

2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT

PROJECT MEXICO
& St. Innocent Orphanage



Powerful PRESENCE



YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK

EXPENSES

- ▶ Project Mexico: \$349K
- ▶ St. Innocent Orphanage: \$1.21M
- ▶ General Admin: \$310K
- ▶ Fundraising: \$240K

FUNCTIONAL EXPENSE ALLOCATIONS

- Project Mexico 17%
- St. Innocent Orphanage 57%
- General Admin 15%
- Fundraising 11%

YEAR END NET ASSETS

2022 • \$2.89M
2023 • \$3.15M

DONATIONS & REVENUES

- ▶ General Contributions: \$1.69M
 - ▶ Homebuilding: \$369K
 - ▶ In Kind: \$95K
- ▶ Other Income: \$115K





From the Chairman

DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS,

I begin this letter with a heart full of gratitude and appreciation for your unwavering support of our mission. Your commitment to Project Mexico and St. Innocent Orphanage (PMSIO) has had a profound impact on the lives of countless individuals, and I want to express my heartfelt thanks.

With your help, we've been able to bring many of our dreams and projects to fruition—I'd like to tell you about two of those projects right now.

Over the past 2 years, we've been working with DIF, the public institution that oversees orphanages in Mexico, to explore the possibility of establishing an orphanage for newborn babies and children up to 5 years old. I'm thrilled to announce that a unanimous decision was made by the PMSIO Board of Trustees to construct a separate housing complex on our 16-acre ranch that will provide food, clothing and shelter for these innocent abandoned children. We have broken ground and the foundation has been laid!

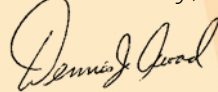
It's thanks to your spirit of compassion that we're able to create a home for these vulnerable babies and young children, a place where they can grow, learn, and dream. We still have a long way to go, and we are counting on your ongoing support as we move forward with this huge undertaking.

But our mission doesn't stop there. We have taken another monumental step, one that has filled our hearts with immense hope and excitement. With your prayers and support, we have embarked on the journey to build the first Antiochian Orthodox church in Northern Mexico! This endeavor will not only serve as a place of worship but also as a symbol of unity and belonging for the local Mexican community, whom we have welcomed and supported spiritually at our modest orphanage chapel. We have now secured the necessary property for the new church, which you will be able to visit this year just 30 minutes south of the border.

As we look to the future, we acknowledge that it is your ongoing financial support that will propel us towards our goals. PMSIO is deeply honored to build these life-changing missions hand-in-hand with each one of you.

Sign up online for our newsletter or follow us on social media for updates on our progress. Together, we will create a brighter tomorrow for those in need, and we are eager to share the blessings we have received with the communities we serve.

Sincerely,



Dennis J. Awad, *Chairman*



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POWERFUL PRESENCE

Why do we have ears? To listen to the angelic hymns praising God. Why do we have eyes? To see the beauty in God's creation. Why do we have hands and arms? To provide a hug of encouragement in times of crisis. This perspective fuels us here at Project Mexico. Through the pandemic and in the midst of caravans of migrants, surrounded by poverty and suffering, hundreds of Jesus' followers have come physically face to face with the people who need help. The power of God flourishes when we show up, are present and make a difference. This year the Orthodox Church once again reveals its true colors by building 24 homes and laying the foundation so the children of the Lord can find refuge.



THE HURRICANE...

On August 20th we prepared for 60 mile an hour winds, five inches of rain and power outages. Thank God the storm was not as severe as we feared, even though it was still a difficult day. That Sunday morning, I preached to the boys and to the missionaries to have hope. As we waited for the worst of the storm to arrive, I encouraged everyone to pray as Jesus guided us to pray (Matt. 6:11). Ask for help and He will answer. Our Father, give us "our daily bread". I emphasized that in the Greek and Latin (*ἐπιούσιον* supersubstantialem) it stresses that it is not just "daily bread" rather it is nourishment that gives us the ability to rise above the challenges, no matter if there are muddy roads, pressures from school or the reality of being abandoned. The meal that gives us the power is communion, the flesh and blood of the Son of Man (John 6:51-53) or as I referred to it in Spanish "superpan" (superbread in English). By partaking of this "Supersubstance" (as translated in the Latin from the Greek) we can do great things in Jesus.

