about them but I'll play along. You find out that, for the next 2 days you'll be on the construction team, working on a new house for a family in the community. You can hardly wait; this is what you came down here to do. Not so fast – you find out that you are also on the breakfast detail for the next morning. Wake up at 6AM! Wow that's early – off you go to the bunkhouse wondering what tomorrow will bring.

6AM already? Your group lead is waking you up now, this isn't what summer vacation is supposed to be like, you look around and you're envious of the others who get to sleep in a few more minutes. Off you trudge to the kitchen. What do they eat for breakfast in Mexico you

wonder? You're thinking 'maybe I'll just wait for lunch' as you round the corner and see the stacks of cereal (American) boxes, fruit, milk etc. – just like home. Breakfast comes and goes, you find out you have clean up as well – oh well it's only once every 8 meals. You pick up your gloves and head out to the driveway for the work assignments, into the van and you're off to the worksite. As you travel through the community you look out the window – what do you see? Do you see the home made of pallets and a tin roof? What about the one made of old tires? You notice that the roads are mostly empty, the yards mostly dirt. You turn off the 'main' road onto nothing more than a dirt path and pull up to an open lot with a ½ built structure. You look around, a pile of sand, a barrel of water, a stack of cinder blocks, you realize that this is the material you will be working with all day. OK, where is the cement someone asks? You're standing on it comes the reply; you look down to see the pile of sand under your feet. First job, you of course volunteer – mix the sand, mortar mix, and water in the wheelbarrow to make the cement? What happens when we run out of sand? Your coordinator points to the hill next to the house – “you dig it out of the hill, run it through the screen and you have all that you need!” You begin the task and quickly become weary. Your arms are about to fall off, you look around and you notice the child looking back at you smiling. It's hot, I'm tired but you know, the children are always smiling. You smile back and continue to work. Soon there after someone offers to switch with you and you jump at the chance, you soon find out the next job you just 'volunteered' for are hauling the cinder

blocks up the ladder to the bricklayers. You get your first load and walk over to the ladder next to the building, you catch your first glimpse of the building – it's only 10' x 10', 1 door, and 1 window. OK where's the rest of it you ask. 'That's it' comes the reply, this will be the new home for the family working side by side with you, mom, dad, and the young child you saw earlier. Now you know why he was smiling, and for the first time, you smile back, feeling good about what you're doing, you know – you're not so tired anymore. You also notice for the first time that the parents are working harder than anyone and they not only put extra effort into the work, they are helping everyone in the group, training, instructing, whatever is needed. This is going to be fun. "Lunch time" comes the instructions from our coordinator. You pack up the few tools, climb into the van and slide over to let the family in – they are going to come back to the parish and eat with you. You're not hungry but you eat anyway (the heat hides your need for food). You have some time now to rest up and reflect, they don't work in the heat of the day down here, somehow you remember hearing that in a long ago history lesson.

Off you doze and before you know it you hear the call – outside in 5 minutes – its back to work. Off you go, back to the site, yup – it's still there waiting for you, just as you left it. Mom, dad and child jump out and start back work, you join in, and as you continue to build you look around and realize everyone is engrossed in the work, you're really making progress now. You also notice, for the first time, the communication that exists between the family and the group. You know, it doesn't matter that you don't

speak the same language, the work still gets done just the same. The last brick of the day is put in place and you clean up the tools, pack them away and pile into the van, this time the family stays behind, they wave and smile, happy about the things to come. How do you feel? Good? Tired? Can't wait for tomorrow? Dinner comes and goes and you have some 'free time', time to share thoughts with your friends – old and new. You walk down the block to the small store and buy a coke – boy that never tasted so good! You talk about the hard work and all the building you were able to get done. Again, looking around you see the children, all over, playing and having a good time. You're too tired to think about it right now, let's get back to the parish and rest. You're thinking about tomorrow already – hope we have time to finish the house that's why we're here.

Back at the parish it's time for 'club', you're not sure why, you would rather have some more free time to visit with your friends and rest but off you go. You're asked the same questions, what are you feeling, what did you accomplish, are you tired? As you listen you hear the same responses you were thinking to yourself, sound like everyone is on the same page. A few more talks by the leaders, and what's this, time to sing? I'm not a singer, at least not in public, you think. Oh well, no options here, I'll 'lip sync' and get it over. As the songs go on you begin to realize, this isn't so bad, everyone is joining in, I might just give it a try, too late, it's time to break into small groups.

Small groups – what's that? What do we talk about that hasn't already been covered? Well guess what, it's all



been covered already but now you have an opportunity to share, thoughts, ideas, impressions, questions etc. this is good, wow, look up —look at all the stars in the sky. You get into a discussion on which job was harder, making the cement or carrying the bricks, before you know it they call for the groups to come back together for large group prayer. Sitting around the big circle, pass the candle, reflect on the day just past and give a 'Yeah God' to for something that happened today. Pretty standard TNT stuff from the retreats you've been on. We adjourn, 30 minutes until lights out — do you go for the shower or not? You ask your friend — "don't bother" there is a line and the water pressure isn't that great. So this is what a Mexico mission trip is all about? You reflect: what are you thinking? What are you expecting? Are things turning out as you planned? Are you missing the comforts of home? You walk back to the bunkhouse to turn in for the night. You climb up to the top (of 3) bunk and as you lay down on your sleeping bag over the wooden bunk you think, I'll never be able to sleep on this but your out before you can finish the thought.

A 'Counting Crows' song is playing in your mind when you're awoken by the cheerful call "Good morning — breakfast in 20 minutes". You roll out of bed, catching yourself when you remember you're on the top bunk and realize your still tired, and now your stiff. Day 2 beckons — back to building the home and again you begin to wonder, will we get far enough along to finish it before the week is over? Off to the work site, everyone jumps in; aches and pains are put aside. The work flows better today, it's almost as if you all know what to expect what to

do next, without having to talk. So, you wonder why was I worried that I couldn't speak Spanish in the first place? As the day progresses you see the child again, same place, same smile. You wink and smile back; you've just made a friend for the day. You continue to work, break for lunch and you're back to the job site working the afternoon shift. Before you know it the day is over. You look at the home, still a lot to do, you guess that it won't be done by weeks end but who know? As you pack up the tools you notice the family is walking around thanking everyone, "Your welcome" is the standard reply. The child gives everyone a hug, and you begin to think, I'm tired, we accomplished a quite a bit, but did we do any good? Waving good by you drive off not realizing that may not ever see the family again or see the finished home. What are you thinking? Regrets? Questions?

