



Latin American Lutheran Mission

CLARION

Vol. 69, No. 5

"You shall be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

October 2004

The Bible Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico



One of the most important ministries of the church of Jesus Christ in every age has been that of preparing leaders to mobilize the church and reach others in Jesus' name. Jesus' model was

simple: work with a few and apprentice them into ministry. He called them to Himself that he might later send them out. In many ways this has been the model of the pioneers of the Latin American Lutheran Mission: the Bible Institute model. Through it they trained the pastors and evangelists who started the congregations of the ELCM. Over the years many of the leaders trained by the ELCM have even been called to serve churches outside the ELCM. The training is one school year in duration followed by an internship.

This school year, the ELCM's Bible Institute is located in Saltillo, in the Mexican state of Coahuila. Pastor Rogelio Balvantin is the current Bible Institute director. He, like the previous director, is himself a family man, a good student of the Word of God and pastors a mission congregation in Saltillo. He has taken on a big assignment with the help of his family and many local volunteers. The five students in this year's class come from three different states of the huge country of Mexico and each has a unique journey of faith and sense of calling to ministry. We're going to share their testimonies in the Clarion so that you might pray for each one by name as they grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Rodolfo Martinez Flores

My name is Rodolfo Martinez Flores. I am 25 and was born in Monterrey, Mexico. I am one of three brothers, Juan Jose and Jesus Gabriel who are older, and me, Rodolfo.

I was born into a family that was following the Lord. My whole early life was involved in the church where my mom was very active along with my older brothers who were a

strong influence on me to grow in the Lord. Nevertheless around age fourteen I began to see life differently. I began to enjoy what the world was offering me and my life got more and more entangled in sinful habits until my early twenties when the Lord began to talk to me. Then one early morning as we made our way home after a night of heavy drinking my friend Fernando and I were involved in a terrible accident. Our pickup truck just about rolled. It was a wake up call for me and I turned to Jesus and until this very day by the grace of God I am walking with Him. I am so thankful for a mom who prayed for me.

My purpose and objective through my studies in the Bible Institute is to grow spiritually, to be filled with God's Holy Spirit and with knowledge so that I might more effectively reach others who are lost and bring them to the feet of our Lord Jesus and to eternal life.

Jorge Jose Guerrero Quiroz

My name is Jorge Jose Guerrero Quiroz. I'm 34 and was born in Monterrey, in the state of Nuevo Leon, in Mexico. I am one of nine siblings, four sisters, and five brothers. My testimony is about how the Lord restored me. He helped me to escape from my past life in which I was trapped in drugs. I am just thankful that I am here today. At the age of 12 I began to use drugs and soon it was a habit. I used all kinds of drugs and it became impossible to support my habit but it was also too hard to just give it up. When I met the Lord it was during a terrible time in my life. I was nineteen and I was a prisoner of drugs with no hope of escape, and in that condition I became critically ill. But when Christ came to my heart and life things really changed. I'm sure the prayers of my mother were the reason Jesus healed both my soul and my body. She used to say, "Jorge, God has chosen you." God gave me an opportunity to serve people and bring souls to Christ. This is just part of my testimony and I share it so that people might believe that there is a God and He can do anything. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

I'm studying in the Bible Institute because God has called me to serve Him. He has given me a new opportunity to do the work of an evangelist and I want to learn how to do it well.

Director's Directions:

Building on the Past – When we received the call to be directors of the Latin American Lutheran Mission, the rightness and the timing of the call seemed very natural. But it was not with a clear view of how our leadership of LALM would be different than previous directors. It was more a sense that our leadership would represent continuity, building on the good things of the past. Gary and Carol Olson's season as directors was characterized by exceptional administration which has improved the overall financial picture, great networking into other Lutheran connections, and an environment of joyful hospitality, among many other things. (If you were here for more than a day you probably enjoyed an evening of laughs playing cut-throat Mexican Train Dominoes with the Olsons and Ricardo Dominguez, topped off with ice cream, of course!) We would like to build on that legacy.

