



2018-2019
**ANNUAL
REPORT**

Project Mexico
& St. Innocent Orphanage





Dennis Awad,
Chairman of the Board



Message from the Chairman

It is an honor to serve as the new chairman of Project Mexico and St. Innocent Orphanage, an organization about which I care deeply. I have been blessed with so much, six grown children, six grandchildren, a wonderful wife and family. I feel called to give back to others that are not as fortunate. I have been a business owner for over 40 years and involved in the church as President of a Parish Council, Chairman of a Cathedral Council, a Trustee at St. Vladimir's Seminary for six years, and a Director of Ancient Faith Ministries for over 20 years.

Even though I had been to the St. Innocent Orphanage Ranch many times to see the staff and orphanage, I never knew what it was like to work on a Project Mexico Home Build in Mexico. I decided it was the time to find out. It only took ten minutes to cross the border. It was easy and safe. Our ranch is only 30 minutes from the border.

When I arrived, I was surprised to see parents with teenage children working together building the homes. Many people such as Dr. Sandi Moutsios and Mark Fridell had brought their children to work with them on the build, setting an example for the young adults they will never forget. Instead of having a traditional vacation, they were teaching their children about doing works of good for others. These great warriors for Christ are examples of how we should view the mission of Project Mexico and St. Innocent Orphanage in our lives.

I worked with Charlie Boardman, site-lead, and he took charge of the home that we were building. It was wonderful working alongside Lisa Rigisich, Father Anthony Savas, Maria Soter and other dedicated, selfless and hard-working volunteers. All of the volunteers fundraise their trip fee which is used to purchase the materials to build the house for a homeless family in just five days! Additionally, proceeds directly benefit the boys at the St. Innocent Orphanage.

How is this possible? Project Mexico exists because of selfless donors and volunteers. Thank you again for your support of this life changing ministry. It is a challenging endeavor that can only exist through your prayers, time and generosity.

May God Bless you and keep you well,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis J. Awad".

Dennis J. Awad, Chairman of the Board
chairman@projectmexico.org

Message from the Executive Director

I want to thank the tremendous efforts of our countless donors, volunteer home builders, OCMC missionaries, interns, and staff who make our work possible.

This year we made improvements to the Ranch facility, expanded our kitchen and the chapel and built a new straw bale Tiendita store. We expanded our Home Building program so our families can now choose the color of their house.

Our new year-round service program will have interns spending two summers in Mexico building and participating in our leadership service learning curriculum at community organizations throughout the fall and winter. This year they will be interning in Eagle River, Alaska.

Volunteers can sign up today for Home Building weeks during our summer 2020 season. Look for our expanded trip options as we partner with our sister organizations as we build hope all year. These opportunities and events will be announced on projectmexico.360alumni.com. The events will also include screenings of the documentary, "Building Hope" which you can download free at vimeo.com/321972622 and use to host a fundraiser for your trip.

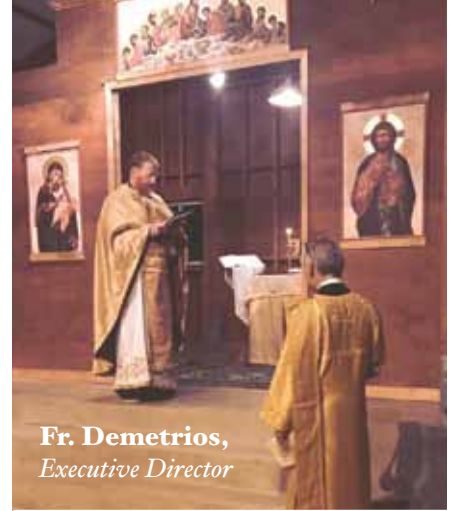
In September we raised over \$14,000 for the boys of St. Innocent Orphanage during our annual Swim For Hope 20-mile open ocean swim from Point Loma, California to the Northern Coronado Island. If you would like to become a School Buddy, your generous donation will help pay for tuition, uniforms, and more for each of our boys in elementary, middle, high school, or college.

As we look forward to the coming year, we ask the Lord to look down on His fruitful vineyard, bless the workers, and help all of us to make our ministry bountiful!

