

We Build Hope TOGETHER

2019-2020 Annual Report



Project Mexico
& St. Innocent Orphanage
projectmexico.org



Saint Innocent
SERVICE WORKS
stinnocentserviceworks.org



THE BORDER IS CLOSED BUT WE ARE NOT

IT is the beginning of the ecclesiastical new year as I write. What will we do with the lessons learned from the past year of our Lord? How will we take what we have learned and use them to redeem the time and produce fruits worthy of His servants?

A year ago, we began a new enrollment process for homebuilding. This included several things: discounted early bird pricing and a rolling enrollment. We started out with 377 homebuilding volunteer signups and grew to 550! We also received about 40% of payments earlier in the year. This would have been an exceptional year, but like everyone

else in the world, the pandemic disrupted our operations.

Unfortunately, with the border closure and community spread in Tijuana we were forced to postpone summer homebuilding 2020. We were blessed in that only 12% of our homebuilding participants asked for refunds! Many made donations of their trip fees to help us in a severe financial crisis and most rolled their trip into 2021.

Last winter, our board approved an expansion of our trip locations. We had several contingency trips planned that enabled us to aid communities. We repaired a house in Puerto Rico, improved

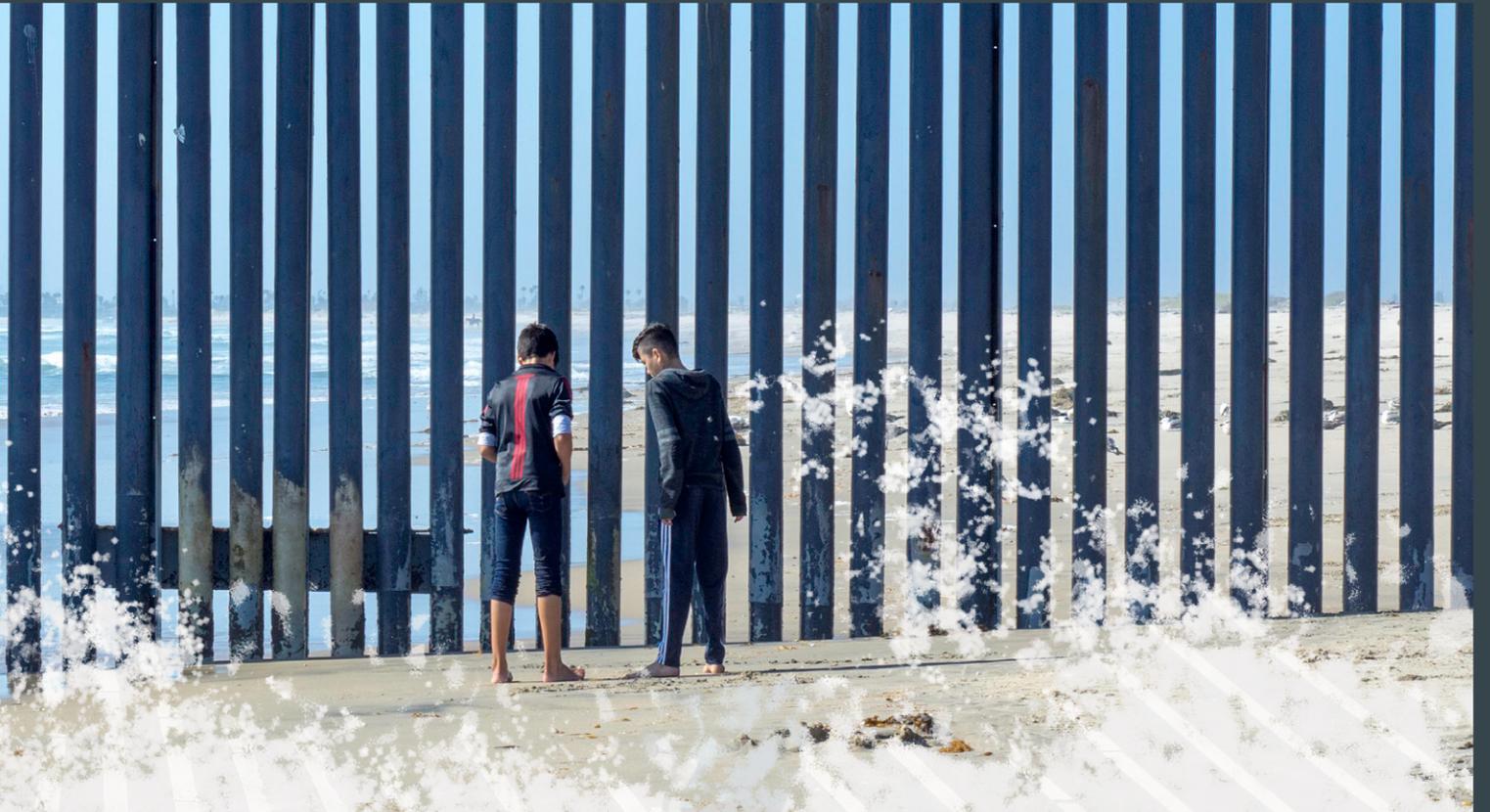
a monastery in Colorado, and built a greenhouse in Ohio. We were able to re-direct several of our interns to Pittsburg with the Neighborhood Resiliency Project and we brought a handful of interns to St Innocent Orphanage to assist with the boys during the lockdown this summer.