You arrive back at the parish and prepare for dinner; your group is exhausted but satisfied, 2 days of hard labor and a lot of progress on the house. You finish dinner and realize you really, really need a shower. Off you go and you soon find out why your friends said don't bother. Even under the conditions it feels great, you're not clean but you are cleaner. Time for Club comes the announcement. You notice the discussions are better, everyone appears to be "into it", and you're beyond the standard questions and comments and really reflecting on what the day meant. The songs also have a different feeling; the words mean something and the participation around the room is growing, hey, this can be fun. Off to small group and, in a way, you are looking forward to it tonight. The discussion quickly moves from a recap of the

day's activities to the days meaning. What did you learn? What are you feeling? Are you getting the 'results' you thought? Good conversation, good discussion and, before you know it you're being called for large group. Boy you wish the small group could continue. Large group has changed as well; you sense the participation, the sharing, and the openness. It's not a simple "yeah God" this time around, it's a sharing from all, it's a thank you to all. How are you feeling? Has your attitude changed? You walk away thinking not "How am I going to make it through the week" but thinking, "I've only got 2 days left". You also realize tomorrow brings a whole new experience, VBS, Bible school. You climb into the bunk thinking, "What do I know about the Bible that I can teach and share with children?" Again you continue to wonder how you're going to communicate with the children as you doze off.

Early wake-up again, are they getting us up earlier every day? You head off to breakfast and as the worksite group's load the van and heads out you are instructed to meet in the mess hall for directions. Don't forget your Bible, after all how can you teach Bible school without the proper tools? Your group leader comes over and informs you that you're on the "Game" committee today. What games do we play?

How about "Patto-Patto-Ganzo!" suggests the coordinator? You know, "Duck, Duck, Goose!" You find out that kids are kids – young ones like the simple games older ones like the standards, volleyball, football (the real one), and baseball. This should be easy. As you're getting organized you begin to see the faces popping up all over,

the children are coming, young and old, big and small, they are all over. You ask yourself – how do you explain American baseball to them? Before you know it they grab the bat & ball and are in the yard hitting it and running. Guess you don't need to explain it after all! What are you thinking? Do you notice that the universal language (the smile) has taken over? You soon see a couple of young boys, can't be more than 8 or 9, kicking a soccer ball around. You think, that's my game, I've played for a couple of years, I can teach them a thing or to. Guess what, after 15 minutes of chasing an 8 year old around the yard and touching the ball 1 time you realize that this kid is better than most varsity high school players back home. Don't mess with a kid and his soccer ball you think as you walk away exhausted. Suddenly a young boy runs by and takes your cap. Welcome to the 2nd favorite sport of the Mexican children, Keep-Away. They run and laugh as you try in vain to get your cap back. Simple pleasures simple games, you begin to realize they don't have much, but they enjoy what they do have. You notice something else; not one of the children is 'bored' or unhappy. Wow, how can this be? You think back on your life at home, If the Nintendo goes down or the CD player runs out of batteries you're bummed, how can they be so happy? As the children, there must be 50 now, start to wander into the hall you see a young boy standing alone kicking a soccer ball. You wonder do you walk over and try and play with him or just go inside and hope he follows? You walk over and give the ball a kick, he kicks it back and before you know it you've got your own soccer game underway. The boy smiles (don't they all?) and you've

made a friend. You invite him inside and without saying a word he accepts and in you both go. You see the other teens preparing a craft, singing songs and acting out a Bible verse in Spanish (boy are they bad) but the children love it and it appear everyone is having a good time. Before you know it the day is over, and the children begin to leave as you clean up. You notice your new friend at the back of the room; you walk over and talk to him, inviting him back tomorrow even though you realize he doesn't understand you. He smiles waves and walks out, hopefully coming back tomorrow. What are you thinking? What are you feeling?

Club, Small group, and large group really take on new meaning today, everyone is up, happy, reflective, it's really hard to but a tag on it but everyone seems to be in tune with what's going on. Those songs from the beginning of the week don't sound so bad; the words actually have meaning. Small group is something you're looking forward to, these other teens in my group aren't so bad, they're actually pretty cool, we think the same on a lot of things. The discussion tonight is on the VBS and the children. What struck you? What surprised you? What are you thinking? Wow, it's over already and we're off to large group. Tonight's opening prayer, share anything you want. The room is full of excitement about the children, just what you expected? Or just what you had hoped?

This is it – last day, it seams like ages ago that you were tired and dirty (looking for a shower) but yet it seams like 10 minutes ago that you were claiming your bunk. Where did the week go? Anyway the standard

breakfast is served; cleanup takes place and break down into work groups. Today you have music? You think to yourself, 3 days ago I wouldn't have had a clue on what do now and I bet the teens in my group would have been in the same boat. Yet here we go, up on stage, picking out the songs and practicing them over and over. We all want this to sound good, we have to do better than the group yesterday! OK, we are in good shape, lets have some lunch and start the day – better yet can we skip lunch and start now? I see the children outside! Lunch is over, let the games begin. You walk outside and look around. There he is, the little boy from yesterday comes running up! He must have understood you when you talked yesterday. You walk together, over to the group of children playing “patto-patto-ganzo” and join in the fun. After a few turns you're picked and as you go around the circle you pick the boy, he catches you and you have to sit in the center, everyone is laughing and smiling and having a good time. You just made his day. Games break up as you move inside, time for some songs and crafts as well as the play. You jump on stage and motion for the boy to sit in front, he does, and you begin singing. Again you can't describe the fun and excitement from the children. And the volume! Break for craft now as you sit with the boy and work your craft together. He shows you how to use the scissors and glue. You help him tie the yarn. Finished! The picture frame is done. You've completed it together. Time for the play and more songs. The time passes quickly and all too soon you're finishing up for the day. Time for good-byes. Are you ready for them? Can't we spend some more time together? Life

goes on, good-byes are exchanged. You kind of feel like you just said good-bye to your younger brother don't you? In a sense you did.

Dinner once again is filled with excitement and stories. Everyone has a story to tell. It seems everyone has a 'little brother or sister' from the week. Off to Club for the final night, you start thinking back on 4 short days ago and can't believe the change in the group, everyone is singing, even dancing and the sharing is unbelievable. You break off into small group, the last one, and the topic is 'reflection'. Where do you begin? What are you thinking? Wow, there's so much to talk about. The expectations, the activities, the weeks work, and the people, especially the children. Where do you begin? The discussion ensues, the best one of the week and again it's over before it should be. Off to large group. Topic, What are you thankful for? Wow again, where do you begin? The candle passes and you're in a daze thinking about what you want to say. You look up and the candle is passed to you. "I'm thankful for the 'little brother' I met this week and all that we shared". You pass the candle and reflect. It was a good week. I'm glad I came.

Meeting wraps up and you start thinking, where did the time go? All I've got to look forward to now is a long bus ride and McDonalds. Then you really start to reflect. What a great week. I came down here apprehensive and wondering what to expect. I'm leaving with a sense of peace and accomplishment. I've met many new friends and 1 special child. I've learned something about myself along the way. I've got a loving family waiting for me and so many stories to tell. You know, in retrospect I

*came down here to give and yet I received much more
than I could have hoped for!
Will this be you? That's my challenge to each of you!*

Mexico Reflections 2000

My experience at Guarey, Mexico was awesome! That retreat put real life in perspective for me. When I saw that people lived without air conditioning, new unused clothes, and maybe indoor plumbing, it made me think about what I actually do take for granted. The first night in Guarey, I was in awe. I knew I would live like the people in Guarey, but I didn't think we would be living in what we considered "the best."