A Pastor Among Pastors – It is my prayer that I could further nurture the spiritual side of things. My life experience and my pastoral experience have prepared me to be an encourager. As a pastor who comes out of the renewal movements of the Lutheran Church, I know that the Bride of Christ must be in continual renewal. Jesus is making her beautiful in order to present her to himself in all her glory on that Great Day. As a Lutheran pastor my springs are also in good reformation theology and I want to continue to nurture what is

transculturally vital from our Lutheran confessional heritage. Not tradition for tradition's sake which is death, but tradition as an incarnational vessel for Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Trinitarian fullness.

A Privilege and a Challenge – It is unique and marvelous that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico is led by Mexican pastors, not missionaries. It is a privilege to be in partnership with them. Our challenge as a mission in this relationship will be to avoid patterns of dependence, and to empower their leadership as they grow toward autonomy in governance, finances, and evangelism. Pray for us in this challenge to be and become a Holy, Christian and Apostolic Church.



—Pastor Dick and Barb Erickson

Latin American Lutheran Mission ELC-M Partners Who Help Proclaim the Gospel

Incorporated in 1936, LALM is a faith mission depending entirely upon God for the supplying of its needs through the prayer and freewill offerings of His people as the Holy Spirit moves them. LALM is an independent Lutheran organization, having members on its Board of Directors from various Lutheran bodies. To learn more about LALM, please feel free to contact the board member nearest you.

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Latin American Lutheran Mission Clarion

The Clarion is published bimonthly by LALM for friends of the Mission and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico. If you wish to be a prayer helper in this Mission for Mexico and would like to receive the Clarion, please contact the Editor at the address listed under "Mission Staff." There is no specific subscription price for the Clarion, but for those who wish to and have the means to help LALM with its cost, it is about \$3.00 per year for each mailing address. Please send contributions to our Treasurer at the address listed under "Mission Staff."

Publication deadline for the next Clarion issue is November 5, 2004.

Donations for LALM should be mailed to:
PO Box 17385, Minneapolis, MN 55417-7385

Bethel of Rochester's Mexico Mission Trips

2004 marks the eighth year of Bethel Lutheran of Rochester, Minnesota's Mexico mission work trips organized through Latin American Lutheran Mission of Laredo, Texas. We work with congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico in projects identified by their pastors. We do repair and remodeling of churches, new church construction, Vacation Bible School activities, and we actively participate in worship with the congregations. Over 150 different members and friends have taken part in our trips so far. Several have traveled to Mexico five times or more. Our average over these eight years has been around 35 people a year. Now that we go twice a year our average yearly numbers are increasing. Interest continues to grow. Forty-four people have signed up for this summer's trip.

Why we go

What accounts for this interest? We have gone with a deep desire to share God's love in Mexico through service among our brothers and sisters in Christ. We have come home blessed by these same brothers and sisters. Working hard together with them to build God's house—for worship, classroom space for children and adults to study God's word, and other space for fellowship and strong community life—we have come to know, respect, and care for each other. We have become involved in the hopes and dreams of our Christian brothers and sisters as they spread God's love in the Gospel in their communities. We see where we can play a role in helping them.

We have grown in faith through their powerful witness. Their personal warmth and joy, lively and enthusiastic worship, knowledge of Scripture, and deep understanding and practice of the Christian faith have changed those of us who go. Many of us can't wait to go back.

Mexico, a developing country facing many challenges, is right on our doorstep. It is within reach of individual congregations for groups to go there for short immersion trips to understand by working together with fellow Christians some of the challenges faced by people living in a developing country. People who seem remote from us at a distance become wonderfully interesting individuals with names, with humor, courage, and compassion, and with hopes and dreams for their loved ones like those we have for our own. To experience God at work through communities of living faith responding to his love in our neighbor Mexico is a transforming event.

Where we go

We have concentrated our work in Mexico at two locations. The winter group, adults including retirees, flies to Harlingen in south Texas in February. The group works at Rio Bravo, a community just across the Rio Grande southeast of McAllen, Texas. We work with Pastor Carlos and Anna Maria de Leon at El Sembrador (The Sower) Church and at El Camino (The Way), the church's mission in an impoverished neighborhood.