In Christ,



Fr. Demetrios Andrews, Executive Director
jp@projectmexico.org



Fr. Demetrios,
Executive Director



Community Highlights

- ✦ Five of the new boys were baptized in the church and a local family of four were chrismated.
- ✦ During Holy Week, seven young maidens participated in the services by serving as Myrrh-bearers.
- ✦ Pascha was celebrated in its fullness by a complete schedule of services and by roasting one of our ranch-raised pigs.
- ✦ 18 clergy and four priest's wives participated in the summer Home Building Program coming from the Greek, OCA, Antiochian and Serbian traditions.
- ✦ The Paraklesis to the Theotokos (Mother of God) was celebrated weekly in Spanish for the Tijuana community.
- ✦ Several Orthodox faithful donated funds to remodel the ranch kitchen and double orphanage cafeteria seating capacity.
- ✦ Women from the community have learned to make prosfora and produced an instructional video in Spanish on how to prepare the bread for holy communion.

Fr. Nicholas Andruchow



A "Face to Face" Connection

How can we stop the exodus of young adults from leaving the faith?

The statistics are staggering. 61% of church going teens are disengaged from the faith once they enter into their twenties. 70% of young adults leave their faith when they go to college. 35% of all 18 to 35-year-old Americans identify with "none" as their faith of preference.

Our youth do not know how to connect with God. They are bored of the mundane approach to spirituality. Orthodox Christianity is steeped in rich tangible tools to help us grow in God but unfortunately, sometimes our traditions seem too intangible. Offering incense, partaking

of God's flesh and blood, being forgiven through the sacrament of confession are all traditions that have been passed down to us through the Apostles.

These traditions are celebrated in Tijuana on the site of the largest Orthodox cross-cultural home building program in the world at Project Mexico. We open up a dialogue with God. Project Mexico brings volunteers "Face to Face" with the realities of poverty. Looking at the suffering of the families for whom we build and of the children for whom we care makes Christ come alive in our own lives by knowing Him tangibly through the needy.

Once they come to know Him then leaving His Church is not that easy. Project Mexico does not claim to be the cure of this lost generation. Christ is the only One Who can change the tides of abandonment of the faith. But Project Mexico can be a tool for the Lord in the 21st century so the young faithful can be challenged as they change lives and stand firm in their life in Christ. ✦ **Fr. Nicholas Andruchow, Priest / Associate Director**





Madi Franck



Orphanage Highlights

- Alejandro completed a successful freshman year at Hellenic College and has begun his sophomore year.
- Efrain and Anselmo are thriving as they enter their last year at Ibero Jesuit High School and are in a great position as they look at universities.
- The youngest seven boys had a successful school year.
- After just one year and a lot of hard work, our three new boys are reading and writing!
- We celebrated our 3rd Homeschool graduation, with four boys graduating.
- Under the incredible coaching of Guillermo, the boys are flourishing in their soccer league and have wonderful fellowship together.

Hard and Humble Work

One of the younger boys' teachers summed it up well at the end of the year when she said, "They may not be the most academically advanced, wealthiest, or 'popular,' but they have a sense of self, heart and values that have made me want to come to work each day. I am grateful that your orphanage exists." We are humbled by the opportunity to

mold our boys into good people, strong in their Orthodox faith. We are grateful to our tremendous staff, volunteers, and the donors that make this good work possible. Please continue to pray for continued strength and health of our staff and their families. + **Madi Franck, Orphanage Director**

The "Jovenes" Independent Living Program

The "Jovenes" Independent Living Program supports our oldest boys in developing important skills such as financial planning, job development, life planning, goal-setting, housekeeping, and being a strong man in society. This program has demonstrated that through positive and focused mentorship, we can aid the boys in developing a strong and secure sense of self that helps them attain their goals.

THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT POSSIBLE

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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 Archbishop Benjamin Peterson, *Officer*
 Rev. Steven Tschlis, *Officer*
 Dr. Frederick Milkie, *Officer*
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 Dn. Andrew Andrews, *Officer*
 George Alex, *Officer*
 Rami Yanni, *Officer*
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 Eugenio Villa Martinez
 Faith Gunderson
 Francisco Carranza Reyes
 Guillermo Moreno Luque
 Ilia & Lena Anossov
 Irene Sanchez Pacheco
 Juan Bustos Denova
 Juan Carlos Orijel Canela

STAFF MEMBERS

Fr. Demetrios (JP) Andrews
 Fr. Nicholas & Pres. Merilynn Andruchow
 Fr. Matthew Howell
 Dn. Alejandro Sosa Aguilar
 Mike & Jennifer Saur
 Ana Lía Gutierrez
 Anna Cunningham
 Beatriz Adriana Gil
 Ellen Maryon

Katy Delehoy
 Lidia Moreno Garcia
 Madi Franck
 Mario Alberto Irineo Lopez
 Martha Elena Maciel Oros
 Monica Aguirre Negrete
 Noelle Robaidek
 Noriko Correa
 Oliver Fahling
 Patricia Stephanie Otañez Silva
 Ramón Manuel Domínguez Valenzuela

Rosalba Nayeli Valencia Arce
 Rocio Irineo Lopez
 Sergio Puga
 Ulises Mital Aguilar
 Shane Roeschlein
 Tina Cooper

I learned that there are people out there with real tough conditions and they are still happy somehow. I learned how we have to be grateful and satisfied for all that we have.

Ethan Kalmin

Even though this is the 8th year I'm leading a team to Mexico, I continue to find great joy in seeing the impact it has on each of our team members. We have taken more than 100 people from ages 10 to 76 years old on these trips, and young and old alike are profoundly touched by their experience. Everyone discovers a renewing aspect of their Christian faith. To love others unconditionally, to draw closer to Jesus Christ, to give of oneself sacrificially, to realize the joy of serving others - these are priceless lessons of life!

Fr. Luke Veronis

Thomas Ingram

OUR SUMMER INTERNS

Aaron Blain
 Anastazie Jordanova
 Angelina Gonzalez Chavira
 Artem Budovski
 Daniel Kroll
 Duncan Young
 Efrain Rosas Leyva
 Elena Richardson

Olivia Neslusan

Sophia Michalopoulos
 Theodora Veronis

VOLUNTEERS

Pres. Maria Margaritis
 Grace Cosby
 Luke & Elias Andruchow



Special thanks to all those who shared their Home Building photos with us. We appreciate you building hope with us through photography!

Everything about Project Mexico was out of my "comfort zone" and yet, within a day my eyes were opened and my heart touched. I realized this place is something special. I am filled with gratitude for this brilliant Project Mexico experience, and know it will remain a memorable highlight in my adult life!

Rebecca Veronis

HOME BUILDING GROUPS 2019

SPRING BREAK

OCF REAL BREAK,
Brookline, MA

The Prodigal Son,
Los Angeles, CA

Sansalone Family,
Cincinnati, OH

Sierra Family,
College Station, TX

Team Portland,
Portland, OR

SUMMER BUILDS

Annunciation,
Elkins Park, PA

Annunciation,
Missoula, MT

Assumption,
Scottsdale, AZ

Benjamin & Joe Hodges,
Memphis, TN

Beth Stapleton,
Clinton, MS

Catie Golitzin,
San Anselmo, CA

Christ the Savior,
Berlin, MD

Church of Our
Saviour, *Rye, NY*

Church of the
Redeemer,
Los Altos Hills, CA

CrossRoad,
Brookline, MA

Holy Ascension,
Albion, MI

Holy Resurrection,
Tucson, AZ

Holy Theophany,
Colorado Springs, CO

Holy Trinity,
Clearwater, FL

Holy Trinity,
Dallas, TX

Holy Trinity,
Little Rock, AR

This trip absolutely changed my life and I am so happy I went. It was the first time in my life where I have done something hands-on to serve God and other people, and it has turned me on to a whole new way of being.

