



Bethlehem Lutheran Church • Aloha, OR
2011 Mexico Mission Trip

In God's Hand
Reflections

In God's Hand

by Bob Fossum

Connected to Christ. Connected to One Another. Serving All People.

That's our mission at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Aloha. One of the reasons we continue to prioritize the Mexico Mission trip is that it meets every facet of our vision in very simple and tangible ways.

Connected to Christ

When folks come on a retreat or a mission trip, there is an anticipation of Spiritual growth. Participants come on the Mexico Mission trip not only to build a house, but to build their faith in Jesus. Each evening we have a time of worship and Bible Study. This year we looked at the Lord's Prayer - and our study of Matthew 6 began on our trip down to Mexico as each car was provided with CDs of a teaching on the principles of the Lord's Prayer. As you read through these pages, you will see clearly how participating on this year's Mexico Mission trip helped people become *Connected to Christ*.

Connected to One Another

Our group is together twenty-four hours a day for six days. We eat together; we work together; we drive together; we sleep in bunk beds in tight quarters together. We laugh together; we sweat together; we worship together; we sing together; we pray together. This is a week built around being together...becoming Connected to One Another.

Serving All People

But what unites us is a common goal of providing a house for a needy family in Tijuana. But it is not just that family that we serve - our group works together as a team. Folks share their skills; they share their encouragement; they share their faith with one another. What is most humbling is seeing our team passionately share their love of God through their desire and hard work of providing a house for this needy family.



Here's what we discover every year on this trip - we are also served. It is an amazing gift to receive the expressions of appreciation and love from those we serve in Mexico. You will hear often in the words of this booklet how we journeyed to Mexico to serve others - only to end up feeling like we were the ones who had been served.

You will be blessed by the testimonies of this year's participants. I hope that next year we can add your testimony to how our Mexico Mission trip was a blessing to you and your family! Come join us! You will experienced being *Connected to Christ; Connected to*

One Another; while Serving All People!

Mexico 2011

by Ann Kachmarek

This was my first trip to Mexico with Bethlehem. I went with the intention of doing a "good thing" and getting to know some different people. I expected to work hard and get satisfaction simply from building this home for a family who needed one. What I didn't

I can honestly say I received more blessings than I could ever create in my lifetime.

expect was the enormous surge of faith and love for God, the people with whom we served and the people we helped. I can honestly say I received more blessings than I could ever create in my lifetime.

What struck me the most was the absolute trust in God that everyone around me had throughout the trip. We drove

through a blizzard and torrential downpours on our way down south, but the attitudes and moods of the team were nothing but grateful and helpful. One would think that traveling caravan style, especially through bad weather, would lead to some short tempers. I found only happiness, laughter and love. When we got to Mexico, we ran into some problems getting to the jobsite, due to muddy roads. We had multiple Mexican citizens, including the police, offer their



help to get us where we needed to be. God provided everything and everyone we needed to succeed.

On our way to and from the jobsite, our "tour guide", Paul, kept us entertained by telling us true stories about his and Pastor Hector's life. Not only were they interesting, they were completely inspirational, as he talked about incidents in his and Hector's life in which their utter and complete faith in God to provide were proven well placed. I have retold their stories many times in the last couple of weeks to those God sent to me to help with faith. It has also helped me as I take care of my mother in her last weeks of life. I

God sent us to Mexico to bless each member of our team with transformed lives and faith.

cling to that faith to get myself through this challenge, and I know He will provide comfort and love to her and my family.

It seems wrong to say that the actual house building was the least of the powerful moments in my trip, but I believe God knew that this wonderful family would get a house whether our group was there or not. God sent us to Mexico to bless each member of our team with transformed lives and faith. I pray I will be able to continue to be a part of this mission every year from now on and that I can be even a fraction of the blessing to others that they were to me.



Mexico Mission Trip

by Jaylynn Bernhardt

I have experienced God in many different ways this week, but one moment that I saw God's love the most was when we played with the neighborhood kids. It amazes me how they can have so little and still be so happy. To see their smile and their eyes glow is the best feeling in the world.

When Angela, Lily, Hannah and I lined up at the end of the road and they lined up on the other side of the road then counted to three in Spanish out loud and saw them run as fast as they could, smiles and laughs louder and wider then the hammers being hammered on the house, we picked them up with open arms, twirling and asking them if it was fun! It was so good to see their happiness.

Nothing mattered then. Not friends, school, family. Just them. Only them.

I saw God's love pouring down on them and into my heart. Nothing mattered then. Not friends, school, family. Just them. Only them. Like I said there nothing better than seeing a joyful child. I love

how they wanted to hold our hands and constantly be by us. The only thing I wanted to do t that moment was give them attention.

We continued to play this game for a long time. I then realized that I need to be more thankful for what I have, and to live a simpler life. That afternoon was all about them. I'm so glad that I went and there's never been a better spring break.



Mexico Mission 2011

by Jaymin Bernhardt

I saw God in a real way at the worksite when my dad pointed out a parting in the clouds. The rays of sun were shining through the parted clouds on the highest peak on the large hill. That was a symbol that God is smiling down at us because we were living through His Word by playing with the children. We talked, laughed, and played with them.

When we were building the house the kids were able to pound nails. When I was on the roof pounding nails I was working really hard. I then pounded my hammer right onto my fingernail. It hurt so horribly! I really wanted to quit working but all of a sudden everything got peaceful and joyful. Next thing I knew God whispered in my ear, "You are doing great, Jaymin! Don't quit now! Think of the payoff!" So, I got a band-aid and got back to work.

God whispered in my ear, "You are doing great, Jaymin! Don't quit now! Think of the payoff!"

I also saw God through my decision to go to Mexico. I was really scared to go because it was supposed to be dangerous. I always told my mom that I don't know if I am going to go. Then after a while I really wanted to go. I had both those feelings over and over again. I believe that God and Satan were having a wrestling match to get me to go or in Satan's sake, to get me not to go. I think that God finally knocked out Satan and got me to go into the car.

My Mexico Mission Trip

by Maddie Bernard

This was my third time going to Mexico with the Baja Builders, and I had an incredible time. When we went last time our group saw the home of the first mission trip I went on in 2007. It was amazing to me to see how they used the house to their advantage, and one of my goals on this year's trip was to see the house we built in 2009.

Luckily, my goal didn't take very long to become achieved. We were building on the same street as last time and the family we had built for and they were related! This was very cool for me! I enjoyed seeing that the previous family had added on a bit to their house and had added a porch with some plants. The house looked very well kept and they were all happy and healthy. The minute we came to their street again they welcomed us and thanked us. It was awesome to see them again and know that our work really does make a difference.