COVID invited new opportunities. We utilized this time of preparation for



Colorado

Baja Mexico



pivoting. We re-examined our service model and we are confident these new initiatives will yield fruit for years to come. Our intern program thrived thanks to a generous grant of \$60,500 from the Marcus Family Foundation.

We also began our podcast series **Stories of Hope** and hosted our first ever streaming show with the Tiendita Summer Night fundraiser!

The loss of the homebuilding forced us to take quick and evasive financial controls. We furloughed our staff and cut our payroll by over 50%. We trimmed our costs of the orphanage by 20%. All other non-essential programs were cut. The government granted our organization the PPP loan and the SBA Loan which is the only reason we managed

to scratch by. Relying on these funds put us in a deficit of over \$450,000 mid-year and we are slowly digging out. Our financial need is critical and our loyal staff has sacrificed for their part.

The \$65,000 Leadership 100 Grant for 100 trip scholarships was postponed to 2021 (you may apply now at StInnocentServiceWorks.org) We were granted a \$47,040 gift from the National Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society for new orphanage vehicles!

Our **St. Innocent Annual Marching Grant Campaign** kicks off October 6th on St. Innocent's feast day! God willing, we will be able to finish the year with your support. We have already made significant strides with a \$150,000

matching grant from our Sponsors where every dollar will be **matched!**

Together, we can continue our great ministry. Join us this year on a trip. See the section of our Annual Report devoted to our new model of trip participation: **Prepare to Serve.**

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, of St Charalambos and St Innocent of Alaska, and the Most Holy Theotokos may we be strengthened in our faith and love for our fellow human beings in need and serve His saints throughout the world. ✘

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



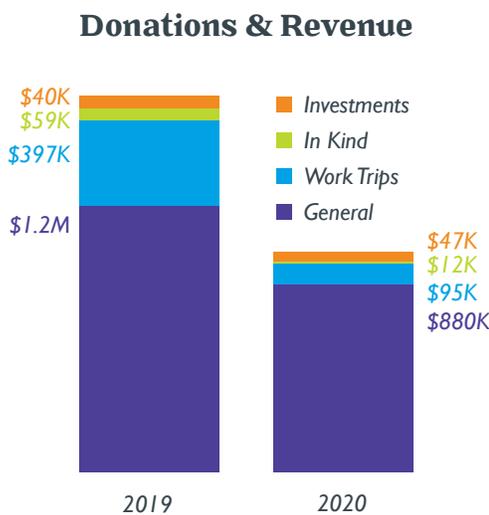
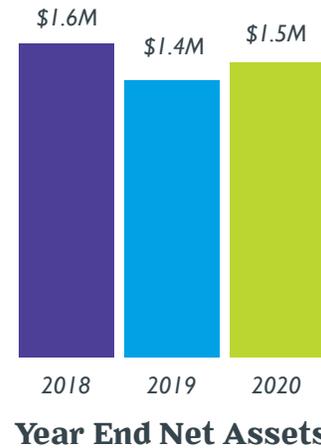
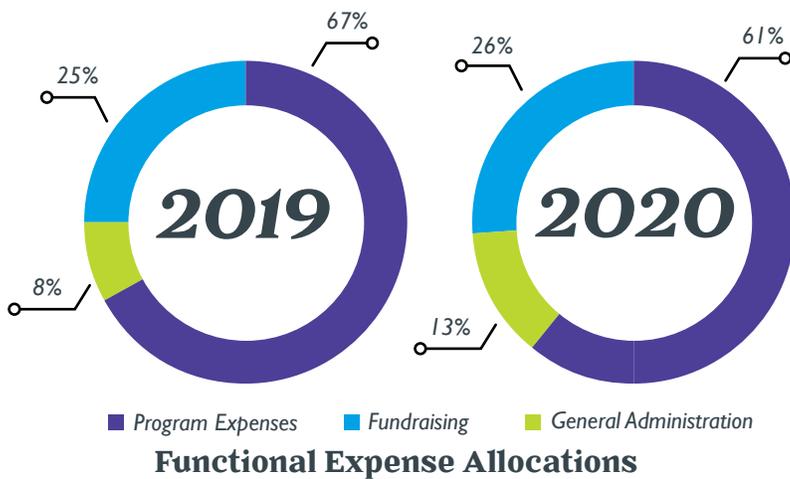
Puerto Rico