Catie Golitzin

Holy Trinity,
Nashville, TN

Holy Trinity,
Overland Park, KS

Holy Trinity, *Santa Fe, NM*

Holy Trinity Holy Cross,
Birmingham, AL

Ken Romero,
Camarillo, CA

LASportsNet,
Los Angeles, CA

Matthew Bramwell,
Sierra Vista, AZ

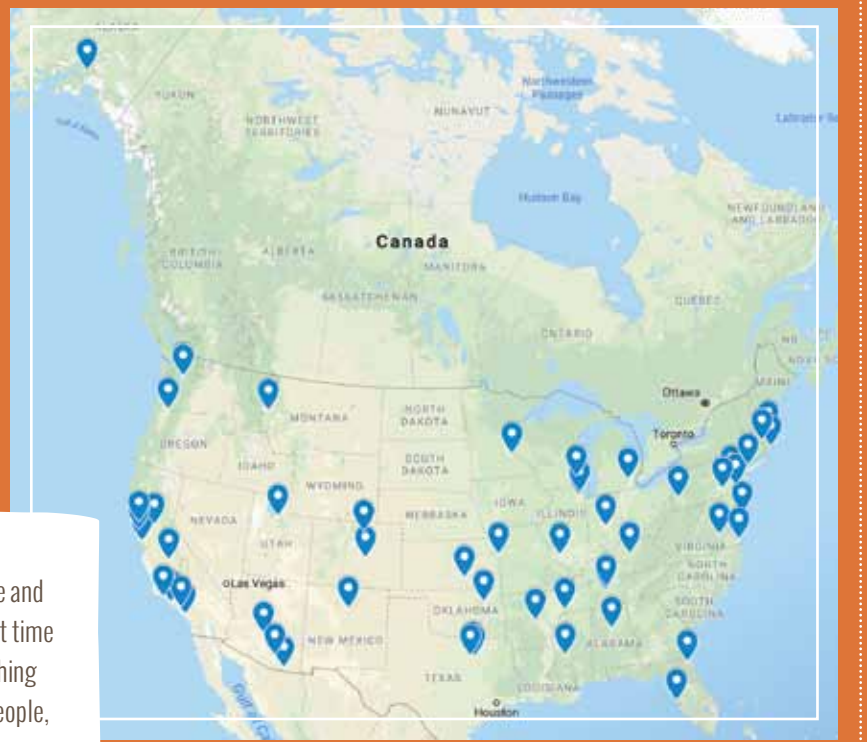
Metropolis of
Pittsburgh Young Adults,
Pittsburgh, PA

Michael Pak,
Los Angeles, CA

Nicholas Kaloudis,
Salt Lake City, UT

Protection of the Holy
Virgin, *Santa Rosa, CA*

Resurrection,
Castro Valley, CA



S.A.L.T.,
South St. Paul, MN

St. Anna,
Salt Lake City, UT

St. Antony, *Tulsa, OK*

St. Athanasius,
Sacramento, CA

St. Athanasius,
Santa Barbara, CA

St. Demetrios, *Elmhurst, IL*

St. George and St. Mary,
Wichita, KS

St. Herman, *Wasilla, AK*

St. Ignatius, *Franklin, TN*

St. John the Baptist,
Eules, TX

St. John the Baptist,
Portland, OR

St. Justin Martyr,
Jacksonville, FL

St. Katherine, *Kirkland, WA*

St. Nicholas, *Ann Arbor, MI*

St. Nicholas, *Bethlehem, PA*

St. Nicholas,
Virginia Beach, VA

St. Paul, *Brier, WA*

St. Paul's, *Irvine, CA*

St. Peter's, *Fresno, CA*

St. Seraphim, *Dallas, TX*

St. Sophia, *Los Angeles, CA*

St. Spyridon, *Loveland, CO*

St. Spyridon, *Newport, RI*

Stephanie & Anna Cobb,
Birmingham, AL

Sts. Constantine & Elena,
Indianapolis, IN

Sts. Constantine & Helen,
Carrollton, TX

Sts. Constantine & Helen,
Milwaukee, WI

Sts. Constantine & Helen,
Richmond, VA

Sts. Constantine & Helen,
Swansea, IL

Sts. Constantine & Helen,
Webster, MA

Sts. Peter & Paul,
Glenview, IL

Team Whiteman,
Wilmore, KY

Transfiguration &
Annunciation, *Lititz, PA*



Tina Cooper



GOING TO MEXICO to build a house was an experience I will absolutely never forget! It allowed me to experience everything the Bible teaches us – to love one another, to be humble, to discover the joy in helping others especially those less fortunate, to be grateful for everything that we have, to realize that happiness doesn't come from how much we have but rather from how much we give. Most importantly, this experience brought me closer to God because it gave me a little taste of experiencing the kind of life that His Son lived – a life of loving others and serving others. This is the kind of life He wants us to live.

