

Mexico After All

United Methodists find peace, partnership South of the Border

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A year ago Antonio was separated from his wife and two small children in Monterrey, Mexico, and heading for divorce. Neither he nor his wife knew Jesus Christ or had anything to do with church.

Then something unusual happened. His estranged wife told him of a small new church in their community. She had visited and thought it would be good for him as well. He agreed. After attending church for two months, Antonio and his wife accepted Christ as their savior and moved back in together. Today they and their two children are active members of Refugio de Paz Iglesia Metodista, truly a Refuge of Peace.

Despite the trend of canceling mission trips to Mexico over concerns of the swine flu or drug cartel violence, twelve members of First United Methodist Church of Irving, flew to Monterrey, Mexico this summer and experienced this incredible refuge of peace, joining hands with our brothers and sisters in Christ in both construction and evangelism.

Led by Rev. David Turner, the diverse group of men and women included those both skilled and unskilled in construction and ranged in age from 18 to 75. Most of the group spoke little or no Spanish but with the help and guidance of GO InterNational out of Wilmore, Kentucky, a bilingual staff member was provided to guide the trip.

It was a return trip for Rev. Turner and three of the Irving lay members, but the first time to go on an international mission trip for the majority of the group.

Refugio de Paz rests at the foot of a majestic mountain, Sera de la Silla, a huge saddle-back-style mountain that is the symbol of Monterrey. The church is led by Rev. Jose Padilla who counseled with Bishop Raul Garcia in establishing the church in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Monterrey.

United Methodist churches from the United States are teaming up to take mission trips to help with the construction of the church building as well as evangelical work in the neighborhood it serves.

"Our local churches must learn that our mission is world-wide, not just in and around our own neighborhoods, said Rev. Turner, "By reaching out internationally, we get a sense of the providence of God, and find ourselves in the rich traditions of making Disciples for Jesus around the entire world."

Irving First UMC's commitment to establishing and building new congregations has extended to Mexico and Honduras the past few years. The church is committed to the Great Commission.

"It is our hope that we will go to Peru soon," Rev. Turner said, adding that he hopes to take members of other United Methodist Churches in the North Texas Conference and beyond.

This year, the group from Irving lived right in the neighborhood of the church. Meals were prepared by members of the Mexican church and served in the church.

The group from Irving experienced temperatures soaring to 104 degrees with air conditioning being a rare commodity—generally only available in the 7-Eleven and Wal-Mart. The spirit of friendship and fellowship in Christ, however, granted refreshment and peace to the group.

Returning to Irving First UMC after eight days in Mexico, group members addressed their home congregation and shared a sense of not just constructing a building but building relationships. While twisting steel for columns, members of both churches shared the language of love. While repainting the graffiti-covered outer walls of the church, they joined hands to overcome the forces of evil and poverty and bring hope to a challenging neighborhood.

Ultimately, they had fun. The trip included side trips for sight-seeing, shopping, swimming and even dancing at an outdoor wedding. The group practiced travel safety always and never experienced any dangerous situations.

For more information or to consider a trip to Refugio de Paz in Monterey or to Peru for your congregation, contact Rev. Turner at david@fumcirving.org or 972-253-3531.