FROM BIRTH TO DEATH

Since 1996 the St. Innocent Orphanage has been a home for children forgotten by the world. Now we have been challenged to start taking infants into our facilities. Babies recently born into tragic homes will be cared for on our 16-acre ranch. The Mexican government is asking us to love and nurture a small handful of newborns so that the essential human touch of love can be transmitted in those vital initial months. Most of the babies will be adopted to Mexican families, but some will continue to live at the St. Innocent Ranch receiving the individual care and opportunities to grow in the love of God. This Christian upbringing happens through the excellent staff and dedicated Orthodox missionaries who sacrifice in order to care of our boys.

We are blessed to announce that we are building an Orthodox church off the ranch for the people of Tijuana. This will allow our ministry to be fully integrated into all the stages of our boys' life. As little children they are entrusted to our care surrounded by the Sacramental Life. As adolescents we teach them to be Christians and now as adults, they will have a Church to attend so their children can learn what it means to be faithful Orthodox believers. And as they approach their last days in this world they will have the Church to carry them to eternal life.

YOUR HANDS AT WORK

32 SCHOOL BUDDIES

235 PANTRY PARTNER BOXES

211 FAITHFUL FRIENDS

62 SANTA'S HELPERS (2022)

Marisela Arechiga, Reseda, CA | Patty Brown, Mercer Island, WA | Protection of the Holy Mother of God OCA, Falls Church, VA | Rebecca Beach, Okotoks, Alberta | Resurrection GOA, Castro Valley, CA | Saint Andrew Orthodox Church AOC, Arlington, WA | Saint Andrew's OCA, Delta, CO | Saint Athanasius AOC, Goleta, CA | Saint Basil GOA, Stockton, CA | Saint Catherine Greenwood Village GOA, CO | Saint Elizabeth Parish OCA, Poulsbo, WA | Saint George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral, Wichita, KS | Saint George GOA, Fresno, CA | Saint George Orthodox Cathedral, Vicariate Palestinian-Jordanian Youth Ministry, Daly City, CA | Saint Gregory of Nyssa GOA, El Cajon, CA | Saint Herman OCA, Littleton, CO | Saint Innocent of Irkutsk ROC, Rogue River, OR | Saint John Chrysostom OCA, Woodside, NY | Saint John the Baptist GOA, Anaheim, CA | Saint John the Baptist GOA, Portland, OR | Saint John the Divine GOA, Wheeling, WV | Saint John the Wonderworker OCA, Atlanta, GA | Saint Luke Orthodox Church AOC, Erie, CO | Saint Mary AOC, Wichita, KS | Saint Michael the Archangel AOC SOYO, Cotuit, MA | Saint Nicholas GOA, Bethlehem, PA | Saint Nicholas OCA Orthodox Church, McKees Rocks, PA | Saint Paul's AOC, Naples, FL | Saint Paul Orthodox Church AOC, Brier, WA | Saint Peters Serbian Orthodox Church, Fresno, CA | Saint Sophia GOA, Valley Forge, PA | Saint Spyridon GOA, Loveland, CO | Saint Spyridon GOA, Newport, RI | Saint Spyridon GOA, San Diego, CA | Saint Stephen the First Martyr OCC, Crawfordsville, IN | Saint Tikhon OCA, Parker, CO | Saints Constantine and Helen GOA, Webster, MA | Saints Constantine and Helen GOA, Swansea, IL | Saints Peter and Paul AOC, Ben Lomond, CA | Saints Peter and Paul GOA, Boulder, CO | SALT OCC, Maple Grove, MN

Annunciation, Houston, TX | Annunciation GOA, Acron, OH | Annunciation GOA, Lancaster, PA | Annunciation GOA, Sacramento, CA | Assumption GOA, Scottsdale, AZ | Church of Our Saviour GOA, Rye, NY | Hellenic Orthodox Church of the Annunciation, Snyder, NY | Holy Apostles GOA, Westchester, IL | Holy Ascension Orthodox Church, Marshall, MI | Holy Cross Orthodox Church, Coquille, OR | Holy Theophany OCA, Colorado Springs, CO | Holy Transfiguration GOA, Marietta, GA | Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Phoenix, AZ | Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Toledo, OH | Holy Trinity Orthodox Church OCA, Overland Park, KS | Justice Maeda, Bothell, WA | Kimississ Tis Theotokou GOA, Racine, WI | Left Hand Ministries OCC, North Tustin, CA |



19 SUMMER INTERNS

13 LONG-TERM INTERNS

24 HOMES BUILT

483 VOLUNTEERS

45,978 VOLUNTEER HOURS

THANK YOU TO ALL THE 2023 VOLUNTEERS!