➤ *Amanda Raymond*

Hope Without Borders

One of my favorite things about working as volunteer coordinator at Project Mexico is hearing how people have been impacted by their Home Building trip experience. Time and time again people speak not so much about the tremendous achievement of building a home for a family in four days. Instead, observations of faith, courage, kindness, thanksgiving and hospitality prevail and are woven

through stories shared and lives that are exchanged as foundations are built. It is a true testament of God's healing presence in our midst and His invitation to participate and learn from those that persevere in faith, hope and love in the midst of struggle. These stories witness to our shared humanity that knows no separation by language, culture or borders. ➤ **Tina Cooper, Volunteer Coordinator**

I THINK PROJECT MEXICO was the most impactful and inspiring thing I have ever been a part of. It helped me see life in a different way and appreciate everything much more. I developed special relationships with my team members, the people in Mexico and especially with the family for whom we built a home.

➤ *Jared Barrows*

THE FIRST THING that amazed me was when we crossed the border was a feeling like we had traveled back in time 50 years. There were one or two nice houses between dozens and dozens of shacks. When we handed the keys over to Maria, the mother of three for whom we built the home, her tears of gratitude said it all. Her husband Abel offered words of thanksgiving that were profound and humbling. ➤ *Michael Chito*



WHAT REALLY MADE THIS TRIP special was the family. The father, Marco, was a former gang member in LA and had a powerful testimony about leaving that life and becoming Christian! Every year I bring markers and coloring supplies for the kids at our build sites. A fun thing we do together is color on the unpainted fascia boards. Coloring is my favorite way to connect with the kids. Pictures and drawings always help bridge the language barrier since everyone interprets drawings the same way no matter what language they speak. After drawing on the fascia boards, we always paint over them before we install them. However, Marco loved the colorful boards so much he decided to clear coat them instead of painting them white. We all wrote our names down and drew pictures before we installed them. This was the first time the family chose to keep the drawings on the boards as a memory of this experience. I was blessed to be able to give them the keys to their home at the end of the week. **➡ Asia Ballew**



BEING AN INTERN for a few months and helping the local people receive a new home has been one of the most beautiful and humbling experiences of my life. The relationships made with the Mexicans as well as with other interns and volunteers are priceless. **➡ Olivia Neslusan**

THIS WEEK OF BUILDING made clear to me that less is truly more. We met a family for whom we built a home who barely have the necessary essentials for living, yet they were such kind, loving, and generous people. It was clear that with such little, there was so much love circulating through their household. Building this home with them and developing comradery with our team was deeply moving. I learned that I receive such deep joy by giving to others. This kind of work is something I can see myself doing in the future. **➡ Cliff Jewis**



George & Judy Marcus Leadership Program

FOCAL (Forming Orthodox Christian Adult Leaders)

Our new leadership program, FOCAL is sponsored by George and Judy Marcus. Every summer numerous young adults join us in Tijuana and intern as site leaders for the groups who come to build homes. They receive no pay and work long hours for weeks at a time. The interest in the program has more than doubled over the past decade and for this reason we have seen the need to develop and formalize a training program for these young Christian leaders.

Presbytera Merilynn Andruchow has lived at the orphanage for over a decade and is a graduate of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary. She is spearheading this new initiative. The Marcus Family Foundation is supporting this program for three years. The leadership curriculum for the next three years will focus on pre-service training, in-country education and post service follow-up.

Project Mexico is grateful for the Marcus' readiness to strengthen the Church's future leaders. This three-year pilot program will be the beginning of a much larger approach to capitalize on the energy of our young adults and to strengthen the overall evangelism of Christ's Church. **+**



Thomas Ingram



Ranch Improvements

Our new general store, “The Tiendita” is fully functioning and was in heavy use for the summer Home Building season. The Tiendita is a building constructed of straw bales coated in a cob mixture of clay soil, straw, sand, lime and water. All of us here at Project Mexico are pleased with the way it turned out. It is serving nicely as a snack and souvenir shop, and a great place to hang out for all the summer volunteers.

The new septic system was built before the arrival of the 2019 interns. It served

approximately 35 people a day during the summer months.

In the coming months we should expect to see visible improvement to the Ranch landscape at St. Innocent Orphanage. We will be planting a large orchard of native, Mediterranean, and fruit bearing trees. Increases in our sustainability will also include a chicken coop to produce our own eggs—we consume 500 a week—along with fertilizer for our growing garden. + **Thomas Ingram, Ranch Management**

Sustain Our Ongoing Ministry!