I really enjoyed this trip. I felt like our group worked great together and made sure to include everyone in the jobs. I nailed, painted, roofed, mudded, helped with VBS, attempted to translate, and much more. It was cool that I could work among the "guys" and that they still considered my help to be valuable. One of the hardest things for me on the trip was translating. I have taken Spanish for quite a while and it is not my best subject but I thought I was ready for the challenge, but I wasn't. At first I didn't even want to talk to people because it is hard for me to verbalize my Spanish. I thought the kids would think I talked funny or would judge me and not want to talk to me, but it turned out that they were just happy to see me and wanted to play. So I became more and more confident in my abilities. I was able to listen to the children at VBS and translate what they wanted to Christy and Kimmy, and every time the child got its need met I felt really proud that I could understand. Now one of my goals is to always work hard in Spanish and try to understand everything so I can be a better Speaker.

This trip especially I grew closer to God. I had forgotten to trust Him and wanted to run my life in my own way. I realized that I was not in control and God is. My life is in God's hands.

Our guides Hector and Paul really showed me what that means though their amazing stories of faith. I never thought anyone could live like Hector does because he trusts the Lord entirely. He believes that God will give him everything - food, money, water, shelter, love. But it is not up to Hector to decide when or how, that is God's job too. Hector really inspired me to trust God, and when we were delayed at the border for 2 hours I kept thinking "It's in God's hands, everything will be all right." And it made me feel better.

Our guide Paul was once telling a story about how he got a flat tire before coming to get us at Rancho Solo. He was stopped in the middle of nowhere along the highway and desperately needed a tire, so he prayed to God and put his trust in God's hands. Then he spotted a shape out in the field. It was a tire laying 2 feet away from his car, underneath the grass, it fit perfectly to his car and he could drive to come get us. He said "If God can create the whole universe and how it functions and every little detail aligns perfectly, then yeah he can put a tire right where I need it easily." His statement amazed me and stuck with me the whole trip and since I have gotten home. It reminds me to trust the Lord because He will provide. I really enjoyed going on this Mission Trip and encourage everyone to come because it is an unforgettable experience no matter how many times you have gone.



MEXICO MISSION

by Jarrett Bernhardt

We had lots of adventures on our journey to Mexico. We had rain, snow, traffic and the border control as obstacles to get into Mexico. Here I felt God was with us through Andy's words [devotional CD we played on way to Mexico] and the skilful driving through the treacherous weather.

That God can make a normal undesirable task the greatest moment in the world.

I would say building the house, being on the roof with everybody was God in me. I realized that some things have a purpose. That God can make a normal undesirable task the greatest moment in the world. He gives you that feeling, that indescribable feeling of I'm making God proud. This is what God planned for the World.



That's not where I felt God's presence the most. I felt like I knew what God was thinking when I was sitting there at night at Rancho Solo. We were singing "How Great Is Our God" and I sat in awe at how God filled the room. Joyce sat there smiling and playing the tambourine. Paul, the Baja worker, had his eyes closed and hands lifted up to the heavens.

Then after the song my heart heated up having Paul in the middle. We all put a hand on Paul and we prayed. We declared how good of a disciple he is. Then Paul told us that every time we test God, He will show us His power. That we should test Him when we can.

Then we started to pray. This is when I got emotional and started to cry. I thanked God

for giving me the group. Giving me Bob Fossum. I just remembered how good His presence felt and how I should never forget how much God blessed me and how much I need to continue being a disciple.

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Mexico Mission Testimony

By Lori Isaak

The trip this year was again very meaningful for me.

One of the many benefits of the trip was that it helped foster relationships with others from church. It is often difficult to get to really "know" people only in the church setting, BUT- when you share a bunkhouse with them, it gets very intimate!

Being away from our "normal" (crazy, busy) lifestyles for a week was a very refreshing experience. There are very few distractions in Mexico (such as electronic gadgets which demand extraordinary amounts of our time).

During the week I could actually feel spiritual growth happening to me. I know this was because of the time invested each night as a group studying "how to pray" using the Lord's Prayer as a guide. Bob & Robin's excellent leadership in teaching this subject was a God-send for me.

God also increased my compassion & love for people overall, especially the Mexican people that I interacted with just by building a house. The act of helping this family have pride in owning their own home is a blessing in itself, but the bigger blessing is the way God has drawn me closer to Him through this experience!



Mexico Mission: 2011

by Konrad Isaak

As we were going down I thought to myself, "I don't want to go." But it all changed as we were going into California over the Siskiyou Pass. It rained really hard as well as in the Grapevine, it snowed there too so it was a disaster. I thought that it would never stop snowing and raining but as we left the Grapevine it calmed down a bit.

As we got farther down south I thought we would be in Mexico next week, like the trip was going to take forever - surely enough we were there. When we got there at the border I was going to miss the comforts of home but we built the house in a record time so that was good.

I experienced God's love through the miracles and stories that Paul told us like Pastor Hector's miracle about the guy stealing the saw and he gave him a check to for a new house

for us to build. I also experienced God's presence through communion that we had on the way down there at the church.

The weird thing is that the weather was bad on the drive down and when we built the house it was nice and when we were done with the house the weather got bad again so that to me was really weird.

On the drive back the weather was bad and it seemed as if it took forever to get back home also so that made me upset. So after the trip I realized how miserable it would be to live down there. So now I am thankful that I live up here because the life down there would be miserable to me if I had to live there. So now I have learned that I should be more thankful for things that God has given me.



Mexico Mission

by Ian Isaak

When I first got into the car I thought this trip was going to take forever and personally I don't like being in small cars for a long period of time. After we had left Bethlehem, later that day we passed over the Siskiyou Mountains and it snowed a bunch. We could hardly see the road. To top things off, later the next day we went through California and it rained like crazy.

The highway flooded and this time we couldn't see 10 feet in front of us. It's California! Isn't it supposed to be sunny and nice? It was nicer back in Oregon than it was there!

Later that day when we were by the boarder staying in a church building, I thought isn't it nice for all of us to be together? I felt like we were finally getting closer to our purpose of driving all the way to Mexico. The next day when we woke up and drove to the McDonald's by the Mexican border, I wasn't very hungry. Then it started raining and I thought, "we aren't going to be able to get to the house if it's raining because all of the roads are dirt". But we finally go to the house and we built it. We finished a day early so we went to the beach and relaxed.