I saw a lot of things that have made me think about myself, my friends, and my family. Whenever I ~~was~~ ^{was} with the kids, we would goof around, and I would laugh and play with the kids like I was playing with my sisters and my brother. I have become to know myself more, and I learned that I don't need material things to make me happy. I have a family that cares for me, and I have friends that I could trust. →

I WILL LIVE MY LIFE FOR YOU

YOU ARE HOLY (YOU ARE HOLY) YOU ARE MIGHTY (YOU ARE MIGHTY)
YOU ARE WORTHY (YOU ARE WORTHY) WORTHY OF PRAISE (WORTHY OF PRAISE)
I WILL FOLLOW (I WILL FOLLOW) I WILL LISTEN (I WILL LISTEN)
I WILL LOVE YOU (I WILL LOVE YOU) ALL ^{OF} MY DAYS (ALL OF MY DAYS)

I WILL SING TO WORSHIP

YOU ARE LORD OF LORDS

YOU ARE KING OF KINGS

~~THE~~ THE KING WHO IS WORTHY

YOU ARE MIGHTY GOD

LORD OF EVERYTHING

I WILL LOVE YOU, ADORE YOU

YOU'RE EMMANUEL

YOU'RE THE GREAT I AM

I WILL ~~DOWN~~ ^{BOW} DOWN BEFORE YOU

YOU'RE THE PRINCE OF PEACE

WHO IS THE LAMB

I WILL SING TO & WORSHIP

YOU'RE THE LIVING GOD

YOU'RE MY SHINING GLASS

THE KING WHO IS WORTHY

YOU WILL REIGN FOREVER

YOU ARE ANCIENT OF DAYS

I WILL LOVE YOU, ADORE YOU

YOU'RE THE ALPHA, OMEGA

BEGINNING & END

I WILL BOW DOWN BEFORE YOU

YOU'RE MY SAVOR, MESSIAH

REDEEMER & FRIEND

YOU ARE THE PRINCE OF PEACE

I WILL LIVE MY LIFE FOR YOU

TAKE MY LIFE (HOLINESS)
(SCOTT UNDERWOOD)

HOLINESS, HOLINESS IS WHAT I LONG FOR

HOLINESS IS WHAT I NEED

HOLINESS, HOLINESS IS WHAT YOU WANT FROM ME

TAKE MY HEART & FORM IT

TAKE MY MIND, & TRANSFORM IT

TAKE MY WILL, CONFORM IT

TO YOURS, TO YOURS, OH LORD

FAITHFULNESS . . .

RIGHTEDUSNESS . . .

BROKENNESS . . .

SOMETHING REAL . . .

This was my second year going to Mexico, and I knew what to expect. There were many first timers on this trip, so I decided to watch them as well as the kids in Juarez. The first timers did a great job. They got a lot out of this trip. Once again, the kids of the community welcomed us like we were at home. Their patience was a great help considering the majority of us didn't know Spanish. But their smiles from ear to ear was all I needed to see. Compared to last year, I got more out of this trip ~~than~~ because I knew what to expect. Last year I was a bit nervous because I didn't know what to expect, so I held back a little. I sure am glad I came on this trip again because it was a great experience. These two Mexico trips will always be remembered in my heart. While on this trip new friendships were made ~~old~~ friendships got stronger, and people got to know everyone better. This trip was unforgettable.

MEXICO

This Place is Actually Much Better than I thought. Local People Running it, Very good Organization, Planning and Lots Cleaner than I hoped.

I can see a few problems like communication with locals, limited money. Sleeping arrangements are good.

Looking around outside the camp it is hard to believe how people actually live and survive in this environment. It is so much different than ours and what we have grown up with.

Working at the work site was a good experience, learning how to do things the Mexican way. Tamas was getting used to vacation Bible School. Was wonderful. How the children looked forward to this. This was a wonderful, eye opening experience. I'm so grateful I was able to participate in this trip.

LORELE REHR

MEXICO

As we started out on our journey from St. Julie Church to Jaurez, Mexico I have no idea what I was feeling. We gathered in front of the Devine Center saying good bye to our friends and family. People were saying have a good time, watch out for bugs, you'll love the kids, and most of all I'll miss you. All sorts of feelings were racing through my body I was sad because I would miss everybody, but at the same time I was happy. As everybody said bye we were on our way.

On the long, long, long bus ride down everybody was having a good time. We were watching movies, playing cards, sleeping. At this point nobody knew what was going to happen how this trip would affect us. As I was talking to a few people who went 1st year they talked about how terrible the living conditions were and how bad everything was. All I was feeling at this point in time was oh no I will totally not like this trip. We made stops along the way I was thinking oh great my last time using an actual bathroom. I also felt I had to savor the food I was eating like it was my last meal.

At about 6:00 Sunday morning we finally reached El Paso, Texas. The only problem with that was we weren't going to cross until about 4:30 that afternoon so we were early. Tons of questions were going through my head. How were the people going to act? What were was the bathroom going to look like? Was I going to be able to talk to these people? I had no idea what to expect. So we ate breakfast and lunch over there then crossed the border. Now crossing the border that was fun. We were told not to talk about drugs, guns, or anything stupid just to talk quietly amongst ourselves. I was feeling very scared when this happened. Everything though turned out ok. We got to go over.

As we were crossing it was a total change in living you were going from tall skyscrapers to little shops it was a total mind boggle. Then as we entered into the little towns you also saw little shacks. Then after you see this you remember you live in a nice ranch home or apartment, all the while these people live in little shacks. As we were coming towards the mission you see these lovely little children coming out to greet you. It is almost as if they were hiding from you because they were scared, just like the scene in The Wizard of Oz when the munchkins come out to greet Dorothy. As we

were unpacking the trucks and van all the children were coming over and at first they were very timid, but then they started to open up. Some were yelling caballito which means horseback ride, others though just gave you a simple smile and that was enough for you to feel like you could take on the whole world.

That night we had something called club. This happened every night. During this time people were given the chance to praise other people or tell a funny happening that happened that day. During this time I felt good about what i had done that day. This time gave me a sense of peace about myself that you just couldn't get anywhere else. This was also a time to relax I guess to. We also sang songs during this time. Myself personally I don't sing but these songs to me were fun. They were sort of weird songs they kind of relaxed you.

After club which ended at about 10:00 we went into our small groups. In these groups we got to tell our personal feelings towards the day. What we felt about the day how it affected us. I thought I always had something to say. What I can recollect from these discussions everybody always had something good to say about the day. The day always affected somebody in a different way to. Sometimes people were happy others people were kind of depressed, but always everybody was glad it was over and always glad to start another day.

When the day began you got up at 7:15 and went and had breakfast then it was on to either a worksite or Vacation Bible School. At the worksite that I was at we were building a wall for an auditorium for meetings or something. The other I was told was building a roof for a house. When you were working you got this feeling. I don't know if anybody else did but I got the feeling that I was actually helping somebody. We were to. Since I was at a school I was lucky I could be around all these wonderful children all day and play with them.