A large part of our work has been at the mission. The heart of the program at the mission is sharing God's love in the Gospel with the children of the neighborhood and their parents through Bible-based programs three times a week. Pastor Carlos's congregation then demonstrates God's love by providing a nutritious lunch for the children at the mission every Saturday morning. The plan is to expand the lunch program and to add a program of instruction for mothers on providing more nutritious meals at home. Running water, bathrooms with flush toilets and showers have been put in to improve hygiene.

The 2003 winter group, working together with people from or provided by the church, hand mixed concrete in batches on the ground, enough to lay floors for three classrooms. On Saturday we worked directly with the children using a lesson we put together on Noah's Ark. It included a procession of the children out to one of the classrooms (the ark), prayer, and a dedication of the new floors by Pastor Carlos.

The summer group is organized for family and youth but includes also others interested in participating in a mission experience. We travel into Mexico four and a half hours south of Laredo, Texas, into the mountains to the 400-year-old city of Saltillo. There we worked at two sites. We helped Pastor



Bulmaro Velazquez and his congregation at Ebenezer Church as they construct El Buen Samaritano (The Good Samaritan) Church in a new neighborhood on the western edge of the city. To help build the new congregation,



The Good Samaritan Lutheran Church



every year since 1998 we have worked together with adults from the congregation to hold Vacation Bible School. Partnering on VBS with members of Pastor Bulmaro's congregation has worked out very well. Our Mexican Christian friends work with the story and music and provide structure, and we provide the crafts. Strong bonds of fellowship develop as leaders work together to provide the children an experience they will remember and that will bring God closer to them. Our youth especially love working with the children in VBS.

We also worked at Filadelfia Temple on the south side of Saltillo, a site for which we helped break ground two years ago. Pastor Marco Antonio Rodriguez has a contagious devotion to building this church—his dream for 10 years. Our



Philadelphia Lutheran

group has picked up his contagious spirit and has worked extremely hard the last three years. This site has required much pickaxe work through solid rock for pillar foundations. This summer they completed the roof on Filadelfia.

Congregational support

When we go to Mexico we go as a part of our Bethel congregation. We retain our relationship with the congregation through our prayers for one another, including use of a prayer calendar distributed at worship. Our congregation has provided generous support to help make the trip affordable for those who feel called to go to Mexico through:

- participating in our fund raisers
- monetary gifts and scholarships
- food and other material support

Children in Bethel's Sunday School have:

- provided funds to purchase over 600 concrete blocks for

- church construction
 - given money for 100 school kits
 - assembled 100 bags of pencils with sharpeners for children's schoolwork (two different years)
- Through special offerings on Global Mission Sunday in late September the congregation has:
- funded the purchase of a van for the singing group at Ebenezer Church in Saltillo
 - supported the Bible School at Rio Bravo which trains leaders for the ELC-Mexico
 - provided financial support for the children's lunch program in Rio Bravo

What we gain

We gain a living experience of God's presence with his people outside our own culture. Other benefits include a deep sense of community among members of the mission group not only as we work on projects in Mexico but also as we meet the daily challenges of a long trip into a different country and culture. When we return, we have become witnesses in our congregation and among our families and friends. We return to an enriched life within our own congregation.

For more information please contact:

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The old city building of Saltillo

Thinking Ahead

Talking to a friend of mine who is also my financial advisor the question was raised, "Dick, have you and Barb written a will, yet?" I had to admit that even though I have recommended doing so to others, I had not yet done so. A will may be primarily written for the sake of clarifying one's wishes for the disposition of one's estate with reference to one's loved ones, but I have served on various ministry boards and am aware of the financial blessing it is to a church or other ministries to receive a deferred gift through an estate. It is a reminder that people who have been blessed and who share the vision want to be part of the future of the ministry even after their life is over. I reviewed a precious letter the other day from someone whose life has been deeply touched

by association with this mission and the church of Mexico. The memory of meaningful relationships and transforming experiences was forever recorded in their heart. Though they had given much through their ministry with the LALM, they felt "enriched in every way" (2 Corinthians 9:11). In conjunction with one's will other instruments can be used for protecting the value of one's investments, savings, and property from probate, and tax liability. It's worth talking to your CPA, financial advisor, or to a friend you know understands these things and is not "selling something". Latin American Lutheran Mission can also refer you to trustworthy and knowledgeable help in this area. God has blessed this past generation with much wealth and He desires that we continue to serve Jesus and His church.

