



PROJECT MEXICO & St. Innocent Orphanage



Building hope for boys without families & families without homes

 projectmexico.org

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Voice of Hope



A Message From The Executive Director

Christ is Risen! ¡Cristo ha Resucitado! Christos Anesti! Every day and in every way we are getting better and better. This is the message I remind myself of frequently. It is important to keep this fallen world in perspective. Despite this reality, we cannot lose sight of the goodness in us and the miracles God performs daily. I want to remind you that there is still so much good in the world and we should not let the evil we experience cause us to lose sight of that.

I have lived in Mexico for more than thirteen years and have witnessed my share of suffering. Hope is the true champion and this newsletter will give you a glimpse of some the great news just south of the border.

This year, through God's grace, we will have a full homebuilding season and welcome hundreds of faithful volunteers as they build homes for dozens of Mexican families. I was inspired by one of our missionaries who shared a fresh and powerful insight, "don't listen to the people who have not come down to serve but ask the people who have, and they will tell you it is amazing here and you won't regret it."

We are happy to announce the Swanson family are joining the ministry. Zach and Sophia Swanson were work-trip coordinators in 2016 have committed

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A JOURNEY OF *Miles*

“And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles, no matter how long, but only by a spiritual journey, a journey of one inch, very arduous and humbling and joyful, by which we arrive at the ground at our feet and learn to be at home.

~Wendell Berry

The quote above by Wendell Berry nicely summarizes my nearly two years at Project Mexico. Before I joined the ministry, I had undeniably taken “a journey of miles,” where I felt as if God had been guiding me away from my plans and asking me

to wait as His plans unfolded. This spurred me on my “journey of miles” all over the country for a period of almost two years, searching for somewhere that felt like home, searching for peace, searching for an increased sense of God’s presence. It wasn’t until the pandemic hit and I was invited back to Project Mexico that I began to understand that I needed to turn inward in my journey.

The year before I was a Homebuilding intern but my return in summer 2020 impacted me very differently. I grew much closer to the boys at the orphanage, and began to feel an internal shift. Whatever had been propelling me during that “journey of miles” faded into the background. There was no single moment of revelation when I knew that I wanted

to stay and work at the orphanage. I had no conspicuous thought of “this is where God wants me to be.” Simply, He opened the door and I walked through it. Or instead,

stumbled backward into it, would be a more accurate evocation.

In the time I’ve spent with the ministry, I have learned many things. The majority of those lessons have arisen from various challenges that ranged from diverting to taxing in nature and every single one of those lessons feels significant. Perhaps the most significant of those lessons is I have learned that I do not need to desperately search for that perfect place where I have a perfect purpose. I do not need to go that journey of miles.

Instead, I take the inward journey towards Christ. It is there that I meet Him. I meet Him in every aspect of my life, my beautiful and wild daily life, rich with blessings. I meet Him in the hearts of our boys. I meet Him in the hearts of my co-workers and community. I meet Him in the dust and the downpour, in the depths of human suffering and the abundance of joy.

Mother Maria of Paris said “‘Love one another,’ so long as it is love to the end and without exceptions. And then the whole of life is illumined, which is otherwise an abomination and a burden.” The Love I discovered in my time at Project Mexico illumined my life in a way never before known to me. It is the force that brings me to the ground at my feet. To learn what it means to be present on that ground with Christ in each moment is a journey that I will be on for the rest of my life. A journey I am thankful to have started. ✕



Growing Up at Saint Innocent Orphanage

The time I spent in other orphanages before the ranch felt like an eternity. The abuse I endured at the other orphanage had become too much for me to take. The day I arrived at St. Innocent Orphanage I was a confused six-year-old sitting in a car and just trying to figure out where I was and where I was going.

My childhood at St. Innocent Orphanage was fun. I played marbles and tops and sometimes Pokémon. I went to school and to church. I drew and painted and grew to love playing soccer with my brothers. I have so many good memories. The ranch became my home. It is my family. The place I feel most comfortable in this world.

When I arrived, I was rude, didn't listen and I would bother the younger boys. But the ranch gave me what I needed to be the man I am today through education and time. By education, I don't just mean school, although it was an important part, I also learned discipline, guidance, direction and faith. It took time and patience and the space to grow and mature.

The church had a big role in my growth. Even though for a while I went just because I had to, the spiritual life made me stronger. I feel the presence of God in my life. Christ says to come to Him and to get to know Him. I feel that. His presence fills me with peace. Knowing

God gives me purpose and church is no longer an obligation. My faith is something that I have chosen. This became clear to me in high school, when my classmates would challenge me for having faith, sometimes making fun, I never doubted. My base is too strong. I know the Truth.

I am studying Psychology at the University. I enjoy my classes even though the assignments can seem unending. I've changed so much since I first arrived. The uncertain little boy, unsure of where he is or where he is going is gone. I have goals. I want to make a life for myself. My goals may seem ordinary but the simple things in life are what are most important to me like finishing my degree, having a career, and my own family. Maybe one day I will have loftier goals, but honestly these simple goals seem like a privilege. Having an education, a career and a family is a luxury for so many people and I am blessed that these goals are within my reach. ✕

FACES OF HOPE

MINERVA AND JOSE MET IN CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO WHILE working on neighboring ranches. The young couple moved to Tijuana to be closer to family and lived with Jose's mother. The young family grew with the arrival of a son. They lived in a small 10'x20' home with eight other family members.

Shortly after giving birth to their second son, Minerva was informed by a doctor that she had cancer. A caring neighbor recommended Minerva's family of four to our Homebuilding program. The neighborhood kids went running to fetch her for our initial interview. Most families Project Mexico builds for are interviewed several months in advance. But in this case, Minerva's new home was scheduled to be built in just two weeks by a group of volunteers from a parish in Louisville, KY.

Minerva visited the site every day with her newborn Edgar, and her 7-year-old, Jose Jr. They were amazed at how quickly the house was completed. Upon receiving the keys to their new home, they were filled with hope and excitement. Months later I returned and asked about Minerva's health. She laughed and pointed at her infant son, Edgar and said, "There's my cancer walking around on two feet." The doctors had misdiagnosed her.



When I returned a few years later to conduct this follow-up interview Minerva smiled and moved her sweater to show me that a third baby is on the way. Edgar believes that the new arrival will be a little sister but Jose Jr. isn't convinced.

Those four days Project Mexico volunteers built a new home were life-changing for her family. She still remembers volunteers by name, and Jose Jr. still has the coloring books and toy cars that were given to him that week. Jose Sr. now works in a factory, and Minerva makes pinatas while watching the kids. They have been able to save little by little and make improvements all over the house. She smiled and said, "We can't do things as fast as you all did, but we are getting there, bit by bit. It was a great blessing that came to us." ✕



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to move back to Tijuana to help grow the Church. Through the blessing of Archbishop Elpidophoros and Metropolitan Gerasimos, Zach will be ordained and bring his family to Mexico to serve. As the Executive Director my responsibilities have expanded tremendously and Project Mexico has a great need for more pastoral support. I am confident Zach's degree from Holy Cross Seminary and his years of parish experience will allow him to truly be a vessel of God's grace.

Great things are happening and our God, who is Good, is blessing us all. Share the good news and be the Voice of Hope in this world, which needs the message of Christ's love and brilliant light.

In Christ,

Fr. Nicholas L. Andruchow

Fr. Nicholas L. Andruchow, Executive Director & Priest