These children were great. They had some of the biggest smiles you have ever seen in your life. They didn't care that they were living in poverty stricken lives they were still happy. I believe these kids were happier than I am. There were two kids that I really connected with. One of the kids names was Juan. This was one of the coolest little kids when

I first met him he was kind of mean, but then he was awesome. He would just come up and start talking to you. He is so smart to. Some of us were trying to teach him English and he was doing it very well. I will definitely never forget him. The other kid was Alfredo. One day after VBS he was playing basketball by himself and I walked over to him and asked him if I could play and he said yes. Then after a while I asked him if he wanted a horseback ride and he said yes. Through the whole ride he was just smiling. It started to rain a little bit he didn't care though I didn't care we both just kept on going. These children to me are amazing. Even though they live in total poverty they are still a whole lot happier than anybody in the U.S.

Another thing we did while we were down there was VBS. When I got to do this it made me very happy. This was so because then I could be with the kids. During VBS we sang songs and did crafts. The songs were just easy songs they were fun and weird. Some of the crafts we did got kind of out of hand but nobody seemed to mind. In VBS I always had fun. Basically just because the kids were there.

This whole week was going perfectly but the last night came and it was so emotional. I believe everybody in the room was crying. I know I was the feeling just got to me. You get so attached to the kids that you can't let go. That is what hit me.

Then the day came and we had to leave. People were crying again. But we had to go. We left the compound crossed the border and were on our way home. We got back to St. Julie on July 2nd at about 4:30 5:00 in the afternoon. We left Mexico behind but I can tell you a piece of Juarez and those kids will always be in my heart.

Mexico 2000 Reflection

June 23, 2000. 11:00 P.M. Teens and parents were saying good-bye to the volunteers that made a commitment to go to Juarez, Mexico. As the chaperones and teens head on the bus, you could just see the tears drop down on almost everyone's face. As the bus ride went on and we were anxiously waiting to get down to Mexico, we were discussing amongst ourselves about going to Mexico.

June 25, 2000. 4:00 P.M. We finally arrived to the border of Mexico after waiting in El Paso since 7 o'clock in the morning. We wouldn't exactly make it to our destination for another ten minutes.

This trip brought out the best of me caring for others and my will to help out the community - From Vacation Bible School teaching lessons about God and making arts and crafts to working on a worksite tarring roofs and cementing.

One of my favorite things I did was when we walked up this gigantic mountain and at the top there was a cross. It was without a shadow of a doubt the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

To sum it up, this mission was an unforgettable and a life changing experience for me. I hope I can go next year.

Michael LaPorte

This was my second year going to Mexico, and I knew what to expect. There were many first timers on this trip, so I decided to watch them as well as the kids in Juarez. The first timers did a great job. They got a lot out of this trip. Once again, the kids of the community welcomed us like we were at home. Their patience was a great help, considering the majority of us didn't know Spanish, but their smiles from ear to ear were all I needed to see. Compared to last year, I got more out of this trip because I knew what to expect. Last year I was a bit nervous because I didn't know what to expect, so I held back a little. I sure am glad I came on this trip because it was a great experience. These two Mexico trips will always be remembered in my heart. While on this trip new friendships were made, old friendships got stronger, and people got to know everyone better. This trip was unforgettable.

Justin Scalise

My name is Juan. I live in the Felipe Angeles community of Juarez, Mexico, near Iglesia Maranatha. I'm 8 years old and, Monday through Thursday during the summer months when I'm out of school, I hang around the Fiesta Para Los Ninos and various work sites in the neighborhood. I have to tell you about this group that came in last week, I've never see anything quite like them over the past few summers. They came by bus (crazy Americans) from Chicago, you know, the town that Michael Jordan built, all the way down here to help us. That's almost 30 hours! I guess there isn't much to do way up north during the summer. Anyway, I'm glad they came or I wouldn't have this story to tell.

Those American's sure do come in all shapes and sizes; I couldn't believe it when they came off the bus! There was the 'grande' (They called him Gerard, I called him "Sir") to the 'alto' (They called him Gorney, what's a Gorney?) to the 'pequeno' (They call him Zika, I was beginning to wonder if any of them had real names?). They were 'joven' (Brad) and they were 'muchos anos' (Some of the other kids called him Santa, he was always having fun, always on the go, reminded me of someone, - did you every see Caddyshack?) The nino's outnumbered the nina's, but you'd never know it by the energy the nina's had. Katie & Jen were all over the place, every time I turned around they were singing a song, playing a game, or just making one of us happy. Jen even wants to hide me and take me back! Boy, can that Katie sing!

I've never seen so many friendships form so fast! We've just started the first day and there goes Mike and Matt, and Matt and Mike running by with little children on their backs, all you here is 'alla' and 'rapido' and a whole lot of laughter! Behind us a game of 'baloncesto' breaks out. Pat & Gavin & Louis take turns shooting and passing. David and Moises jump in and we have us a basketball game, not our sport, but we give them a run for their money anyway! We're being pushed off the court; Pastor has started a game of 'volibol'. Nick and Katie, Wally & Justin jump in with all the parishioners. It's not pretty, but it sure is fun, best of all, the kids can play too! I fit right in, you know Justin and I are the same height! Off to our right a game of 'futbol', the real one, breaks out. It's the American's vs. the Mexican's! I'm going to sit and watch this one. Adam, T.J., Chris, & Mary lead the American's and they hold their own. Boy that Mary sure can play! Good thing my friends are taking it easy on them today, scored enough to win, the way it should be.

Things finally settle down for the first night and I look around, there's Kelly & Danielle, Dave and Nikki playing with the children, taking pictures, laughing, and just having fun, I'm sure glad they came down and I can't wait until tomorrow.

I'm heading down to the school; they tell me these guys are going to help build us a new 'auditorium'. Let's see if they can build like they can play. Maestro will keep them in line. Wow, look at that, 9AM and they are already hard at work. There's Mark & Mike, Kevin and Louis mixing the concrete. Louis is talking with Maestro; at least someone around here makes some sense. Maestro then moves on to talk to Mr. P., guess they brought him because he's tall, doesn't need a ladder to reach the top of the wall. He has him working on all the high stuff. Mark and Louis are going to work on the back wall, boy that Mark can lay a perfect brick, I think it even brings a tear to Maestro's eye. Look at Erin go on the sidewall, she's laying the bricks faster then the guys! Should I let her know that she just laid 3 bricks in the window? No, I'll let Maestro do it. Well the guys are done with there section (of course the girls, Erin, Nikki, & Meghan have been

done with theirs for awhile), and they need Megan, the 'artist' to help them tuck point. Good thing she's here or they wouldn't know what to do.

It's lunchtime, I'm going to run up to the house and see how the roofing crew is doing, and at least they got the easy job today. Wow, have they got a lot done. Look at Joe go up that ladder with the roll roofing! I'll bet it's as big as him, must be one strong hombre! There's Chris and Chris nailing away and tarring the roof looks like fun in this weather, don't they know it's siesta time? Good thing they have Kevin with them, he knows how to take it easy in this heat, I remember him from last year! Mrs. Mag's sure keeps these guys in line; (she works harder than them, but doesn't let them know that!).