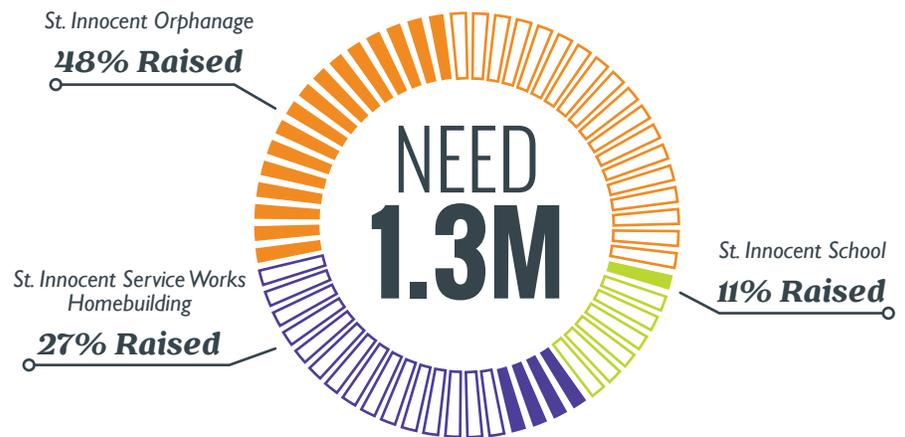
Cleveland



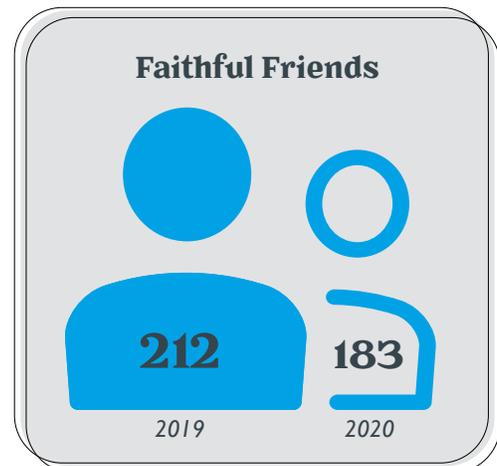
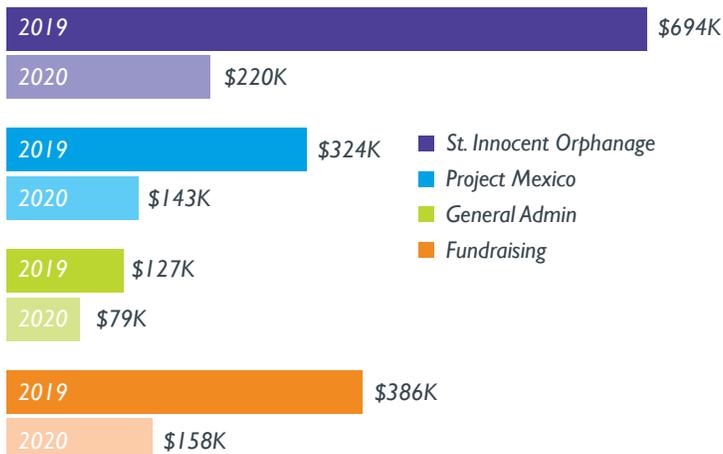
Donations at Work