Becky Liebenow – LALM Summer Intern

After four years of hoping to volunteer with Latin American Lutheran Mission I was able to do so this past July. My first contact with the mission was serving as interpreter in Monterrey, Mexico for a team from the Lay Ministry Training Center in 2000.

I wasn't sure what to expect when I arrived in Laredo, but I knew it would be a life-changing experience for me. During July, I found myself in a number of different roles as interpreter, leader, counselor, construction worker and bridge builder between the American team members and the Mexican Christians. I loved being able to help the Lutheran Church of Mexico and assist the American groups in reaching their goals for their outreach.

During the first week I worked with a high school group from Flower Mound and Austin, Texas. We worked on Philadelphia Lutheran Church in Saltillo under the direction of Pastor Marco Antonio and also held Vacation Bible School. During the second week I was with a smaller junior high team that bunked down at the mission station in Laredo, Texas and worked at Calvary Lutheran Church and Grace Alone mission church in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. The third week I worked at Grace Alone mission church with a high school team from Bethany Lutheran Church of Austin, Texas. A roof was built creating a covered porch for Sunday school space. VBS was also held. During my last week I returned to Saltillo and worked with a team from Bethel Lutheran Church of Rochester, Minnesota. Half of this large team worked at Philadelphia Lutheran and the other half worked at Good Samaritan Lutheran, both churches in the process of completing new

worship space. A large VBS outreach was held near Philadelphia.

It was a challenging and wonderful experience for me. My parents were missionaries so I grew up as an MK and I later served in Latin America for four years. I could see how I was able to use this experience and our Bible School training as a team leader this summer. I also made a decision to not return to my job in Phoenix, Arizona and am now seeking God's direction for what he has next for me. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths."

I feel very blessed to have been able to meet and work with so many committed Christians this summer. It was a pleasure to meet people from various Lutheran churches and work with dedicated Mexican pastors and church leaders. I hope to be able to volunteer with Latin American Lutheran Mission again in the future.

The work of the LALM is so important because it helps and encourages the Mexican Lutheran Church and it gives Lutheran congregations in the U.S. the opportunity to serve and learn in a new way. I am also grateful to the Olsons and Ericksons for their wonderful hospitality at the mission station in Laredo. May the Lord bless Dick and Barb Erickson and Ricardo Dominguez as they lead the mission.



—Becky Liebenow

In Memoriam - Donald E. Strand

Donald E. Strand, 77, of Kindred, North Dakota, long time friend, supporter, and board member of the Latin American Lutheran Mission died July 13, 2004 at this home. Donald was born October 13, 1926 in Abercrombie Township, North Dakota to Ingmar and Ruth (Gunness) Strand. He attended a country school near Abercrombie and graduated from the Abercrombie High School in 1944. Donald enlisted in the US Navy and served aboard the aircraft carrier USS Saratoga in the South Pacific. He was in the service from 1944-1946. Upon his return to North Dakota he attended North Dakota Agricultural College (now NDSU), Fargo, North Dakota for two years. He then worked for the Red Owl Store in Fargo. Donald married Mary Lou Thompson in 1948 at West Prairie Lutheran, rural Kindred, North Dakota. They settled in the Kindred area and farmed until Donald retired in 1991. Donald continued to work with his son David on the farm until he suffered a stroke in 2003. He was active in his local church teaching Sunday school, and holding every office over the years. He also sang with the West Prairie quartet for more than 25 years, performing in many local churches. Donald served as a board member of the Latin

American Lutheran Mission from 1970 until 1997, and was president of the board from 1990 until 1995. Donald and his wife, Betty Lou, made many trips to Mexico to visit the mission and have many dear friends among the Mexican churches. Funeral services were held July 17 at West Prairie Lutheran Church, Kindred, North Dakota and interment was at the West Prairie Cemetery. May God bless the memory of our brother Donald E. Strand. He will be remembered by the LALM and the Lutheran Church of Mexico.