WRITTEN BY PRESBYTERA MERILYNN ANDRUCHOW

FAREWELL



NOELLE

ONE OF OUR SHINING STARS OF ST. INNOCENT ORPHANAGE STAFF, NOELLE ROBAIDEK, IS moving on. Thank God, in 2008 the Theotokos (Mother of God) called Noelle to serve at Project Mexico/St Innocent Orphanage. Noelle has been serving the ranch for over 15 years. She first volunteered on homebuilding teams during the summers of 2008 and 2009. Then served as a summer Intern for 5 years. And at the end of her internship, she began work as a full time English teacher in Tijuana, Homeschooling the Junior High School boys. She was also in charge of the after-school homework program. Finally, she became the Education Coordinator for the boys at the ranch whose ages ranged from five years old to 20 years old. Now her full-time missionary work has come to an end.

When I first met Noelle she was interning. I was so grateful when she moved onto the ranch full-time to help with educating the children. Since my biological boys were also being raised at the ranch, I was thrilled that they would be growing up in her shadow. For more than a decade Noelle has taught through example how faith should be lived. Noelle had the courage at the age of 15 to listen to the call, to take

the risk and leave her home in Wisconsin to begin her journey in a 3rd world country to help the poor and needy. Her unconditional love for the orphaned boys reminds me of how the mother of God, the Panagia, must love us. Loving us even when it hurts. Her unconditional love for the boys who are truly wounded by being exposed to too much pain and anger.

Noelle's light, her joy, and leading by example will truly be missed on the ranch. I will never forget walking into her house one night to see four of the boys with green facial masks on their faces cleansing their pores. Or when Noelle would stay up late to help the boys study for exams. Or holding one of the boys tightly as he sobbed because of the abusive memories left by his biological mother.

Thank you, Lord, through the prayers of St. Innocent, the Theotokos for choosing Noelle to serve her blessed children. And thank you Noelle for responding to the call. Glory be to God!



INFANT ORPHANAGE BEGINS

The picture above shows our progress of the new structure being built to house and care for infants in need. The photo at right is our first arrival at the Infant Nursery, our "Casa Cuna", on the Ranch! As the only Orthodox infant orphanage in North America, St. Innocent Orphanage aims to make a greater impact in the life of little ones in Mexico. We are grateful to begin to receive infants who will stay on the Ranch until this new building is finished. We ask for your prayers as we start the nursery and nurture these precious lives. **SUPPORT THE ONGOING WORK HERE > PROJECTMEXICO.ORG/DONATE**



WITNESS TO LOVE

AFTER MY FIRST HOMEBUILDING INTERNSHIP IN MEXICO IN 2018, I THOUGHT TO myself, 'this was a great summer, but once was enough. I need to be thankful for this (opportunity), keep it in my soul, and bring this joy to the next adventure life gives me.' But the following summer I found myself at Project Mexico again. I felt similarly at the end of that season, thinking that the summer of 2019 would my last full summer. Yet, I applied again for 2020. When I wasn't able to return because of the pandemic, the spirit of the ranch continued to live in me, but my expectation of interning again slowly faded. Anytime I spoke of Project Mexico, I smiled and remembered my experience with fond memories. It is a place that is so near to my heart. I was convinced that my summers of homebuilding were finished. However, God had plans for me to return to the ranch with a different mission.

I have been blessed with the opportunity to work closely with the children at St. Innocent Orphanage. The lesson I have learned is that the education program is much more than teaching lessons and helping the boys catch up in areas that may have been delayed. As a fellow coworker pointed out to me, when the boys get to the ranch, they aren't at school anymore. This is their life. The work that the staff do cannot be placed in a category because that isn't the way that life at home functions. C.S. Lewis compares the love that comes with our faith to salt. Faith and love, like salt, are not meant to be isolated.

They exist to enhance everything around us! Faith and love are not simple pillars of the organization, rather they are present everywhere and fulfilling in all things.