When we first got to Mexico, I felt sorry for all the people we were building for there because they had nothing except for a makeshift house and some other things. I had been on the trip two years before and it was nice to see the family we built for then had added on to their house.

As always, we did a Vacation Bible School for the kids in the village. We had supplied the children with water and once again I felt lucky that God had given us water and supplied us with everything we have that they don't.

When we were down there we had Paul to help us with building the house. He also helped us get from Rancho Solo to the worksite every day. On the way, Paul told us some

miracle stories and it made me think of how awesome God was to make those miracles happen.

Mexico Testimony

by Harvard Isaac

My "trip" really started about two years ago. We went on the trip and had a great time. We had good weather and a good drive and formed a bond with people that maybe we wouldn't have otherwise. I got very close to several families because of that trip.

I looked forward to going to Mexico again in the future. As the time grew closer, we were again, very busy. I started to think of reasons why we shouldn't go. We could just hang around and get something done at home and we haven't had time like that for over a year. I thought this would be a good week to do just that. I also wasn't getting paid for the time we had off and I should really have worked like I did the other week I didn't get paid for. So there were a lot of reasons that I had second thoughts this time.

So here we go. Last minute packing. Would it all fit? Would the car make it? We took off hoping for the best. At least it's usually warm and dry down South. Well, we were soon very disappointed. The drive got worse, it got cold and it rained like a hurricane for hours on end. I have driven 3 million miles commercially and as many or more in a car since I was 15 and I have never seen it rain that hard, for that long, in my life. In the back of my mind I kept thinking, "What's next? Are we going to keep going or should we just go back? Will it get so bad we would quit?"

The next day was just as bad. We approached the Grapevine and the signs said "Snow on Summit". We prepared for the worst. It rained just as hard and as long as it had the day before and if it snowed that hard, we were not going anywhere. We got to the top and although the traffic was a bit slow, there was no snow on the road. It snowed but didn't stick. Finally as we approached San Diego, it stopped raining and it looked like we might be in luck. It had been another stressful day and again, I just wanted to go to bed. In the night it rained and we thought, "here we go again". But the next day there were some clear spots and we headed off to Mexico and to the job site.

We arrived at the job site and with all the rain, the dirt roads and hills we had to go up were very muddy and slick. This whole trip was going to be a hassle, but we were here and it was time to go to work. The sun came out and we got a lot of progress done on the house. We finished on Wed. which was a new record for us and that night it started to rain again.

I took to heart that God can allow all sorts of obstacles to whatever it is we want to accomplish. I've had lots of personal examples of this in my life and it has brought me to understand that God is in control and He has a purpose and the best outcome, in all of that. It's not the trials we go through that dictates the goodness of the outcome. It's the journey, the growth, the relationship with God and what we learn from it, that determines the outcome. God gave us what we needed, not what we wanted.

Trials and tribulations aren't always what they seem to be. Something that looks like it's impossible to us, is nothing that God can't handle. He knows what we need and He freely gives it to us. I just need to keep this in mind at all times.

Praise His Holy Name! Amen. Can't wait for the next trip!





Mexico Mission

by Joe Bernard

I'm always amazed at the stories and memories that come from my family's time on the Mexico Mission trip. Most of the years it's the time we spend building the house in Tijuana. Some years it's the drive south. Some years it's the drive home. This year, I think the most memorable and significant moments came from our driving to and from the work site and our border crossing coming home.

I would have never thought that our time driving to or from the building site would become memorable, but this year we were blessed with stories from Paul, our Baja Ministries guide. He was with us most of the daytime hours. Many of the youth worked with him directly. I didn't have as much time to work next to Paul as I had in the past, but this time I was blessed to hear his thoughts and stories of how God works in, and through his life.

As we drove one hour to and from the work site each day, Paul would usually speak to us over the walkie talkies and share thoughts or observations. It became a spiritual time. He spoke about stories in his

life and in Pastor Hector's life that were amazing examples of God in action.

I will always remember Paul telling us about the time Pastor Hector caught a man stealing his radial saw out of his pick up truck. Pastor asked the man if he needed a saw. The man did, and Hector freely gave the man his saw and said "You don't need to steal. You only need to ask."

Hector freely gave his belongings to someone in need without a moment of hesitation. He mirrored Jesus' love and not only gave a man his cloak but his tunic as well. I think of this living example of God's love every day, and strive to follow it. Hector's stories provided me with the peace and trust in God that I would shortly need.

I was worried most of the trip that Jonas, our German exchange student, would not be able to return to the United States. We only had

photocopies of his student visa, as the originals were left somewhere in Beaverton and couldn't be found. But

God was in charge. I just had to let go. Clearly by design, someone from a prior group had left a message in our bunk house intended for me. On the bottom of the bunk directly above where I slept, I woke up each morning and saw the painted words "**In God's Hand**" staring me in the face. Each morning I saw those words and each evening they were the last words I read. Each day in Mexico I became more convinced that they were intended for me.

I've traveled to Mexico on service three times, and have taken youth on mission trips for 15 years. Every trip shows me amazing examples of God's miracles in action. When performing God's work, God performs tangible signs

for all to see. It seems difficult to see the miracles at home in Beaverton, but stories of miracles, like the ones recounted here, never fail to take place when I'm on a mission trip. It's an amazing feeling to be **In God's Hand**.

*I woke up each morning and saw the painted words "**In God's Hand**" staring me in the face.*



Mexico Reflections

by Barb Bernard

Of all the things that happened on this Mexico Mission trip, living in a community of God's people is where I most experienced God's love and presence. I have been on two previous trips to Mexico. This trip was amazing in how we all lived as one body in Christ. People were positive and joyful, patient and caring for others before themselves, and all having the same goal. I experienced people taking care of one another and stepping in when there was a void. From carrying long wood planks to taking care of my kids when I wasn't able. This Christ-centered love is unique to this trip, I still carry today.



Of all the things that happened on this Mexico Mission trip, living in a community of God's people is where I most experienced God's love and presence.

God's love shined through when each person used their unique gifts and abilities to share God's love. I saw people using power tools skillfully, leading VBS on a plastic tarp, playing soccer with neighborhood kids, cuddling babies, using Spanish skills and successfully learning/using gifts they didn't know they had. Some gifts were simple, like patience and willingness. I watched one scrape mud from the whole floor with a small tool, for a long time, out of love for the family moving into the house.