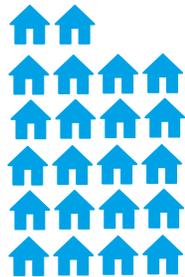
2020 Fundraising Need



Expenses



Hands at Work

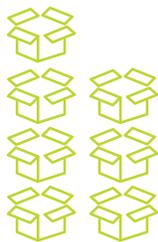


2019



2020

Homes Built / Work Trips



2019



2020

In Kind Donors



2019



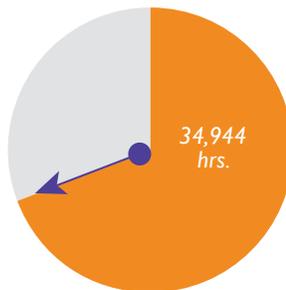
2020

Santa's Helpers



2019

Volunteers



2019

Volunteer Hours

Goal: 50,000 hrs.



2019



2020

Pantry Partner Boxes

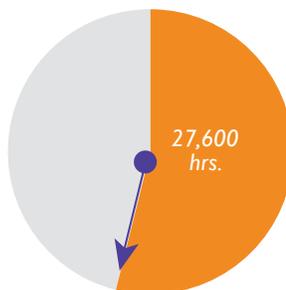


2020

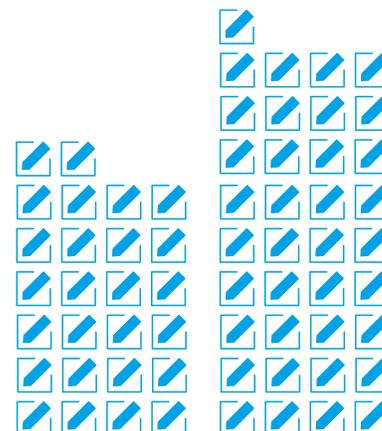
2019 School Buddies



2020 School Buddies



2020



2019



2020

Interns Trained

*A faithful friend is a strong shelter, and he who finds one finds a treasure.
There is nothing that can take the place of a faithful friend,
and there is no way to measure his worth. A faithful friend is a
medicine of life, and those who fear the Lord will find him.*

WISDOM OF SIRACH 6:14-16, ORTHODOX STUDY BIBLE

ON PRESENTNESS OF MIND

THE ORIENTATION OF THE SOUL

TOWARDS OTHERS

THIS SUMMER, MY INTENTION WAS TO SPEND TWO MONTHS BUILDING HOMES IN MEXICO, as I had in the summer of 2019. Due to the nature of the pandemic, that program was cancelled. Instead, I ended up in Pittsburgh, working with the Neighborhood Resilience Project, a non-profit focused on trauma-informed community development within the hill district neighborhood.

The way to God lies through love of people. At the last judgement I shall not be asked whether I was successful in my ascetic exercises, nor how many bows and prostrations I made. Instead I shall be asked, Did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners. That is all I shall be asked. About every poor, hungry, and imprisoned person, the Savior says 'I'.

Mother Maria of Paris

Mother Maria Skobstova, a Russian nun who dedicated her life to serving the needy in 20th century Paris, called this life of dedication to others 'monasticism in the world.' We should strive

towards her example; both her vigilance in ministry to the needy and her aptitude for self-sacrificial love are unparalleled. As the dedicated patron saint of our house this summer, her words and her example greatly informed our ministry. During a summer in which I found myself in an unexpected place doing unexpected work, her teachings helped to bring me back to earth and remind me of my purpose, especially as I struggled with my longing to be across the border building homes and living on the ranch as I had initially planned. Reconciling where I thought I'd be with where I actually landed opened the door for some serious insights regarding Saint Maria, self-sacrificial service, and presentness of mind.