Well today I'm going to head back to VBS (it's my favorite too). There's Mrs. LaPorte hard at work making sure everything is ready to go. She's cleaning everything in sight. Someone tell her she doesn't have to wash the basketball court! I'm going to play some basketball before we start; I wonder who's out there now. Never fails, I knew someone would be willing to play, looks like another 2 on 2 with my friends Jeff and Tim and my brother Edward. I'll take it easy on them this time, they need the encouragement after the beating we gave them in football! Wouldn't you know it, 5 to 5 and it's time to call it a game – VBS is about to begin. Time to sing – what's that noise?? Oh, it's just Mr. Holan singing! I'll move over here by Cailin, she's always smiling and singing and having a good time with us. Time for the skit, I don't understand what they are saying but they sure are funny! I'm going to get a good seat over here by Pat, at least when I ask him a question he can answer me. I think he must be one of those Spanish tourists or something. Finally, we can do the crafts – my favorite part, I get to make something to bring home, I'm going to work with Kelly today, she always let's me go first and makes sure I've completed it, you know what, they all do!

Wow, where did the week go? (Funny, that's the same question the Americans are asking). This sure was a fun week, I learned a lot and I think they did as well. They really made an impression on me, all the loving and caring, the smiles and the joy, not to mention all the hard work, what a group. I'm really going to miss them. I just wonder, did we make an impression on them as well??

- Juan

Mexico Mission Trip 2000

A man isn't poor if he can still laugh. - Raymond Hitchcock. The Mexicans are poor physically, they don't have all the material possessions that we consider "necessities," but they are not poor emotionally or spiritually. They have what is really important in life; happiness. I saw their happiness through all the smiles and laughter shared with us throughout the week.

I learned the most about happiness through a little boy named Alfredo. Alfredo wore the same clothes everyday and lived in a little shack, but that did not stop him from loving life. Everyday I would play basketball with him and help him with the craft at Bible school. A smile lit his face from the moment he saw me to the moment he left each day. He loved everything that we did together. I've never seen someone so excited about basketball, and I've never seen someone cherish a piece of wood, like he did the wooden cross I gave him. The only time I saw him without a smile on his face is when we hugged and said goodbye, at that point we both had tears in our eyes. I'll never forget the time I spent with Alfredo and the lesson he taught me.

In five days the Mexican children taught us an important life lesson; be happy with what you are blessed to have and enjoy life. They may not have expensive possessions, but they do have one priceless possession; true happiness.

Erin Chlum
7-9-00

Mexico Mission

When we got on the bus and started our journey we all prayed for a life changing experience.

As we crossed the border, excitement filled the air. Looking at all the things around you it's hard to believe that only 10 minutes away there are huge skyscrapers and big houses. The Mexicans live in small houses built in whatever they can find, whether it was fencing or wood or for the lucky ones, brick. Another thing that I realized was that they live in small homes with hardly anything and they are truly happy. We live in huge houses with lots of material things but were always asking for more.

The Mexicans quickly accepted us and became our friends. They are accepting to everyone, unlike Americans who are taught that strangers are bad or dangerous. This year I saw many of the kids we met last year. I also got to talk my two favorites from last year, Lupe and Miriam. Lupe remembered me and she still had the cross I had given her. We all had a great time playing with all the children.

At the work site it was amazing all the things we learned and were able to accomplish. It was especially difficult because the maestro(teacher) only spoke Spanish. Despite all that was against us, we accomplished a lot by teamwork and determination.

At VBS we got to play with all the little kids and try to teach them about a specific bible verse. To accomplish this we played games, sang songs, did crafts, and performed a skit. Although we were teaching them they taught us much more about love, happiness, and friendship. I also met Gabino, one of the Mexican children, who instantly

became my friend. Gabino and I spent the next two days together playing and doing the craft. His favorite thing to do was to take my hand and run and just keep running and when I couldn't keep up he'd keep going and make me try to catch him. On that last day of VBS me and Gabino had to say goodbye to each other. Remembering all the time we'd shared I knew I was going to miss him. I gave him my cross and knew that I'd remember him forever and hoped he would remember me as well.

One night we went up the mountain, which once again was an incredible experience. At one point they had us just sit and listen. All the sounds are so different than all the traffic noises that you hear in the United States. Another thing that was interesting was that from the top you could see New Mexico, and all that was separating was train tracks. You could see very well from the top how different the two worlds are.

One of my favorite parts of the trip was Club, which was a time when we got together as a group. We sang songs, reflected on the day, and bonded with each other. The bonds we formed are ones that will never be broken.

On Friday morning we had to pack up and leave. It felt like we had just arrived and we were already leaving. It was really hard to say goodbye to all the kids knowing that we may never see them again. We had grown to love these kids and so soon we had to leave. I don't think there was a dry eye. I feel like this year I have gained a lot from this trip and I hope I'll always be able to carry it with me. I feel that last year I started my journey towards happiness and this year I added to all that I've experienced and learned. As we built the houses in Mexico we are building on our personal journey towards true happiness, brick by brick, smile by smile.

Mexico Reflection

It was hard leaving home and going to a foreign country with a group of people that I had never met before, But it was definitely worth it. I soon found out that I had nothing to be nervous about because by the end of the first couple of days, I felt like I belonged in the group. Everyone really tried to include me and get to know me. I'm especially glad I got the chance to get to know the girls that I shared a room with. We had some very weird experiences, but it was a lot of fun and I made some really good friends.

When we arrived in Mexico, I was surprised and happy to see the warm welcome that the people gave us. I made many new friends that first evening and even more in the following days. Although at first it was hard to deal with toilets that didn't always flush, hard beds, and few showers, by the end of the week I barely even noticed. Seeing the way the Mexican people lived made me feel very thankful for what I have. I admire that they are able to remain happy and friendly even though they have very little.

The part I enjoyed the most was VBS. I really enjoyed playing with the kids and singing songs and doing crafts with them. Club in the evenings was also really great. It was a good time to share the funny events of the day and thank God and each other for the special moments.

Overall, the thing in Mexico that changed my life the most was the kids. They loved me even though to them I was a funny looking Gringa with "cuatros ojos" (four-eyes). I loved talking with them and playing with them because they were so unjudging and fun to be with. This trip to Mexico has been such and enjoyable and fulfilling experience because of all the friends I made, both Mexican and American.

Mexico Reflections 2000

My experience at Juarez, Mexico was awesome! That retreat put real life in perspective for me. When I saw that people lived without air conditioning, new unused clothes, and maybe indoor plumbing, it made me think about what I actually do take for granted. The first night in Juarez, I was in awe. I knew I would live like the people of Juarez, but I didn't think what we would be living in would be considered "the best."

I saw a lot of things that have made me think about myself, my friends, and my family. Whenever I was with the kids, we would goof around and I would laugh and play with the kids like I was playing with my sisters and my brother. I have come to know myself more, and I learned that I don't need material things to make me happy. I have a family that cares for me, and I have friends that I could trust.

I know that I will never experience that again. That retreat has touched me in many ways that are indescribable. I have many memories of people smiling and laughing. I saw more people smile about everything, then complaining about what we don't have. Overall that retreat meant a lot to me. I am glad I went, and I know I got more out of this retreat than I will ever get out of any other retreat I may go to.

- Cailin Mittler -

Mexico

When I first signed up for the Juarez Mission, I was frightened because I had no clue what to expect. I regret ever having that fear!! Mexico had the most unbelievable effect on me, the type of thing that you can't really describe with words. All I know is that I was touched. A new miracle, a new seed of life was planted within me. The Mexican children opened my eyes and showed me the true meaning of life. Not money, possessions and greed, but love and friendship. You saw it all around you. Whether in VBS or the worksite, we were all touched by the children's energy and light.