God's love also was clear to see in the happy faces of those living in the simple conditions of Mexico, hugging the boy we built the house for two years ago, and the peace that rested on the crammed car with five of us stuffed in for 2,800 miles!

A big reason I went was for Maddie, Peter and Jonas to have a greater understanding of how much God wants to be in their lives and choices daily, and how much He loves them. I wanted them to realize

what needs others have, and how they can make a difference in someone's life. I wanted them to experience Christ in others, and to be Christ to the family we were building for, those in Mexico and the team members. I was not disappointed. God is faithful. Taking my children on this trip was something I felt

called to do but I never expected the abundance of blessing He showered on me.

God blessed me with wonderful growth in my faith. The CD's [we listened to on the way down] and the evening devotionals gave me an enlightened understanding of prayer, and how to praise God, align my will to His and pray persistently. Through the incredible examples of Hector and Paul's simple and totally trusting faith, I have a fresh understanding that God *is* in control in my life, I can trust Him in all situations, and I don't have to worry. I was also reminded that all the time, wherever I am,

Taking my children on this trip was something I felt called to do but I never expected the abundance of blessing he showered on me.



with those I have been given in my life, I am a witness of Christ and I am to reflect his love...even when it's hard sometimes. It was an unforgettable trip for me.

When God's people come together, the world is never the same at least my world and one Mexican family who's sleeping in a pink house tonight.

Mexico Mission Trip

by Peter Bernard



When I arrived at the work site for the trip I was excited and ready to build a house. I looked out over past the lot and saw all the Baja builder houses that were on the hill. I walked around the streets talking with the kids and half the things they were saying I couldn't understand but I did understand some of it and they were saying hello and what are you doing here and things like that. I was excited that the team was able to see the house that was built two years ago because the family had done so much to it and it looked like a whole different house. They had added a porch and stairs and so much stuff. The family we were building for was related to the family that we built for two years ago.

I was able to see how the family had loved their new house so much and all the gifts we gave. They wouldn't stop smiling. I would like to see the house a year from

now because I want to see how much they will do on the house.

The family had a little boy named Edgar. He was four years old and he was so fun to be around because he would just smile and smile. I think about how those kids and families get food and money and I think of how fortunate we are.

I was able to see how the family had loved their new house so much and all the gifts we gave. They wouldn't stop smiling.



Well when I was in Mexico with the team I was thinking about how many people told me that it wasn't safe to go to Mexico but I realized that God was watching over us and that we shouldn't be afraid.

Mexico/Mexiko

by Jonas Schabel

Even though it's not like I ever want to go back there, some trouble at the border, a long drive, getting up way too early for spring break, and undrinkable water. It was a good experience to see people being happy with only the basic things in life. To see little children playing soccer with passion reminded me of home. That was my favorite part of the whole trip, playing good soccer just for fun and without aggression. Even if I never felt a 100% safe there was never a dangerous situation.

Looking back I have to thank the Baja Christian people and God who gave us great guidance and help. The trip also made me realize how good my life is, for how many things I should be more thankful like water or a house. And so it looks like I wrote a little

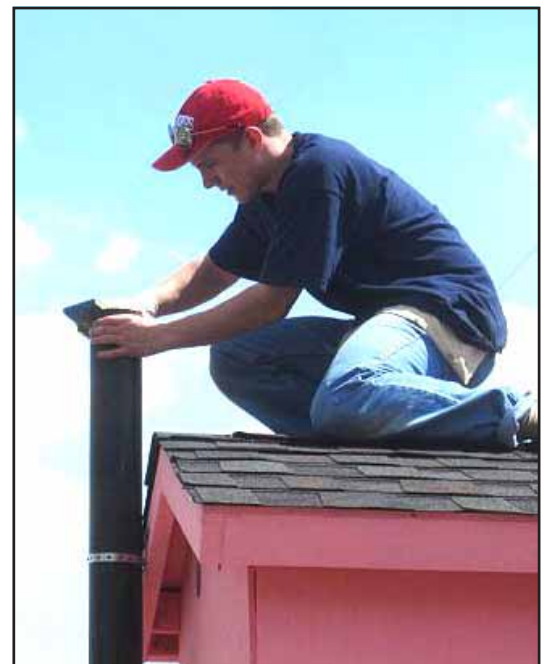
more,
I'm just
running out of ideas, I'll write the the whole
thing again in German.



Fußball mit Leidenschaft spielen. Das war der der beste Teil der ganzen Reise, guten Fußball mit Spaß und ohne Aggressionen. Auch wenn ich mich nie 100% sicher fühlte waren wir nie in gefährliche Situationen. Rückblickend muss ich Baja Christen und Gott danken sie haben uns gut geführt und geholfen. Die Reise hat mir gezeigt wie gut ich es in meinem Leben eigentlich habe, für wie viele Sachen ich mehr dankbar sein sollte; wie Wasser oder ein Haus. Und damit es so aussieht als hätte ich mehr geschrieben, ich hab einfach keine Ideen mehr, schreibe ich das ganze Ding noch mal auf deutsch.



Auch wenn ich niemals mehr nach Mexiko zurück will, Probleme an der Grenze, eine lange Anfahrt, viel zu frühes aufstehen für die Frühlingsferien und nicht trinkbares Wasser. Es war eine gute Erfahrung, Leute die nur mit dem nötigsten leben fröhlich zu sehen. Was mich an Zuhause erinnert hat
waren
die
Kinder
die



Mexico 2011

By Angela Garrett

This spring break was the best week of my entire life. I feel like I've become a better person because of everyone I met and everything I learned about God. All of the memories I've made mean the world to me and will last forever.

I loved the late nights we had, the epic ninja games, fighting with "Carmen", teaching the Mexican girls

Ring around the Rosie, playing concentration, the little kids smiling

faces, but most of all, how much closer I feel to God now.

I never used to really truly pray. I would just shoot out a few thanks, then go to bed. But now I know that prayer isn't a one way conversation, it is a two way thing. God listens to and answers our prayers.

This spring break was the best week of my entire life.



anyone talking; I knew that this was clearly God talking through her to me, saying that He forgives me, and gave me a second chance. All the things I've done or said are forgiven, and that is an amazing thing to think about.

I love my God!

The best lesson I learned this last week was that everything is "In God's Hands". This little phrase has gotten me through a lot lately. Whenever I'm feeling down, or sad, I can always think of this and feel better, because I know that everything happens for a reason.