I have witnessed those who work at the orphanage put in tireless hours because they are who the boys have as family. They are not just teachers who are planning lessons, but are people

who are using their gifts to share love as they help out with homework, wrap textbooks, or size for uniforms. They share love when the kids get distracted or act out or share stories about their pasts. I had a professor who told me that a good life is one where you admire those you surround yourself with and are proud of who you are becoming. I can confidently say that my short time thus far has put me on that track.

Anyone who ministers with Project Mexico learns that there is a thin separation between work and life. **The boys who live here are not projects that need fixing, but are children of God who have been placed in our lives to love.** This type of love is one that takes priority above all else. It is at times too much to bear. I have not yet fully been able to understand this feeling. I have a long way to go before that happens. However, I have at least witnessed the love and service since I began this path and am grateful.





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Noelle Robaidek
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Shannon Todd
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Julia Kasten
Julia Parsenios
Julia Sheridan
Julianna Frigerio
Marcelino Makar
Noah Shackelford
Panayiota Veronis
Qaedan Kerr
Sophia Fahling
Sophia Jewett
Timothy MacDonald
William
Filanowski



An initiative of Project Mexico, in collaboration with Hellenic College Holy Cross, The FORCE (Forming Orthodox Christian Evangelists) introduces the faithful to opportunities in Christian higher education and is made possible by the generosity of The Archbishop Iakovos Leadership 100 Fund Incorporated (the "Fund"). Submit your application form at ProjectMexico.org and if chosen, you will receive a credit for your trip fee to cover the homebuilding week of your choice.

Leadership 100

THE FORCE

Hellenic College
HOLY CROSS
Greek Orthodox School of Theology



Learn how to qualify for The FORCE Leadership 100 Scholarship Fund at projectmexico.org/force-scholarship

Homebuilding Scholarships AVAILABLE NOW!

THE CHURCH GROWS

The very first Liturgy in the Americas was celebrated off the coast of Alaska in 1741, nearly 300 years ago. It was celebrated onboard the ship of captain Vitus Bering (the namesake of the Bering Sea) on the feast of the Holy Prophet Elias, July 20. Our beloved St. Innocent arrived in Alaska 80 years later. He traveled extensively throughout Alaska, teaching, baptizing, building churches often with his own hands, translating the Gospels and Services into the local languages which he had learned through intense study, all while keeping detailed accounts and journals. St. Innocent was unimaginably industrious, still famous in scientific circles for his detailed studies of the natural environment in Alaska. While there, he took at least one journey down the North American Pacific Coast reaching as far as California. It is thought that his goal was to reach Mexico. He never did.

Or so I said in a recent sermon here at the St. Innocent Mission, our little chapel within the walls of St. Innocent Orphanage. After the sermon I was corrected by Presbytera Carmen Sosa who said, "That's not true. St. Innocent did make it to Mexico. We have his relics here in the church." I wanted to cry. She is correct. In 1995 Project Mexico received a piece of St. Innocent's bone and shortly afterwards the first Orthodox Church in Northern Mexico, our little chapel was named St. Innocent. A miracle.

For almost 30 years St. Innocent Mission has been celebrating the Divine Liturgy, baptizing and communing Orthodox Christians, and sanctifying the earth within the walls of the St. Innocent Orphanage. It has been a true orphan-



age chapel ministering mainly to the orphanage needs. But like the treasure it is, it has also attracted hungry seekers of Christ and has seen the receiving of more than a handful of new Orthodox Christians. Our community currently numbers about 40 members, not including the 22 Orthodox orphan boys. With this

seed of a community it is now the most beautiful and perfect time to continue the work of the great missionary St. Innocent of Alaska outside of the orphanage walls, focusing attention on the local community by building a new temple in their midst.

The orphanage chapel will continue to minister to the needs of the orphanage. At the same time we hope to now build a local parish which our orphan boys can attend with their families even after they leave the orphanage and the orphanage chapel. On the very feast of the Prophet Elias this past summer we purchased land in central Rosarito. We will build a temple on it within the next year. By God's grace, we will soon be announcing "Blessed is the Kingdom..." from within the heart of Rosarito, echoing those same words which began the Liturgy on that ship floating in the Northern Pacific waters 300 years ago. The mission continues. The Church grows.

St. Innocent, pray to God for us.