They love so simply, not caring how you dressed or looked, just as long as you would give them a piggyback ride. The Mexican community made me realize how selfish we truly are, but few notice it. A simple wooden cross on a rocky hill brought tears to my eyes, changing me forever. Things like that are what make the Mexicans so happy.

I would return to Juarez in a heartbeat. And I know I will always be welcomed there. Mexican children are so full of love that no one will ever be turned away.

Katie Maglia

Mexico

This place is actually much better than I thought. Good people running it, very good organization, planning, and lots cleaner than I hoped. I can see a few problems like communication with locals, limited menu. Sleeping arrangements are good.

Looking around outside the compound, it's hard to believe how many people actually live and survive in this environment. It is so much different than ours and what we have grown up with.

Working at the work site was a good experience. Learning how to do things the Mexican way takes some getting used to. Vacation Bible School was wonderful. How the children looked forward to this. This was a wonderful, eye-opening experience. I'm so grateful I was able to participate in this trip.

Greg Rehr

People always think that a perfect vacation is one where it is always beautiful and hot outside, a getaway from all the things going on at home, and a place to have fun as they relax. Florida, California, Arizona, and all those great places everyone thinks of first when you say vacation, but has anyone ever considered Juarez, Mexico? My most wonderful vacation took place there and it is one I will never forget.

The trip really began and made me think as we were crossing the border between Texas and Mexico. I was thinking about the transition like when you change from a child to a teenager. This passing would effect how I look at life. I always took advantage of all that we have, not what we don't have. Riding to our complex was making me realize this. Seeing all the poor men, women, and children walking with very uncomfortable looking clothes on, the dirty roads, garbage everywhere, the uncared for buildings, they all showed me how fortunate we are. It's horrible they have to live like that. It kind of made me nervous to live in their lifestyle.

We reached the site and I just wanted to get started, but we had to wait to the next day. All of the days down there were days of excitement and full of surprises. VBS was awesome! I played all kinds of games with the kids. They never judged you on what you look like, but how much you will play with them. Their smiles brightened my day. I loved being around them so much.

Building the addition to the house was a great experience. I never worked so hard and had so much fun. We didn't make a big difference, but we added a little bit and soon it will be finished when other groups go and work on it.

I am so glad I went. Everything from going to the Ice Cream Shop to climbing the mountain was a thrill. After the whole trip, I wanted to stay and help even more. I got used to the culture and enjoyed the whole trip to its fullest!

Mary La Porte

Mexico

This trip to Juarez, Mexico was my second. Going in, I didn't necessarily look forward to it because I already knew what to expect. I couldn't have been more wrong for feeling that way. Right from the start you could easily tell this was going to be different. For example, the bus was practically brand-new (even the air-conditioning). We received a similar send off to last year's, but it was still special. The ride took about two-thirds the time of our previous trip and everyone was in good spirits. As I had thought Juarez was still about the same as before, except that I noticed all the little things. It seemed like there were fewer houses made of scrap, and more of brick. The general land seemed to flourish with shrubs and green trees more than sand and dirt. Perhaps I was wrong, but I'm thankful I was able to have a positive outlook on their community. We stayed in the same place, only this time I had a better bunk. The kids were just as playful as last year, but this time I could speak Spanish. The work at the sites was easy to accomplish with all of us looking out for each other. This time around I got more into club time and the other discussions held. So many positive things happened throughout each night and day, that it's hard to mention them all. I'm not saying that last year's trip was a bad one, it just prepared me better for this one. I'm glad I went back, and I did it right.

Chris Pluchar

YOU ARE INVITED!!!

WHAT: A welcoming party

WHERE: Juarez, Mexico

WHEN: When your heart is open, your mind is set free, and you're ready for a new way of life.

WHY: To see God's love for all his children.

Given By: The children and their families with a smile and love.

R.S.V.P.: AFTER YOU ARE DONE READING THIS.

GO!!!!!!

NOW!!!!!!

For the ones who have been there, never forget what you saw.

" So many memories, so many smiles. The road that stretches behind us. We had some laughter and our share of tears but all these moments unite us." " I'll be your friend for a lifetime. Against the wind and the rain of every season. Won't walk a way in the hard times, I'll be your friend."

This I promise to you. :)

(Song from WOW 2000)

- Kelly Pluchar

Juarez Reflections
Mark Holan

Before leaving for Mexico, we spoke a lot of the unconditional love of the children of Juarez . I was able to witness this firsthand, but I also witnessed the unconditional love our teens had for the people of Mexico. I also saw the love and kindness the adults of Juarez exhibited to us all.

The children of Juarez are unbelievable! They are trusting and loving to all of us without expecting anything in return. What is really amazing to me, is the children go through this week after week throughout the summer. A different group comes through every week and every week the children form this incredible bond with the teens. Many of the children remember the teens who were here last year and seek them out.

The adults of Juarez are very spiritual, kind and loving. I worked with Octavio and Lettie at the home. Both exhibited a great sense of humor along with a work ethic that is enviable. Octavio is a great man. We spoke in broken English and broken Spanish to each other about God and life. It's amazing the conversation you can have with hand language and broken phrases. Octavio told me that before God, he was nothing, with God he is everything.

Our teens knocked me out with their love and courage. By the end of the week, no one was afraid to show honest emotion. It didn't matter what others thought. The toughest guys were hugging and crying. I spent a good amount of time observing the interaction between our teens and the local children. Love flowed freely. Whether it was Katie reading or Gerard wrestling or Matt giving horseback rides, the emotions were true. I was never more impressed with a group of teenagers. I know that our future is bright with these teens leading us.

If you asked me to describe Utopia, Juarez, Mexico would not come to mind. After all, how can Utopia have living conditions like that, 11 people sleeping in a 12 X 12 room, toilets that seldom work, water pressure that at best is sporadic. But, the week we spent in Juarez was as close to Utopia as I will ever find. I only hope that we can keep that feeling for the rest of our lives.

Mexico Reflection

God made us a family.
We need each other.
We love one another.
We work together.
We play together.
We praise God together.
Thank you, God,
for our special family.
Amen.

For one week this summer God made us a family. We did everything from brush our teeth together to share our innermost thoughts during small groups and prayer. As in any family there were disagreements, but nothing lasted long. Meals were prepared in small groups to share with the whole family. At the dinner table we shared lively discussions and a lot of good laughs. Throughout the day we shared our talents, thoughts, support, and hugs. And at night we shared quiet or sometimes exuberant talks as we lay in our bunks before we went to sleep. At times we sounded like the Walton's as we said our good nights.

We needed each other and depended on each other for support and help. If someone looked sad or troubled, help was on the way within minutes. Few jobs could be done alone. Cooperation was needed and a team spirit prevailed. It was not uncommon to see someone help with a chore that was not assigned to them. It was incredible to watch the work of the many hands used to carry out God's love. We were His hands.