The night we got back, I got a message from a friend that I had lost (I had been praying about our broken friendship for weeks) and that message said "I forgive you." I knew that this wasn't just



Mexico 2011

By Laura Garrett

What a wonderful week! Thank you to everyone for being part of this special week and making Angela and I feel like a part of your family. The week for me can be summed up in four words: Anxiety, Joy, Love and Peace.

Anxiety: *1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.* Anxiety began to set in when I realized at the Rummage Sale that we were leaving in one week. I thought we were still a few weeks out. As we left in the morning for Living Savior on departure day I am still thinking to myself: Are we really leaving today? Am I ready? Am I *really* ready? Is my heart where it needs to be? I don't know. How will I know? We pull in and see Dennis and Mike and I finally convince myself that yes, we are really leaving today. We're on the road pretty quickly. I get comfortable as we drive away, and BAM... it hits me, we are leaving today. I see the Bethlehem, et.al. caravan, our blinker is turned on and we slide in to the great row of cars. I finally hear it, finally feel it, and finally see it: God telling me - yes, it's time, you ARE ready. Open your heart, sit back, relax and enjoy the ride because you ARE ready!



Joy: *1 Thessalonians 5:16 Be joyful always.* The joyful laughs and bonding with our "car family" start early. The joy of seeing everyone at our first stop and meeting new folks was the start of our wonderful week together. We start CD#1 from Andy Stanley's sermon on the Lord's Prayer. I am elated. I have been struggling with prayer for quite some time and how perfect is this that we are going to spend a week learning and seeking. Is it coincidence? Mmmmm no. It's God's plan.

I experience great joy when we get to the job site and everything about it is so familiar. Immediately we hear the sound of hammers pounding and painters painting. My biggest joy was watching the kids in our group working hard and playing hard. The joy in our girls as they played games with the little girls, teaching them how to sing "Ring Around the Rosie" and seeing the joy on their faces when the girls repeated the song back to them. The joy our boys showed out on the soccer field with the local boys. Some of our boys didn't know what to do ... but you could see the joy on their faces to be out running around and trying to talk to the kids. It was so evident that God was working in every single one of them.

Love: *1 Chronicles 16:34 Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; his love endures forever.* Love was everywhere. The community of Rojo Gomez greeted us so warmly. They love to see us arrive and are so happy for their neighbors. The love of our family: Keila, Barnave and their kids. It was so heartwarming to see them every day. The love of our mission family - just seeing the love between family members, car families, and our larger "mission" family. Love was evident in everything we did with each other, for each other and most of all for Him. Spending an evening declaring God's greatness gave me an incredible sense of His love for us - His chosen children.

Peace: *Psalms 29:11 The Lord gives strength to His people; and Lord blesses His people with peace.* Peace is what I began to feel as we were winding down our week. Peace with myself, peace with my daughter and peace with the world around me. As Pastor Stanley said, "When you know who God is, it gives you a better understanding of who you are." Our Tuesday night discussion centered on surrendering to God. That question raised huge flags for me in my life. Am I totally surrendering my life to Him? Well, sometimes. Is sometimes a good answer? I don't think so. After hearing the stories from Hector and Paul, I heard and saw what it really meant to surrender your life to God. He is in control - I am not. Slowly I began to relax and let go. This was definitely my "AHA" moment. The trip as a whole rewarded me more than I could have ever hoped or imagined. My reward for the week was summed up by Andy Stanley when he said that our reward for having a relationship with God is an inner sense of peace that God is with you. He is an awesome God.

Mexico Mission Trip 2011 Testimony

by Mike McCullaugh

My life right now, in spite of the fact that I am semi-retired, seems to be as busy as it ever gets. There are still not enough hours in the day and my frustration level (and blood pressure) gets all fired up when I'm not able to get all the things done I want. Yet there was never any doubt that I would be taking this week off to serve my God who was loudly calling me to do so. I felt his call and immediate presence as I compiled a list of folks who I thought might like to support the trip and me personally. 25 of the 30 folks I asked to support our group generously donated just shy of \$2000...WOW! ... God's work not mine. What a positive note on which to start the trip.

God's presence was palpable as I witnessed incredible positive attitudes all during the drive down in spite of bad weather, wet sleeping bags, muddy roads etc.,etc. Our group seemed focused with a strong faith that God was in control and if it was His will, we would get to the job site and build the house. I remember Paul reminding us (more than once) that God is in control while we were at McDonald's before crossing the border.

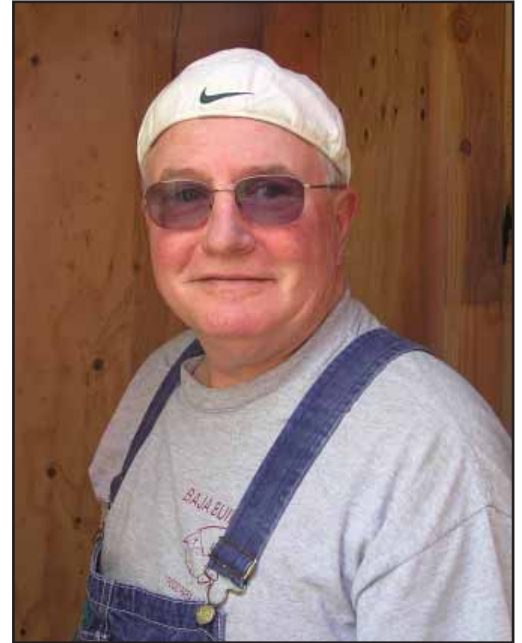
There were many, many instances during the trip where God's grace and love shined brightly but for me, my faith test revolved around Paul and his many stories. Paul seems very passionate about his faith and wears it on his sleeve for all to see. Yet for me, his stories of his flat tire and Hector's many adventures were not believable as told. They were too good to be true and since I had never experienced anything quite like that, they must not be true. I wanted to believe but

concluded that my tenuous faith would not let me. This concerned me and I made my feelings known to my "family group" ...who had already seen me rolling my eyes in the car as Paul was telling his stories. I was a bit ashamed of how I was feeling. We discussed this in our group and subsequently prayed about it.

The very next night before our evening session began Bob, not knowing about my feelings, asked me to pray for Paul. We all know that God doesn't ask us to do anything He doesn't think we can handle...yet Bob just did. My heart dropped to the floor but I told Bob that I would. I don't remember what I prayed or whether my prayer for Paul was any good or not. But I do know that I was

completely at ease when I was praying and afterward felt a love for Paul that I was incapable of developing for myself. Thank you Father...I am a work in progress.

And as Hector says...Thank You Jesus!



