

God Will Do Great Things If We Will Just Let Him – Matamoros, Mexico – July 2009

We can be impatient, we want things our own way, and we have our own expectations. It's not always what He wants and we need to get out of the way.

The Mission in Matamoros, Mexico, has seemed to be that way over the last year. We start to build a youth building beside the church in the village – God sends a flood. We want to drain our property – Mexican red tape. We try to help a family – many small problems. We want to go ahead with the new building – financial crisis in the U.S.

With perseverance and God's timing, we now have a completed youth building that is larger and more functional than originally dreamed possible. Draining the property has turned into providing sewer to an entire street. A family has a home to be proud of and the work has inspired many of the neighbors to make improvements as well. Not only is the youth building completed, but the community is more involved, proud of what is happening, and long time residents of the community have visited the church for the first time. Friends have been made, relationships established, and people from both sides of the border have learned to appreciate another culture. We were even invited to a birthday party! And then invited back later for supper. Jorge Reyes,



pastor of the mission, invited us to eat with his family at their home one day and the contractor that we have been using cooked for us one night.

Over the past year, we helped Esmeralda and Christobol make huge improvements on their home across the street from the church. Since then, they

have painted the compound walls of the mission. The local meeting members painted the inside of the meetinghouse in preparation for a youth gathering of young Friends from all over Mexico. Things had improved so much that Jorge said, "that is why we were able to have the youth camping of the Friends Churches with comfort." Christobol taught Mike and our VBS team how to stucco the outside of the new building and said "I do this from my heart." It was exciting to see Americans and Mexicans working alongside each other.

Rodrigo, a member of the church, was glad to be able to help also. The community boys painted the gate to the compound, helped carry in the new chairs, and picked up trash. All they need is a little encouragement. Victor, Esmeralda's son, found a wonderful toy in a discarded box that once housed a sink for the new kitchen. A meeting in NC sent money to buy a swing set. Many children were overjoyed, although many had to be taught to slide and swing. The muddy, swampy crab farm is now a parking lot **and** what has been now dubbed "the playground" because of the new swing set. One of the members has agreed to do the work adding some plants once again on the grounds.

At a well represented community meeting requested by the Mexico Task Force more than 50 adult residents attended. The COMMUNITY is happy that we are there and seem interested in improving their community. They are very thrilled with the "playground" and would like to see it available for the children in the community on weekends. (They would also like to have some swings for toddlers.) They suggested that having soccer,

volleyball and basketball available might encourage youth and young adults to be more involved. They also suggested that it would be much better and more visible to have the meeting sign on the outside of the wall instead of on the building inside. Jorge took the opportunity to make himself available to the community and to also let everyone know of meeting times. The VBS team kept the children occupied and



after the meeting invited everyone to have hamburgers and hot dogs. Everyone was invited to tour the unfinished building and they all seemed thrilled at what they saw.



At the direction of the Mexico Task Force, a group of seven had traveled to Matamoros to finish the youth building, stopping overnight at MOWA Choctaw for lodging, food and fellowship with the group working there. Four days later, we were joined by others who traveled with the Mexico VBS team. We even made sure that John Porter got a good taste of the manual labor.



The work was hard and dirty, the weather HOT, and we put in long hours. At the beginning, some had the challenge of buying, mostly in Mexico, materials, tile, paint, appliances and supplies



to set up the kitchen and baths. Others sealed and painted the walls and ceiling. A bottled water cooler was one of the first purchases and was enjoyed by all, including the VBS children. We then laid tile in the showers and on all the floors, hooked up lights and plumbing, painted



doors and trim. The refrigerator, stove, and the cabinets (made by a local merchant) arrived. The VBS team applied stucco and paint on the exterior walls while they got sunburned and helped with other jobs. Tables and chairs were bought and brought in. The members of the church and the community made it clear with their smiles, "thank you"s and thumbs up that they were very happy with the facility. Except for some small plumbing issues, the building was ready to use when we left.



All is not perfect and there is still plenty of work to do. The door facings in the old building are termite ridden, benches are falling apart. Other benches have rotted or been eaten by termites so much that they are too short to use well. The water leaking into the building has been slowed but not completely stopped. The floor is cracked in one room and allows water from the septic box to seep up into the room. This now could be closed since we have city sewer. Adding a layer of cement to the floor (level with the other main room) would seal the cracks, keep water from running in, and aid in septic connection.

Sports equipment for the teens and more swings for the very small children need to be purchased. Church members have requested an additional drum set and amplifier system. Individuals need help with their homes. The opportunities are endless. Will we allow God to use us to help them?

You never know how far a good deed will reach. The cruise control went out on Shelby's car just before arriving in Brownsville on our way down. Even though we had been advised to take the car back to Brownsville because the Chrysler dealership in Matamoros would take advantage of us, we still decided to try the Matamoros dealership. They were extremely friendly and helpful, gave an estimate much lower than anything we could expect in the States, said it would take at least five hours and supplied us a truck to use while they repaired the car. When we returned to the dealership, they had worked on the car for eight hours, charged less than the estimate (only \$50 total) and the salesman would not take the \$20 tip offered for his work. His said, "I do this for what you do for the people in my country."

Worship at Monterray

On Sunday, John Porter, Beth Saunders, Wiley & Shelby Shore and Walter Shore acquired special visa's and traveled farther into the country to Mexico's second largest city, Monterray, for worship. The



situation here is much different from Matamoros especially in the village of Esperanza y Reforma. The people do not appear to be so stricken by poverty.

The members apologized for not having very many people, as several were on vacation – but they still had about 50. The meetinghouse looks very nice and they have a good variety of ages involved in meeting. Many people had a part of the service.

Everyone seems to enjoy singing together. There are three Sunday school classes for youth

and children and the adults had a very interesting lesson taught by a 46 year old man. As worship began, numerous people, men and women, spoke in open worship before the pastor had a sermon. They were very happy to see us and several times mentioned the help that they had received from Poplar Ridge Meeting. Quika said that Jake Penley was like a second father to her.



When asked what they needed – help doing VBS, visitation, etc., they responded that visits are welcome and they seem open to any assistance we would like to provide. VBS would be fine but difficult. There are not many young families that live in the community anymore. Even the members of the congregation drive in for service. They would have to find a larger place to have VBS and figure out a good way to get more children. They do need some help with maintaining the building. They are also very interested in working with a special ministry to help homeless and abused children.

They are not a lost and forlorn mission as some might describe. They are a thriving fellowship with dreams and hopes similar to some North Carolina meetings. We do need to maintain contact and support their outreach.