We loved one another. Hugs, hugs, hugs! Many were shared and their effects were powerful. The hugs represented our love and concern for each other. They also represented our bond during this mission. The hugs I received touched my heart and soul. I also witnessed so many hugs between the teens and the children of Mexico. These small, yet powerful, acts testified God's love. The hugs were heartfelt and that was obvious. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to share "mad props" at the close of the day to recognize the acts of love we shared and the powerful impressions they made on us.

We worked together. We worked at Vacation Bible School and the work sites to serve the community of Juarez. Having common goals and willing spirits made strenuous and tedious jobs seem exciting. I saw teens carry huge loads beyond what they ever expected they could carry. I also saw teens carefully pick up small rocks to place in their cement work. At Vacation Bible School patience was exercised and cultivated. All of the work was done with care. We also worked to serve each other. It was amazing to see the teens step in to help without being asked – unsuspecting volunteers found themselves cleaning

bathrooms, plunging toilets, carrying heavy loads, etc. Seldom were there complaints and better yet everyone kept on volunteering without knowing what they were volunteering for. That was the spirit of the whole trip – we all signed on without really knowing what we were getting into, but willing to do whatever might come our way.

We played together. We also played with the children of the community. There was so much love and good sportsmanship displayed in the play. I enjoyed watching the teens display their talents and skills in basketball, volleyball, football, soccer, and water balloon volleyball. The games welcomed all who were willing to play and they were played with fantastic displays sportsmanship. We also played in friendly teasing and fun-filled pranks throughout the days. There were always weird happenings to brighten our days.

We praised God together. Many of the most enriching and profound times of the trip were when we praised God through our words and songs. The reflections and journaling of the morning carried us throughout the day. At night, teen club brought us together to reflect on the day and praise God. All of the participants were able to recognize God's power and love. We shared some very powerful stories that brought many tears of emotion. *Yeah God!*

Thank you God for this special family. I was so proud to be among these wonderful examples of God's Love. God's presence was flourishing during the Mexico 2000 trip. I was impressed with the physical work at the worksites and the crafts, skits, music, and games of Vacation Bible School – but even more impressive was the spirit and love behind the work. That was awesome! The memories I have of this experience have made a profound impression on my life.

With Love and Respect to all of the Participants,

Deane LaPorte

Juarez Reflection

By Chris Holan

Throw 44 people together for 4 days of work, there's bound to be problems. Add 30 hour bus rides to begin and end the trip, and that's the formula for disaster. However, if it's a mission trip, the fighting doesn't pop up as often as expected. Sure, lack of sleep, harmless pranks, and "male bonding" don't add up to a problem free week, but I think our mission and the closeness of the group helped prevent more than a few fights.

The participants of our mission trip to Mexico showed camaraderie like I don't think I've ever seen. We put our differences aside so that we could achieve our goal of helping the people of Juarez. There was very little bickering and no selfish "none for all and all for me" attitudes that can some times take over back at home. We put all our problems on the shelf for our stay in Mexico, and it carried over on the bus rides. I never felt excluded from anything that happened, and I'm pretty sure that sentiment rang true for everyone. I think that everybody there got to know everybody else a little bit better.

The maturity level and the closeness were a lot higher there than at home. For those who work better with numbers, this was well illustrated in the "mad props" and "weird happenings" that we did at night. The "mad props" were where we could recognize people for the good things they did. The "weird happenings" were sort of playful teasing for the funny or sometimes embarrassing things they did. On the first night, more than half the time was spent on the "weird happenings". By the final night, however, "mad props" were by far the majority. It just felt wonderful to give and receive one of those, and it helped bring us closer to each other.

For those who don't need numbers, by far the most profound example of the unity were the events of the final night in Juarez. We did a feet-washing activity, where the staff would wash the leaders feet, the leaders would wash each member of their groups feet, and then all were welcome to wash whomevers feet they felt that they should. It was truly an amazing thing to see. There was no teasing and there were gestures of forgiveness. But above all were the tears that flowed. We were all hugging, crying, and sharing kind words with friends new and old. I have not felt so touched in quite some time. I felt at peace and as one with everyone there. It was a feeling I won't soon forget.

The trip to Mexico had such an impact on my life, it's almost indescribable. Before I left, I really hoped that I would make memories that would last me forever. These memories are such a big part of me, I don't go a day without thinking about Mexico.

I don't think I would have enjoyed Mexico that much if it weren't for the people in TNT. Everyone effected me differently, and everyone effected me positively. I learned that I had to be honest to be open, and in Mexico I was open so much it surprised me. I have a hard time with being that open with people, but even the atmosphere changed how I thought about everything. I think about certain people everyday, and I thank them for being who they are and what they've done for me. I made friends for life, just from one trip, and it makes me really happy knowing that I can turn to these people after the trip and still feel the same way about them. No one disappointed me through the whole trip. Everyone willingly gave a hundred percent to everything and that made everything a hundred times better.

Another strong memory I have, is the fact that I went to a totally different country helping other people less fortunate than me and I had the best time of my life. In a way, I feel like I've been given so much more than I ever gave, to anyone. Just seeing these people so happy with so little, it really is amazing. Just being in the same room with those kids made me so happy, all the joy they have in their hearts, and the smiles. I'll never forget those smiles.

I've gotten so much out of this trip, and I really thought that I would be able to change my life here, to be more like the people there. But it's hard with all these material things surrounding me, to get to the life that I want. I would give up anything and everything to go back there and be that happy again. I honestly, can

not express in words how I really feel about that trip. The excitement, the happiness, and the sorrow of the whole thing really made me think about what I have, and what I take for granted. I have never enjoyed myself and the company of others so much in my life. I never thought that I would feel this accepted in anything.

I loved this trip. And I would go back there in a second to do everything all over again.

Nikki Owczarski

REFLECTION

On the way to Mexico, I was wondering if I would have the same amount of fun as I did last year, because I thought it was a once in a lifetime experience. Wow, was I wrong! Fortunately, the bus ride was a lot more comfortable than last year, and overall the ride was great. We arrived in Juarez Sunday night. After we got situated in our bunks, we were able to meet the people of the church. The Mexican people made us food and then the head of each family introduced themselves and the rest of their family. Each family thanked us all for coming down and helping them. I thought it was so amazing that the people welcomed us freely and were our friends, eventhough we'd only known them a couple of hours. I found out that I would have Vacation Bible School the first two days. During those two days, I felt bonds forming between myself and many of the children. We played many different games like soccer, baseball and pato pato gonzo. We also sang songs, acted out gospel scriptures, and made crafts. We were all growing very close. The children would listen to us, and in the evening they would come back and beg us to play some more or give them piggy back rides. Playing and interacting with the Mexican children was one of the greatest memories I have of Juarez. They all seem so appreciative of our spending time with them. The next two days I was at the worksite. What really touched me, was after the first day at the worksite, Sara, our counselor, told me that the children were asking where Tay Jota (T.J. in Spanish) was. It really made me feel wanted, knowing the children missed me during play time. At the worksites, we worked our hardest and had a great experience working with the Mexican people. Unfortunately, there were times we wished we could do even more work for these people. On our trip home, I realized I shouldn't take things for granted, and when I don't get my way, I shouldn't complain. These people have the very minimal, and are happy with what they have and how they live. I am also somewhat jealous of the way they live. Because their lives are so simple with the very least, they don't have to worry about some of the problems we have to deal with back in the states. Yes...I would do it again!!!!