Three Rooms and a Loft

By Dennis Olson

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48). It is to these words from Jesus that I return each time I am presented with the possibility of a Mission trip to Mexico. Why drive all the way to Mexico when we have needy people all around us? Part of the reason is that the people of Mexico do not have the freedom to live where I do. And so I drive 1200 miles to another country to build a home for someone I will only meet once or twice in my life. We give them one of the most basic of all needs. Shelter. No kitchen, no plumbing, and only one outlet per room but to this family we are building for them a home. A place with concrete floors, where the rain will not enter through the tar paper roof held in place by old tires. Three rooms and a loft, but more than that, rooms to call their own. A place where they can be together or be alone but at least now a place where they have that choice. What it must be like for one family to live in one room all the time with no freedom to be alone.

We talked a lot on the trip about what Jesus told the disciples when they asked him to teach them how to pray. And the first thing Jesus said was that “when you pray, go into your room, close



the door conversation with God. And maybe, just maybe we were able to give this family a room with a door to close and somewhere to be alone and pray to Our Father in Heaven, King of Kings, Messiah, Lord of Lords, Creator and Prince of Peace.

God’s blessings.

Dennis

the door and pray to your Father who is unseen” (Matthew 6: 6). We also learned in prayer, first to give all glory to God, then submit your will to Him and then if you have any time left we can bring him any of our concerns (which He already knows about) to His attention. And so it was revealed to me that prayer is a very private, personal, close

And maybe, just maybe we were able to give this family a room with a door to close and somewhere to be alone and pray to Our Father in Heaven.

Mexico Mission

by Joyce Maier

After committing to the 2011 Mexico Mission trip this year the devil started playing with me and gave me all kinds of excuses why I should not go. Even as we drove down I-5 through the snow and sideways pelting rain, I wondered how we would ever build a house in these kind of conditions. The weather did not seem to be getting any better - the further we traveled. But...God parted the rain clouds, dried up the mud and allowed us a "window" of reasonable weather to build a house and continue to build the community of God. Why do we always doubt Him?

Through established relationships with our BLC team and as we developed new ones, we praised God, loved one another, and blessed a family with a new house. This trip is about more than building a house. My new-found friends and strengthening my relationship with Jesus were an added bonus. Gathering together every night, studying the Lord's Prayer, singing, having good conversations with my husband and friends let me come home with a full heart and a renewed spirit. The power of serving in God's kingdom energizes me and brings me closer to Him.

How often do we get to leave our troubles and worries behind, go forward in faith and love on so many people?

I had the privilege of handing the keys of the house over to the family on Wednesday afternoon. I will never forget the face of the young father as tears were streaming down his face as he took the keys. He truly had joy in his heart. Sharing the love of Jesus with the family and the people in the neighborhood, through prayer and action put joy in my heart!

Over the last several years, God has been leading me on a journey that has been unexpected and wonderful but it didn't happen by chance. I have opened up my heart and asked God to show me the way and until I surrendered to His will, I had not experienced joy like this. Serving a family in

Mexico, by building a house, was what I had considered to be the "purpose" of the trip. However, so many more things were accomplished. How often do we get to leave our troubles and worries behind, go forward in faith and love on so many people? I would encourage anyone who is interested in joining a mission trip like this to take a step of faith. You will be richly blessed, as well as have the opportunity to bless others along the way. I cherish the relationships that I have made through this mission trip and will go again - in a heartbeat - if I have the chance.

God is not finished with me yet and I look forward to my continuing journey!

Serving Him,
Joyce



Mexico Mission

by Paul Maier

I was not in the best of spirits in the time leading up to the Mexico mission trip. I had not been working for 8 months and seriously looking for paying work for 2 months. Granted that the first 6 months I was on a planned leave that included a few months in Mbita, but I've not had to actively look for work for more than a couple weeks in the past couple of decades. As my wife put it, I was "in a bit of a funk".

As we got closer to the Mexico trip I just kept thinking about the impact of the trip on both our savings and the job search. What would I do if I was working on a job opportunity and it conflicted with our Mexico trip? Finally it got close enough to the trip that I had to make the call – I'd go on the trip and if it interfered with getting a job, then that was God's will for me.

God's will for me has been in the forefront of my mind for a few years now. He's put me on paths I would not have imagined. While they have been challenging, they have also been very rewarding, fascinating and adventuresome. Some would say risky. I'd turned to God regularly in prayer over the last couple months to guide me to the job He wants me to have. I wanted the job that He picked for me, not that I picked for me.

The Wednesday before we left somebody contacted me about a job. They were in a rush to fill the position. I had two interviews before the week was up. I told them I'd be gone the next week, and no, I won't be available by phone nor e-mail.

So, was it a coincidence that part of our group study was on the Lord's

Prayer 'Thy will be done'?

I think not.

It was reassuring being with a great group of fellow Christians studying and discussing the impact of God's will on our lives. Talking about the difficulty and struggles that is involved for us humans that are so 'me' and 'my will' focused. This time discussing God's will gave me the assurance that I had made the right call in choosing the trip over the job hunt.

P.S. Got the job offer the Wednesday after we got back and started the week after that.



This time discussing God's will gave me the assurance that I had made the right call in choosing the trip over the job hunt.



Mexico Mission

by Douglas Bernhardt

This was my second time to Mexico with Bethlehem and it was as great or better than the last. It is amazing what you see and who you encounter along the way. Both the people you go with and the ones you meet there, bring a new look on things.

I saw God in many ways over the week, just to mention a few:

It **rained hard** both days of traveling the total 1100 miles we traveled. I remember saying if it rained like this during the week, we are going to be in trouble. But Monday morning when we

crossed the border it was sun shining, not warm but **not raining!** We drove to the work site and found the roads very muddy and impassible without 4 wheel drive in some places. This meant that some of us were going to have to walk in the final 10 blocks or so, and carry our tools, which did not look

That doesn't mean He[God] is going to make it easy all the time,... but He watches over all of us

good. Then after talking to some people, they spoke Mexican, but there was another neighbor there who could translate (is that God putting people in our lives, to help us?) who told us that we could go around another way and that we should be able to get up to the work site. We then went around and after slipping and sliding around; we made it up some very muddy rutted-up roads. Then after building the house in 3 days under

partly cloudy skies and even some sun, it **poured down rain** all night.

Was that God's work??? Parting the skies, putting people in our life to help, I like to think so.

He sees us coming to do good things for a young family of 4, that was living in a hut made out of scrap lumber and a tarp that leaked when it rained, I believe God made it more comfortable for us to work. That doesn't mean He is going to make it easy all the time, like the weather and roads to get there, but He watches over all of us to get there and back safely.