Nothing will ever be the same as Mexico. There was a certain quality about my summer on the ranch that made it inimitable; a unique hypostasis, if you will, wherein each day slid by and blended with the next, and yet life also possessed an inherent singularity of moment. To exist and operate within the context of the Project Mexico internship was to fall headlong into a sense of 'presentness' that came naturally. In less words, the experience of life on the ranch was, as a friend put it, effortless. So, one found that living in the moment was similarly effortless. The presentness I encountered in Pittsburgh was different. It did not come effortlessly; it was not, for me, immediately inherent in the place or in the work. Of course, this is not a mark against

Pittsburgh. I cannot emphasize enough how seminal this summer's work was for me, and how wonderful the people at the Neighborhood Resilience Project truly are. Rather, it was a tell of my soul's orientation towards the place and the people, which ultimately led to an acknowledgement of my troubles in establishing true presentness of mind without the helpful external vibrations of Baja-California living.

It was my tendency while in Mexico, although I was serving others, and although I felt the call to self-sacrificial service, to center myself more on the 'ascetic' aspect of the Mother Maria quote. A focus on personal prayer, reflection, and fasting, and an attempt to strengthen my spirituality through sheer willpower was aided by a healthy dose of Project Mexico-style inspiration. The brand of presentness I was feeling gave rise to a spiritual inspiration that was mostly self-centered. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, as 'understanding of being' is certainly necessary before perfect love can begin to radiate outward, it is this inward focus that, outside of the nonpareil atmosphere of PM, has now made attaining presentness of mind so difficult.





[...the act of sacrificial love itself leads to a greater awareness of place, person, and moment.]

The second half of the quote, which emphasizes personal sacrifice for the sake of others, has encouraged me to believe that these two things, self-sacrifice and presentness, have a connection, and in fact that the act of sacrificial love itself leads to a greater awareness of place, person, and moment. Pittsburgh took the desire of self-sacrifice that seeded my previous summer and supplemented it, in an environment where I was forced to create presentness for myself, as (I mentioned before) it did not come naturally. In turn, learning to facilitate presentness within myself, through self-sacrifice and service, is what has encouraged me to be more aware of my soul's orientation towards others.

This 'orientation of the soul' is something which Mother Maria hints at in the above quote and expounds upon in some of her writings. Her criticism of certain methods of monasticism, wherein one commits oneself to vigilant, unending, even obsessive, correction of the soul's stumbling, is followed by a recommendation: to redirect that energy and that vigilance towards Christ-like love of others, in all things and at all times. She says that the soul should not be oriented

back in on itself, but should aim to identify, empathize, and commune with every other soul that it encounters, through perfect love.

A favorite saint of mine, Saint Porphyrios, reinforces this view of hers with his quote,



"When we set ourselves apart from others, we are not Christians."

This is when presentness of mind comes back into play. When we are not present in ourselves, whether or not we are found in the physical company of others, we destroy our capability of authentic interaction with other souls. We miss the mark. But setting ourselves apart from others does not need to be a choice consciously made; it can be (and I would argue

most often is), an unconscious side-effect of living our lives in a way that does not encourage recognition of moment.

It still feels bittersweet that I was unable to return to the ranch this summer. However, this does not diminish how eternally grateful I am to now have a summer of ministry in Pittsburgh on which to reflect. I needed Mexico as a lens through which to qualify my work with the NRP, and I hope that my work will consequently inform my service moving forward, in a manner that glorifies all the ways in which Christ can move through us, for others, in each moment. ✘

////// Elias Fox was among five St. Innocent Service Works (SISW) interns who travelled to Pittsburgh this summer to work in partnership with Neighborhood Resilience Project (NRP) to experience a different perspective of what it is to serve. Taking a trauma-informed approach within an underserved inner city district, Fr Paul Abernathy centers the ministry on building resilient, healthy, healing communities.

Thank You 2020 Participants

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HCHC, Brookline, MA

VOLUNTEERS

Elias Andruchow*

The George & Judy Marcus Leadership Internship 2020



Glory be to God – the 8-week St. Innocent Summer Internship program was a great success! Through the continuing generosity of the Marcus family, this program completed its second year. Due to COVID we had to tailor our intern selection to fit the appropriate guidelines in order to facilitate interns at the ranch. The theme for this summer was, “Be still and know that I am God,” (Ps. 46:10).

