

PICTURE THIS

A city with masses of people, many little shops, food carts, tiny homes with wash hanging on the line every day, all mingled together. A man, woman or child will sell you a carnation or rose, a newspaper or wash your windshield while you wait at the stoplight. The streets are filled with mostly older cars and very old busses and an occasional horse drawn cart collecting trash. Yes, there are a few larger businesses, a Best Western Hotel, Wal-Mart, Burger King and a few nicer homes. Everyone must use bottled water to drink, brush teeth and prepare food.

Out on the edge, just inside the city, sits a village community with mostly dirt streets and very meager homes. The women and children especially, tip toe through the mud around large puddles of grey water that fills the low places in the streets and yards. The smell of sewer lingers on your shoes and in your car. How can the people look so clean??

Just off the main street sits the only church in the community. Women and children, picked up by the pastor's van, come for Sunday School. (The pastor is praying for the men to come too.) They must take a long step over a pool of water to reach a little bridge, then another long step before dry pavement to get into the church. The wrought iron windows, wide open for relief from the heat, show the unpainted portions of block wall around the property. After a time of prayer and singing (the church can't afford instruments), the children leave the adults to go into the other room to learn scripture verses and color pictures that they share when they return. There is a special birthday prayer for Miel, a young boy just turned 12. Everyone is invited back into the only other room for birthday cake.



You must be careful when you sit at the home made benches and tables because many termites live there. Hope you don't need rest rooms because the toilets don't work. The streaked walls and floor in both rooms show the many leaks in the roof and windows, which make the room too damp for the set of drums they wish for. There is standing water around the church. On one side, hundreds of little sand crabs live in the mucky dirt. They do bite. The braver children like to pull off their little legs to watch them flop around, a substitute for playground equipment they don't have. Anyway, don't step in the muck. You will sink.



God lives here! He loves the smiles and hugs and handshakes and clapping and singing. You say, Was this the work of Mother Teresa? No, this is North Carolina Yearly Meeting, today, in Esperanza y Reforma (village), Matamoros, Mexico.

On Sunday, the pastor has Sunday School in the village in the morning and worship in the evening at the other church on the second floor of his home in town where they have some musical instruments. During the week, he has Bible study at both churches. He shows a real concern for the people and a commitment to God's work. The NC Yearly Meeting Missions Committee, by trust funds, provides funding for the pastor, Jorge Reyes, and his ministry. The committee has no funds for any major improvements.

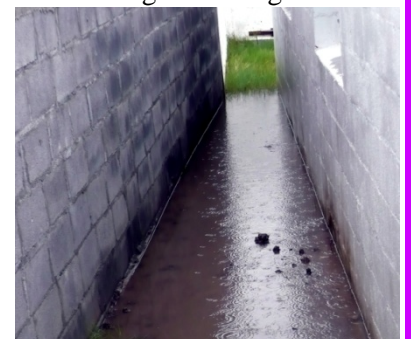
The North Carolina Yearly Meeting Young Adults have a **DREAM** for the village mission. They want to build a simple kitchen complete with appliances, and a fellowship room – small by our standards. Some bathrooms would be a real bonus. They are working to raise money. Some older adults are dreaming with them. Some work has been done for cement foundation and research is now going on for building materials more termite proof and water resistant. Some Friends also have a deep concern for helping families in the community improve their living conditions. A special Mexico task force has been formed to research and work toward making these dreams come to pass. Kevin Smitherman, a member of the Missions Committee, is the convener.



On behalf of the task force, Wiley and I along with Walter as our interpreter were in Matamoros, September 18-



24 (not counting our driving days) with the assignment to get the water off the property – or find a way. Also we were to do some research for building possibilities. Jorge was an excited and helpful participant. After surveying the property and community, we met with the village commissioner, then officials at the city water



works department to find out regulations. We also talked with builders and some people who had buildings in the city.

Although it was not our assignment, we saw some serious roof problems with both existing buildings and feel compelled to share our concerns. The church in town has water seeping through the ceiling and some crumbling cement around edges and needs major repair. In the village, after only a rain shower, water was running down all walls through the ceiling and windows and under the doors. Walter caulked the roof around the edges stopping a few leaks, but mostly just slowed it down. Wiley thinks the building needs a new roof. Caulk in front of the doors did temporarily stop the run in. We are sending Jorge some rubber weather stripping to try on the windows. While waiting for city officials and others to come to the property to give estimates, we scraped and painted Rustoleum on all the rusty pitted wrought iron windows including the protective trim. Walter repaired the crumbling window putty and replaced eight broken window panes. Walter and Wiley also replaced some parts on the old toilets. The boy's was not a complete success.

Wiley, along with two helpers, shoveled a trench which began some drainage off the property. We made arrangements with our neighbor, on the main street, who is the former commissioner, to have two kinds of dirt brought to fill in the property. We purchased the required tile and left it on the property for the city to lay a sewer line up the street by our property to the next intersection. This will make it possible for the neighbors to hook on to the line also. When the city lays the line, they will pave that strip of the road. We believe the dirt and the sewer line/paving will greatly help reduce the water problems on our property and the street, which helps us and the people. The rain showers prevented our completing the project, but we left instructions for things to be done and will continue to monitor the situation. We also purchased a new water storage tank (replacement) for the house. People need the storage for days the city has no water, sometimes several days at a time, as happened while we were there.



One day after we had observed families in such difficult conditions and the church surrounded with grey smelly water, a rain shower began. Immediately water started coming in the door and down the wall. Walter and Wiley went into the next room to check it out. In a couple of minutes I followed – water was coming down all the walls. I turned away to keep from crying. Can our mission be an example in this community? Can we make the dreams real? What is God saying to us?

On two of our exploring days, after talking with several people, Jorge said “It’s been a really good day.” He says that Friends were the first Christian Missionaries to enter Mexico. Do we still carry the concern for the souls and needs of these people? To say “Yes”, pray and make contributions as your heart leads. You may designate your giving to Mexico building and/or repair projects.

Shelby Shore