That is only a couple of things that I saw God doing His work with or for us. There were many more!

This is a trip that I would suggest most any one to take at least once and I believe they would go back again if possible. You get touched in so many ways, and make many new and better friends along the way.

GOD IS GOOD, ALL THE TIME
ALL THE TIME, GOD IS GOOD!



Mexico Mission Trip

by Karen Bernhardt

For me, this year's Mexico mission trip was a very God-filled lesson. I once again got to witness how people live with so little and yet are so happy and friendly. How children who are loved and taken care of are so filled, so joyful and filled with love. I experienced God's love and presence in our children daily. When they were anxious or not certain, they knew to come to us for love and support and trusted that God was with them at all times. How they interacted with the village kids playing endlessly with them and sharing their lunches with them each day. When asked, they would do any job needed to be done. They did not complain out loud, they just accepted the week as it came. We knew this trip could bring up issues/ memories for them and we saw God's hand on them the entire time.

The most impacting moment for me was visiting the orphanage; for our three children lived the first years of life in one in Romania. God reminded me real fast why we answered His call to add our beautiful children to our family.

Upon entering the boys' hall, we saw four younger children laying down for their naps. I followed Christy over to the beds where they were resting, picked up one of the boys and started rocking him in my lap. Douglas followed me and did the same. There we were rocking two little boys- just like our son's when we picked them up in Romania and tears rolled down my cheeks. I saw God smiling down on us. This is His plan for children, to have families who will love them, care of them and teach them about His unending love. These are the children who need more than the children we met in the village.

My faith deepened more at that moment as God reminded me there is a plan for our lives if we just listen. We were given our three younger children as gift so we could learn more of Gods grace, learn to depend on His plan and know we can get through rough times with faith and prayer. I knew at that moment I needed to trust fully in God's plan for my life. That night at Bible study, God gave me the word **simplicity**. I needed to make my life simpler, so I could hear Him talking to me.

It is not all the stuff you have worked so hard to acquire that really matters. It is how much of Gods' love you give and how your time is spent during the day that matters. Less is far better then more most of the time. I purchased a certain beaded bracelet in Mexico, not sure at the time why; just knowing I needed to have it. I have come to understand when I wear it I am reminded of the lessons God taught me that day. When beads are put together with a plan they are a beautiful piece of jewelry you wear and enjoy. Just as when life is put together in Gods way and plan it is a beautiful life, so full of priceless treasures and a reward of everlasting life in Christ Jesus.

I am always amazed of what I can hear Jesus telling me when I am willing and able to listen. This trip gave me added strength to live my life for the greater plan-for Jesus' plan. I am so very thankful each day for taking the time to serve and learn more about how I can live my life simpler and more God centered. I believe I received more than I gave on this mission trip.



Mexico Mission Trip 2011

by Anthony Norris

During the Spring Break of 2011 I had the chance to go build a house in Mexico for a second time with a group of friends from our church. Despite experiencing some of the worst weather I've ever seen during this time of the year on the way down I really enjoyed the time I had on both the road and in Mexico. During the road trip I had the privileged to ride with the Fossum's on the way down and back, which of course was very pleasant and enlightening. Listening to the [program] sermons, Bob's personal music collection, and just talking with them I appreciated the time I had with them.



personally get to know everyone else in the group. I felt more complete at the end of the trip so in the end I believe going by myself was the right choice.

Going into Tijuana to build a Baja home was quite the experience, I didn't have anything specific I wanted to do on the home, I was just there to build. After 2 and a half days of building, with the help of Hector, it was spiritually uplifting when we handed over the keys to the family and individually giving them their house warming gifts. Knowing that God sent us down to provide a home to this family, it makes me thankful that I was given the opportunity to help.

Unlike the trip I went on 5 years ago I did not attend this one with my family which in terms made me the only person on this trip going solo. Though one would think I would be nervous about such things the truth is it didn't bother me in the least because I really didn't think about it being a trip without a family - I more thought about it as just a trip by myself. It really put me in a unique perspective because since I was without a family I had a lot more time to reflect and



Mexico Mission

by Kimmy Ritcheson

This [Mexico Mission trip] was much different from years past. This was a group that I loved to talk to. I was asked to share the first word of the day, on Thursday morning, (if you would have asked me 5 or even a year ago to do that I would have said, "Umm no way!"),

This was only the 2nd year that my family did not have car trouble, This was the first year that we had to drive through snow, and I also got to ride in the back of a pick-up truck with mud flying everywhere just to get up to the work site. But in all of this, there was a verse that kept popping into my head ...*and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* Matthew 28:20.

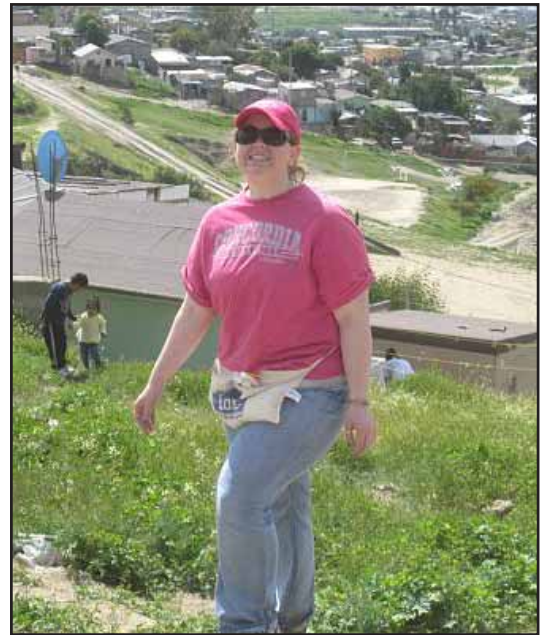
No matter what curve balls get thrown our way, God is always going to be there, and everything that happens is for a reason. We may never know why, but God does and that's all that matters. In all of this I saw that God's love was there and being expressed by the children in the village. When you looked in to their eyes and saw how at peace they were, I knew that their hearts were full of God's love. They were not worrying about where their next meal was going to come from, they were not worried about looking cool, they were not upset about not having all the latest and greatest toys. They were so at peace with what God has given to them, they knew that they were in His hands and everything was going to be okay.

During this week I felt that peace, the children were great examples for me to follow after. I now need to remember that peace that I felt from these kids and take it with me everyday and know that God is going to give me what I need, when I need it. He is in control, so I don't have to be; worrying about silly trivial things of life is only going to make it harder for me to hear God's voice and listen to his direction.