In honor of St. Innocent’s feast day on October 6th we began our Annual Matching Grant Campaign. We invite you to support our ministry as we enter the end of year by becoming an Annual Matching Grant Sponsor or Supporter. This giving provides dollar-per-dollar matching to the amount given by our generous donors. Your contribution is critical for us to continue our mission. With your support, we are looking forward to growing the ministry of Project Mexico in 2020!

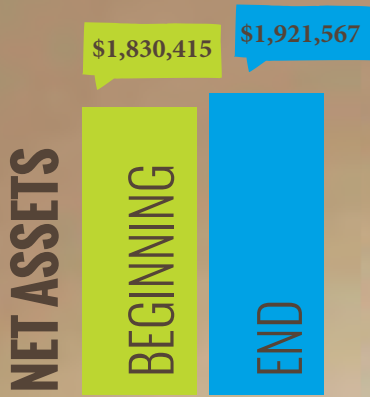
DONATE ONLINE TODAY:
projectmexico.org/donate

All gifts received by mail must be postmarked by Dec. 31st. Online gifts must be charged on or before Dec. 31st. Thank you!

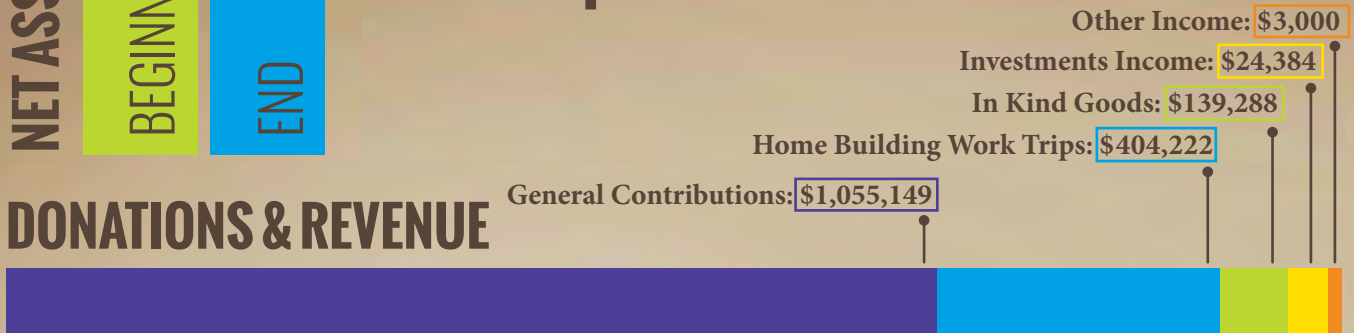


2018

DONATIONS AT WORK



DONATIONS & REVENUE



FUNCTIONAL EXPENSE ALLOCATIONS



2018 HANDS AT WORK



Project Mexico of the Orthodox Church



Building Hope for Boys Without Families and Families Without Homes

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Fr. Matthew Howell



Year of Service

Project Mexico is happy to announce its first formal year-long internship program which is available starting in January 2020. Participants will start in Eagle River, Alaska and will finish as Home Building interns in Mexico. Interns will go to Mexico in early May to prepare for the summer.

The program will be done in conjunction with OCMC (OCMC.org) and Saint John Orthodox Cathedral (stjohnalaska.org), which will provide a loving, supportive church community for the interns during their stay in Alaska. OCMC missionaries Michael and Jennifer Saur are bringing their immersive missionary experience from Project Mexico to Alaska to help set up and run the program.

Learning service development will include work at the Downtown Hope Center in Anchorage in addition to other social service agencies in Anchorage, Eagle River, and Wasilla. Work with the QCA Diocese of Alaska will be done as it becomes available. There will also be opportunities for Alaskan adventures (i.e. snowboarding, skiing, hiking, etc).

The cost of the program is \$1,000 per month and includes travel costs, rent, and a living stipend.

Space is limited, apply immediately!

Contact the Year of Service program overseer, Fr. Matthew Howell, for applications: FrMatthew@ProjectMexico.org. ✦

Project Mexico
& St. Innocent Orthodox Church
Building Hope for Boys Without Families and Families Without Homes