BUILDING HOPE WITH COURAGE AND LOVE

YOU KNOW WHEN SOMETHING JUST FEELS RIGHT?

That's not a feeling I experience often, which is why I look back at my move to Mexico with a certain awe.

In spring of 2021, I was a year out of college and searching for purpose. I knew I needed change, but I wasn't sure what that looked like until, almost by accident, I ended up volunteering at a homeless shelter in Cleveland through a stateside program run by Project Mexico.

That experience changed my life. After two months, I couldn't imagine doing anything else, so I bought a one-way ticket to Mexico. It was a crazy, I-can't-believe-I'm-actually-going-through-with-this decision, but it felt right. And here I am, two years later, to tell you it was one of the best decisions of my life.

That's my story—but it's not just mine. You wouldn't believe how many people have told me that Project Mexico changed their lives forever, that they finally found what they'd been searching for all their lives, and that their experience reminded them to see beauty in everything and look to the future with hope.

If you visit the Homebuilding page on Project Mexico's website, you'll be greeted by two words: "building hope." Those aren't just nice words. We build homes, but that's just part of our mission. The physical structure is only temporary; hope is a gift from God that stretches into eternity. Our real mission is to serve as conduits for God's love—to build hope both for ourselves and those around us.

So my vision for Homebuilding is that we courageously choose to let God share His love through us. Maybe for you, that means coming down for a week or a summer or supporting us through donations or prayers. Maybe it means something else entirely. But whatever your choice, I pray it becomes a defining moment in your life and sets you on a path of beauty and purpose beyond your wildest dreams. I pray you look back on it with awe. And I pray you look to the future with hope in God's grace and the beauty of His world.



2023-2024 calendar

DECEMBER 2023

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EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT DEADLINE

FULL PAYMENT DEADLINE

INTERNSHIP APP DEADLINE

HOMEBUILDING WEEKS:

GROUP LEADER RESERVATION DEADLINE

WEEK 5: JULY 5 - 11

WEEK 6: JULY 19 - 25

WEEK 7: JULY 30 - AUG 5

WEEK 8: AUG 8 - 14

WEEK 1: MAY 24 - 30

WEEK 2: JUNE 5 - 11

WEEK 3: JUNE 14 - 20

WEEK 4: JUNE 25 - JULY 1



LEARNING TO LIVE LOVE

THIS SUMMER,

I WAS GIVEN THE CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE A PLACE, PROGRAM, AND MINISTRY THAT I LOVE AND RESPECT. I was given the blessing to love my God and my neighbor in the most real and complete way that I have ever been able to before. I learned so much about my vocation, my path in this life, as well as my desires and how at the middle of them all lies Christ and the Gospel. I learned an immense amount about people through my interactions with the “niños” who call the ranch home, the families that I was able to interact with on site, and the volunteers that came to give a week of their lives in service. Most of all, I learned about my neighbor through my interactions and relationships with my fellow Interns.

Living in close proximity for an extended period of time with others who share the common goal of salvation opened my eyes to my own life as well as the lives of those whom God has placed in my life. It is truly fulfilling to work alongside other people in the same shoes at similar points in life who all desire to hear the same words, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

I learned more this summer than in any classroom. I learned about myself through silence and prayer. To see myself and Christ in those around me. I learned more than in any Sunday School class or Orthodox Summer

Camp that I have attended. Growing up, I was well prepared by my parents and my community, but until now I never had the chance to enter the mission field and put all of it to the test. I learned that we only experience God through the same way in which he experienced his time on earth; through suffering, patience, and most important, by “Living Love”. The joy which the families that we built for had in their hearts and on their faces taught me the importance of continuous rejoice. Even though hardships, pain, and temptation can be the status quo from time to time.

To anyone considering an Internship at Project Mexico, I would ask, “Do you want to learn more than you ever have before?” Even now, as I return to college this autumn taking more engineering classes that I have no idea if I will ever use, I know that I go into my future with the lived experience of being “on the ranch.” I know that I have learned much and desire to keep it close to my heart. I now know that I have only begun to learn how to “live love”, let alone practice it daily. God-willing I will be able to intern again and continue that process of learning through loving God through loving and serving my neighbor. This summer, my teachers were my fellow interns, volunteers, orphans, homeless, Priests, and above all, Christ himself who worked through all along with His mother our Theotokos. Glory to God.