Lead by Pres. Merilynn Andruchow, each day in prayer the interns learned how to plug into the source of peace, our Lord and Savior. They began to learn how to quiet their thoughts in order to feel His presence and His peace, and then carry that peace into their day-to-day routine. As a result, the interns were more peaceful, patient, kind, and resilient in their leadership roles with each other, the boys, and the staff during the mandatory lockdown.

It was truly a blessing to work with these amazing young adults and to see them blossom in their Orthodox Christian faith. They were lights not only to the people and boys here at the orphanage, but they left the summer and returned home as shining beacons for people in a world that has been plagued by darkness.

Gap Year Residency

Are you a student or parent of a student looking for a unique and life-changing experience in service of Christ? Don't want to spend next year stuck in ZOOM distance learning and want to make a difference? St Innocent Service Works is now accepting applications for our Gap Year Residency Program. The residency features Service-Leadership Education and Ministry Service in an Orthodox Residential Living environment.

Locations Include: Alaska, Baja Mexico, Pittsburgh, Puerto Rico and New York. Learn more by visiting the website at: StInnocentServiceWorks.org

* Indicates those working in partnership with OCMC

Prepare to Serve 2021

As news of the pandemic unfolded in the Spring months of 2020 it became clear that our summer would not be taking place as planned. Amidst growing uncertainty in all dimensions of life both domestically and globally there are two things that we know for sure. First, that a nationwide shutdown means there is an even greater need for individuals and communities to be served across the United States. Second, we have a remarkable group of courageous and vibrant young interns and volunteers who are eager to offer their time and their hearts.

Times of hardship often generate creative responses and new partnerships. This summer we partnered with the Neighborhood Resilience Project (NRP) in Pittsburgh. Five of our interns travelled to Pittsburgh this summer to serve within

NRP and experience a different perspective of what it is to serve. Another aspect of these partnerships and of our continued initiative allowed us to forge a GAP Year of Service residency program through St Innocent Service Works (SISW). This program allows us to build on the foundation of the beautifully immersive intern experience in Mexico.

In reality, any service is a gateway for growth into a deeper way of being that transcends all boundaries of what we define as service. To dwell in this love and in the continuous prayerful presence with God lies at the very heart of what it means to be human. The past months have demonstrated how lifegiving opportunities can emerge when we are willing to continue our walk in faith in the midst of challenging circumstances.

Risk-Free Early Bird Sign-up

- ① Choose one area of need: Community, Humanitarian or Recovery.
- ② Select dates and location for your group.*

*In the event of travel restrictions, we will move your trip to a domestic, regional, or local project as needed through our network of partnerships. This way you can commit and prepare to serve.

EARLY BIRD ENDS NOV. 30th

StInnocentServiceWorks.org



Community

Join volunteers as we beautify monasteries, rebuild churches, create greenhouses and gardens.

LOCATIONS

- Ohio
- Colorado
- California
- Missouri
- Kansas
- Tonga
- Alaska



Humanitarian

Help us build safe and secure homes for families in need.

LOCATIONS

- Baja Mexico
- Pennsylvania
- Toronto
- Appalachia
- Kansas
- Alaska
- Massachusetts
- Pittsburgh
- New York



Recovery

Team up with us to support families that are still in need after hard hit natural disasters areas.

LOCATIONS

- Puerto Rico
- US Virgin Islands
- Bahamas
- North Carolina
- Texas
- Florida

Opportunities of **GROWTH**

Fr. Nichol Andruchow
 Priest & Associate Director
 fnicholas@projectmexico.org

In these challenging days we reflect on the many unprecedented events and ask, "When will it end?" Us, as Christians, know there will be an end and God will return. Today, we are challenged to persevere no matter what epidemic might strike or senseless act of violence might occur. We are called to constantly imitate the universal virtues that rise above any worldly cause and resolves all the conflicts of modern society. These virtues are given to us by God and are engraved on our inner voice leading us to what is right. Every human being is called to be truthful, loving, patient, fearless, temperate and zealous for what truly matters. The source of these traits originate from the infinite creator, therefore the depths of them are far reaching and we are called to grow in them as long as we have life. We all must continuously grow spiritually so that we may endure the hardships in a healthy manner and become more like Christ. This is key to human existence and here at the St. Innocent Ranch we have had plenty of time to keep on growing through adversity, trials, and abundant blessings.