T.J. DEXTER

Wow! The journey we have all just returned from was awesome. First of all, I would like to thank everyone involved in the trip. Secondly, we have learned a lot through friendships made on our adventure. Remember the most important friendship is the one with Jesus. He walked with us, hand in hand, through about 50 hours of bus rides, 5 days in Mexico, and for the rest of our lives. Remember your service and continue to grow from it.
Thanks Again,

- Pat Hannigan

When I signed up for this trip I didn't know what to think. I was excited, nervous, and I was mainly just happy. I was hoping that I would be able to come back and say that the trip had changed my life. Well it did! While I was in Mexico I learned so much. I learned a little Spanish, I learned how they lived, but most of all I realized how good we have it. While I was in Mexico I didn't see one kid not laughing or smiling. Some people would say that they are poor. Not me, I think they are rich. Not with money, but with faith and life. All in all that was the best week of my life. I learned so much. Although we may have helped them build a school or helped with a house they helped me more than I could ever help them. I truly hope I and many more can experience the feeling you receive while you're in Mexico!

- Mark Hanningan

Mexico Reflection

It was 11:00 at night on Friday, June 23, and I was stoked. I was so excited for what would be to come within the next few days. As I loaded onto the bus for our seemingly “forever” bus trip, I realized that everyone was as excited as I was. A few of them even seemed more excited, as they had gone last year, and knew what to expect. A few moments later we were saying our departure prayer, and we were off. The bus was great. 100 times better than last year’s bus, was the word goin around. We popped in our first movie, and the trip had now begun. The first night went by very fast, and as we arrived at our first food stop, we could hardly tell we had gone anywhere. We ate our food and pilled back onto the bus we were back on our way. We drove right through the heart of Oklahoma, which was the mainstay for most of the daylight. At about 7:00 P.M. we arrived into Texas, but we weren’t there for long. We stopped at about 9:00 and had a picnic type thing. That was awesome, the scenery was great, and everyone was interacting, and having fun. We arrived in El Paso Texas at about 4:15 in the morning on Sunday, but most people were sleeping. The bus ride had been a breeze. We got to walk around downtown for quite a while before they called us back. In that time we had mass in a huge, and beautiful church. It was now time for us to unload our stuff, and pile it onto the ugly yellow school bus for our departure from the USA. As we crossed the border, you could not only see, but also smell the poverty. The dirt road we traveled on was horrendous. We eventually pulled up into the place where we would be staying for the week. A Puke green two-story house, one of the nicest ones there. It was then the interaction started, between everyone regardless of age, size, or income. Then I made my first trip to the coke store, a place I would be going very often in this short trip. It was there that we got to drink our only cold substance of the trip, and man was it refreshing. After about 1 hour of having fun it was time for club. During club we mostly sing, but we also bring up good points that happened during the day with our yeah gods, our mad props, weird happenings, and highlights of the day. After a 2 and a half-hour club session it was time for bed. We slept in about a 12 by 12 room, with four, three bunk high beds. There is one swamp cooler for the temperature, and man did it work. We woke up bright and early the next morning, with breakfast at 7:30. After breakfast we got our assignments for the week. I had vbs the first two days, and then the worksite, for the next two. Our day was about to begin. We had a planning

meeting for V.B.S, I had song and games group. So we scheduled everything for Monday, and Tuesday because we would be going to the market tomorrow. The kids then started piling in at about 1 o'clock. I generally hung around this ten-year-old boy named Juan for most of the week, but I met him at vbs. After what seemed like a blink of an eye it was just about time for club. We had another great session, and then again, we went to sleep. The wake up call was bright and early as usual, and we were ready to start our day off. For me it would be off to the market for some shopping, so I hopped on to the dirty yellow school bus and we were on our way. When we arrived I ran right into the market. We shopped around for 2 hrs and then headed back for another exciting day of bible school. Vbs. the second day was a lot better, because you knew more people. I played basketball with some older Mexican kid for most of this day. And again with what seemed like the blink of an eye the day was over. We were in club then ready to go to bed. The next day Wednesday, would be one to remember. It was my first day on the site and things were going good. Everyone was working hard, and a lot was getting done. When we got done, we went back to the place where we had been staying and played with the kids, until dinnertime. We had an outstanding dinner, and then loaded onto the bus. We were on our way to the mountain, which had gained its fame from last year's trip. We arrived at the mountain after a ten-minute drive, and just starred in awe. It was an amazing thing. We then started to scale up it, on my way up I began to think if the walk up was worth it, but my question was soon to be answered. It was great; everyone was taking pictures of the cross, placed in the middle of the peak. We then went back and had a club session, and it was off to bed. The next day was our last full day in Mexico. We went to the site, worked our butts off, and then came back to go to a mass said in Spanish. It was really cool. We then played with the kids for another hour, and it was time for our last club. They did something really cool having to do with Jesus washing all of his disciple's feet. Then it was time for bed, and when we woke up it was time for another long bus ride. This went by really quickly, and we arrived home at five thirty, I would be changed forever.

Jim Zika

The Greatest Love of All
(Michael Masser, Linda Creed)
revised for Mexico 2000 (Juarez mission trip)

The Greatest Love of All let me love MYSELF!

I believe the children are our future
Give them faith,
Let them lead the way
Show them all the beauty they possess inside

Give them a sense of pride
Make it easier.
Let the children's laughter
Remind us how we used to be

Everybody's searchin' for a hero
Someone...they look up to
You can be the one who fills that need.
Sharing the love of Christ
You can show them how,
To let His love shine forth from within
For all the world to see.

I decided long ago
Never to walk in anyone's shadow
If I fail...hey I still succeed
Because I've the courage to show I believe

No matter what the odds may be
We go forth with Christ's dignity.

Chorus:

Because the greatest love of all
Is happening to me
I found that the greatest love of all
Is inside of me.

So...I believe the children are our future (Back to verse one)

Chorus:

Because the greatest love of all
Is happening to me
I found that the greatest love is *Christ in me!*

(The greatest love of all
is easy to achieve
learning to love myself
Through the *Greatest Love Of ALL*)

Henry @ our lock-in

MEXICO

Kate
Mazley

When I first signed up for the Juarez Mission, I was frightened because I had no clue what to expect. I regret ever having that fear!! Mexico had the most unbelievable effect on me, the type of thing that you can't really describe with words. ~~All I~~ All I know is that I was touched, a new miracle, a new seed of life was planted within me. The Mexican children opened my eyes and showed me the true meaning of life. Not money, possessions, and greed, but love and friendship. You saw it all around you whether in VBS or the worksight, we were all touched by the children's energy and light.

They live so simply, not caring how you dressed or looked, just as long as you would give

them a piggy back ride. The Mexican community made me realize how selfish we truly are, but few ~~see~~ notice it. A simple wooden cross on a rocky hill brought tears to my eyes, changing me forever. Things like that are what make the Mexicans so happy.

I would return to Juarez in a heartbeat. And I know I will always be welcome there. Mexican children are so full of love that no one will ever be turned away.