In past years I have felt sadness, and hopelessness, wondering if I'm really making that much of a difference here in a city and even a county of so much pain and poverty. But this year there was a much different feeling in my heart. I felt like, yes, there is a great need in this county, and even if my part is very small it's helping someone, and that is what God commands us to do, He does not command us to save the world, (thank goodness, Jesus already did that), help everyone and fix all of their problems. No He commands us to be His servants to help the poor and the least of these.

This week I was able to put this into practice, just the simple acts of love is pleasing to God.

This week was also a great reminder of how with God as the center of our community there is a great acceptance of everyone and everyone's gifts, they all meshed very well with each other. This team was just that - it was team, there was no I's or ME's it was all about embracing each other, and making sure everyone was a part of something, there was no one left out of anything. There was always at least one person who reached out to everyone and made them feel a part of this God community.



Baja Builders 2011

by Kevin Ritcheson

I am still in awe of how a group of 32 people, most with limited house building experience, can come together to build a home for a family in need. But anything is possible with God. As I reflect back on the week creating the house and strengthening the family of God, we were able to get a glimpse into the heart of God.

God put a little bit of His heart into each and every one of us, and every one of us put a little bit of our heart into the home and into the family.

What I mean by this is that I am able to get a basic understanding of how much God loves His people. When God created His people, it was out of love. He loved the world so much that He sent his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

When we built the home for the family, it was built out of love - love for God's people.

God put a little bit of His heart into each and every one of us, and every one of us put a little bit of our heart into the home and into the family.

That feeling that we got when we put "life" into that home has to be a similar feeling of what God felt when he created each and every one of us.

Now creating life is not the same as creating a building, but what if this home was what the family needed to create a new chapter in their lives? There will always be a place in

my heart for the families that I have been privileged enough to build for, just like the place that God has in His heart for each and every one of us that He created.



Mexico Mission

by Lillian Kachmarek

Going to Mexico this year was really a blessing. For one thing I got to be with family and friends. And secondly, it influenced my life by showing me how fortunate I am. Also at our evening discussion time it taught me that I need to pray more often. So now I do mostly at night before I go to bed. I pray that I will be able to go back and help make a difference in multiple people's lives. Also for the five little girls that I met and bonded with this year, that they will continue to grow strong and that someday I will be able to see them again.



Mexico Mission

by Simon Kachmarek

This year was my second time going to Mexico. This trip was very special to be because I was able to go with two of my cousins and my aunt, along with my sister and mom. It was awesome to spend the time with them. I also got the privilege to spend time with a lot of kids there. We played soccer together and although we could not communicate by talking, we used charades and were able to get through

it together. Finally, I got to be mentored by Paul, Sergio and Edgar who showed me the power of faith in God.



Mexico Mission

by Stephanie Kachmerek

As this was my fifth trip to Mexico with Bethlehem Baja Builders, I was astonished to find it to be my most favorite trip, for so many reasons...

I was anxious about being away from my work field for such a long stretch of time, as I recently became a full-time independent sales agent and I don't make money when I'm not in the field. I was struggling to find validation for the purpose if it meant putting my family financially at risk...God provided an abundance of work for me the week I returned and my month ended strong.

I was nervous about the weather conditions, especially having traveled through rain, snow and high winds to get their...God provided three solid days of sunshine for our team to work and share His love in the community.

The first day we met the family for whom we were building the home. Coincidentally, they are relatives of the family for



which we built two years ago and who still lived just a few doors down...we were reunited with the family and many friends from that earlier trip. I reaffirmed my faith to them sharing time, hugs, prayers, smiles, gifts and the love of Christ (not really a coincidence). God provided such a gift of shared memories and reunion of friends.

Another reunion was with the working staff of Baja Christian Ministries...Hector (Praise Jesus!), Paul (storyteller extraordinaire) and new to us this trip, Luis (the roofrat trainer) These men coached each of us how to

efficiently build a home, to work as a team and to give God the glory! Just to be in their presence was such a gift and to hear their testimonies of the miracles they have witnessed in their lives was priceless. God provided leaders, mentors, teachers to guide us on our journey.

The food has always been a highlight of the trip from Julio's famous guacamole to the amazing open grilled mexican sandwiches of 2009 to this year's assortment of whole fruit juices and spicy beans...not forgetting the breakfast papas and Lillian's tres leches birthday cake. God provided nourishment and strength for our days.

Our evening devotions were a time to reflect on God's presence in our day, to learn how to better communicate our thanks and needs to our Heavenly Father and to bond more intimately with our Bethlehem family members. God provided for relationships, new and old, to be strengthened and deepened our relationship with Him.

The thing that stood out to me on this year's trip (if you haven't noticed the common theme) GOD PROVIDED FOR MY EVERY NEED and always will.



Mexico Reflections

by Robin Fossum

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.

Psalm 127:1



Ten years of being part of Mission: Mexico are flush with rich memories of the homes and relationships and lives built with over 100 fellow team members and 11 beautifully gracious Hispanic families.

With that said, I loved this year's trip!

My teammates became family as we worked and played and worshipped and prayed over the course of the week – that such connections occurred in a very short span of time is testimony to the nature of the time we spent together. Enthusiastic, tireless, willing to undertake whatever task needed doing, mentoring others in new skills, engaged with the neighborhood children – these characterized our days. I loved watching the house take shape and the team come together.

There's something about working side-by-side to help another that bonds people in amazing ways.

I'd have to say, though, that the time of worship we shared each evening made for an

unforgettable connection between what we were doing in Tijuana and why we were there. Together we "declared God's greatness" as One who had been faithful in each moment, we leaned on the Spirit to enable us to "surrender our will to His will" so that we could see beyond ourselves to focus on the needs of our teammates and the people of Mexico, and we

"acknowledged our dependence on God" for providing everything we needed, pardoning our failures, and protecting us from physical and spiritual harm.

The prayers offered up in that "upper room" by my teammates enlarged my faith and love for my God in refreshing ways my tired spirit had so much needed. I am so thankful that God allowed me the privilege to live and serve with these dear brothers and sisters.

It's true that any group of people can build a structure together. But working together as people of one mind and heart in the love of Christ, we built not only a virtual mansion for a Tijuana family, but Faith and Life and Love in one another and all those we met along the way.

The prayers offered up in that "upper room" by my teammates enlarged my faith and love for my God in refreshing ways my tired spirit had so much needed.