Turning Inward

In March, when the crisis began to unfold, we were called to focus inwardly. Our orphanage chapel closed the doors to people in the community. The boys of St Innocent now were the main leaders in the altar and the chanting stand. Trips off the ranch to public gatherings were prohibited and we focused our efforts on the Lenten cycle. We all counted our blessings to be able to worship together and receive Holy Communion. In addition, it was a gift to have 16 acres to vent the

stress of isolation. Through God's grace we came together and labored for the Lord by planting close to 50,000 square feet of land to grow food for the community. Before we knew it, we were eating kale and swiss chard three days a week and winter squash and corn were multiplying faster than it could be consumed. The harvest was an outward sign of God working through adversity but the largest gift was the faith growing in all of us because of our need to rely on Him. I continue to encourage all the boys and the staff that even though the virus is real and people get sick, don't be afraid because Christ is bigger than all of this. God knows how our faith grew in those days of isolation.

Reaching Out

As we approached Pascha and Pentecost we realized that the threat from the pandemic was not going away, so we made adjustments and opened our doors. Luckily on the ranch we have a partially enclosed pavilion which we use for the large summer

homebuilding groups and is opened to outside air. This large space allowed us to permit the faithful who do not live on the ranch to attend worship and receive Holy Communion. God came into the world to bring humanity together through His loving sacrifice, now as one Body we were united





in Christ. As the only Orthodox Orphanage in North America, we also opened our doors to three new boys. The Church is a refuge for the Lord's little ones. Yes, we are vigilant against the sicknesses of the world, like COVID-19, but that does not mean that we neglect

those in need. Christ reached out in our time of need and saved us from sin, and here at the St. Innocent Orphanage we reached out once again and gave a safe haven to children afflicted by the malice of the world. As a result, they took the pledge to commit to Christ and became baptized Orthodox Christians on the Feast of Transfiguration.



I do not claim to foretell the future but I know God will prevail through these tragic times. As a priest, I have read plenty of history and I know the Holy Scripture well. Bad things happen in the world and we are called to grow through them. No matter how long this crisis might persist, may Christ encourage us all because better times are ahead. And through all of this may we all grow becoming better humans filled with Godly virtue that overcomes all challenges. ✘



We all must continuously grow spiritually so that we may endure the hardships in a healthy manner and become more like Christ.

Learning Every Day

Something like 90% of communication is non-verbal. This summer I put that percentage to the test. Not knowing Spanish well meant that I would chiefly communicate through smiles, hugs, and play. It forced me to listen and observe more than I normally would. My apprehension when asked to come in the beginning of the summer was based on the misconception I had, that deep connections could only be made through 'deep talks'. This summer has taught me that is far from the truth, as words can sometimes be limiting.

From intense games of basketball where the rules were negotiable to sweet story time before bed, the summer was filled with beautiful memories. Like Juan Pedro singing his heart out on the Karaoke and the boys cheering him on in the crowd. Chris's proud smile when showing off his newly made tie dye to Choco. The brotherhood at the Ranch can easily be seen, and made it easy for me to fill a journal with images like these that are imprinted on my heart.

The depth of human connection can be so great and there is such a power in togetherness. It is hard for me to put into words the beauty and resilience of these children. In the midst of the turmoil of the outside world, it was a great blessing to be with them and to make the summer full of good memories. No period of time in our lives is all good or all bad, and this summer although it was not the summer I had in mind, was definitely more beautiful than anything I could have planned myself. Resilience and adaptation are lessons that we need to relearn each day. ✘

Eva M. Connolly, Summer Residency intern at Project Mexico



A Dose of Hope

Project Mexico's Homebuilding Ministry and St. Innocent Orphanage for boys have touched thousands of lives. Listen in as we tell "Stories of Hope" of former and present employees, families and volunteers who have been touched in various ways by being part of the Project Mexico family and have experienced the love of God. Find the podcast at ProjectMexico.org.

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Project Mexico
of the Orthodox Church



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