

Laredos Unidos Mission Team Report (April 12-18, 2004)

Our team was comprised of nine members: Jim Cockerham-Union Presbyterian Church; Brenda Crossman-New Hope, Asheville; Carole Ball-Trinity; Karen Morin-Murphy; Kathy Parse, Eric Parsons, Alan Griffin & Linda Amos-Waldensian; Ginnie Stevens-PWNC. We were in mission with Laredos Unidos, one of the joint border ministries of the PC(USA) and the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico.

Our trip was a positive but varied experience for our group. Alan, Eric, Karen, Brenda and I stepped into an international mission experience for the first time. Ginnie and Carole, while veterans of many mission trips, visited Nuevo Laredo for the first time. Kathy and Jim returned for a joyous and emotion packed reunion.

We were faced with some injuries and illnesses of our team members throughout our trip that could have been very detrimental to our effectiveness but, as only God can, He used those adversities to unite us and create a cohesive and supportive team. The congregation of la Iglesia Presbiteriana Monte Sion rallied to do what they could to help in each situation and it created a memorable bond. God brought beauty from ashes!

The recurring and intertwining thread to our experience was esperanza-hope.

Hope that our physical labor made a measurable difference. We painted the manse of Monte Sion and the surrounding wall and cleared knee high weeds from the back yard. The men laid a concrete sidewalk in front of the house and cut out a back door. In addition we painted two bathrooms in the fellowship hall at of la Iglesia Presbiteriana Peniel, where we lived, and the guys hung a door and unclogged a sink there as well.

It is hard to believe that we also found time to have play and activity time with the children and fellowship with the adults of the two churches. The women of Monte Sion cooked for us each evening and a discussion of life on the border was enlightening. We attended a church bulletin jewelry making demonstration (a self-help program that earns much needed income for the women of Monte Sion church) and worshipped on Wednesday night worship at Monte Sion. There was an evening to meet and spend some time with the members of Peniel as well. The border patrol tour evoked mixed emotions as we were told about the professional way they try to carry out their assigned duties, but we still wistfully imagined a world without borders. The tour of the orphanage made everyone pensive until Jim perked things up with banjo playing and lively singing ensued.

The most poignant experience was the tour of the a new community, Naciones Unidos Colonia. Meeting Mapy, the paraplegic resident with her beatific smile and optimistic attitude sitting in her tiny shack with a dirt floor and no electricity or running water, was enough to cause us all to examine the things we routinely complain about.

The final night members of Monte Sion hosted a Mexican fiesta with authentic Mexican dress, food and entertainment, a perfect ending for our trip!

Throughout all these wonderful activities we had hope as new friendships were created and old ones rekindled that we could carry the amazing spirit of love and faith of the people of Monte Sion and Peniel back home to our congregations and use it to inspire a renewed fire for mission work in Nuevo Laredo and other places that God has for us.

Our hearts and heads are full of a new or renewed awareness of the plight and the needs of our neighbors. Awareness comes with a responsibility for action that is not always easy to figure out, but our faith tells us that if we ask, God will guide that action in amazing ways.

We came home fueled with hope and prayers for action so that money can be raised to build a church for the people at the Naciones Unidos Colonia. Hope and prayers that Mapy, who unselfishly offered her little home for church services until a building can be constructed, can at the very least have a concrete floor so that her wheel chair won't be mired the mud each time it rains. Hope and prayers that Noe Espinoza, coordinator for Laredos Unidos, will obtain a visa to help him continue God's work with the people of Nuevo Laredo.

The goodbyes were painful but only temporary. We have hope that we will continue correspondence with our friends and maybe even have the privilege of visiting them again. Our one true hope however is the universal hope that all hermanas y hermanos have through Christ, no matter where they live or what language they speak. Christian friendships are eternal!

Linda Amos, Waldensian Presbyterian Church