Summer Mission Teams



San Rafael



Grace Alone Lutheran Church in Nuevo Laredo



Rio Bravo



Wananmingo en el Potosi



Youth Camp in Atongo

About eighty youth from all over northeastern Mexico converged on Cristo Rey Lutheran Church in Atongo de Abajo, Nuevo Leon, Mexico for a week-end camp. Many tents popped up all over the yard of the church. It was a weekend of fun activity and inspiration for everyone. There was a fabulous play-off among soccer teams that represented each area. There was the caravan of vehicles to the swimming hole with competition for who could do the best acrobatic dive from the swing out over the river. There was the election of new leadership for the new school year. There was Bible study and Bible memory competition and powerful times of worship with ministry following. The theme that the Spirit of God continued to bring forth in his own creative way was the abundance, availability and healing power of God's love. Saturday night pastors were praying over youth until after midnight as the Holy Spirit fell with sweetness and power. Many did not get to their various homes until the wee hours of Sunday morning, but rejoicing in the Lord. Pray for continued revival among the youth of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico.





Gifts of Love



The following persons and organizations provided gifts, donations, or bequests to the Latin American Lutheran Mission in July through August of 2004. The LALM Board of Directors and staff are grateful for all these gifts as well as those gifts of time and talents. (If you do not want to be recognized by the Clarion for your gift, please send a note along with your contribution to the Treasurer/Financial Secretary stating your desire for anonymity.) We apologize for any errors or omissions.

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In memory of Stanley Christianson
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 In memory of Lila Gubrud
 In memory of Ruth Megard
 In memory of Talora Nelson
 In memory of James Peterson
 In memory of Donald Strand
 In memory of Stanley Teal
 In loving memory of Lynda Voyrich

Honorariums

In honor of Doris Nordin's 92nd B'day

Estates

Estate of Ruth Harrington ~ Sioux Falls, SD

Special Note:

We have changed our e-mail address
 - yes, again - it is:
lalmelm@sbcglobal.net

The PO Box address for contributions is:
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Minneapolis, MN 55417-7385

LALM Prayer Warriors October 2004

Thanks and Praise

- For the blessings of our annual meeting under the theme, "Lord of the Past – Lord of the Future".
- For the many churches that received the testimonies of our Mexican pastors during our time spent in the upper Midwest in September.
- For the wisdom, faithfulness and creative input of our LALM board members as we seek to clarify our functional definition of partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico and focus on strategies for short-term mission teams.
- For safe travel and for the volunteers and host homes that blessed us in so many ways in our September trip.
- For Pastor Rogelio Balbantin's willingness to direct this year's program in the ELCM's Bible Institute in Saltillo.
- For the faithful support in prayer and finances of LALM's constituency.
- For the faithful ministry of the ELCM's Mexican pastors and leaders.
- For good ministry reports coming from various churches in Mexico.
- For the hard work and generosity of the teams that were here in August.

Prayer Requests

- For the continued recuperation of Pastors Bulmaro Velazquez and Brigido Villarreal from recent surgeries.
- For the three students starting in the Bible Institute in Saltillo September 6, 2004, the teachers as they prepare and teach them, and for Rogelio Balbantin and his helpers as they coordinate the program.
- For the Mexican pastors as they prepare their hearts and seek God's will in the selection of new leadership for the ELCM in the month of January.
- For the Ericksons as they attend the October short-term missions conference in Atlanta.
- For the Olsons as they continue to pursue healing and help for Gary's medical needs.
- For Elvira, Carmen, and Jesse as they serve the Lord in the Gospel Bookstore.
- For Pastor Ricardo Dominguez, our border assistant, and his leadership of Bethel Lutheran.
- For the funds and volunteer help in the new year to remodel the Norma and Claire Hobart home donated by their estate to the mission.
- For travel funds for Pastors Maria Elena and Antonio Tirado of Calvary Lutheran in Nuevo Laredo to attend a free theological training course in St. Louis, Missouri in January.
- For a time of refreshment and spiritual renewal from the presence of the Lord at the October 20-23, 2004 Confraternidad Pastors Conference in Rio Bravo.
- For wisdom and grace for the Ericksons as they lead the mission.
- For openings, creativity and boldness for the church of Mexico as they build relationships and share Jesus with their neighbors and friends.
- For renewed vision and growth for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico
- For the dozens of Stateside churches that are solidifying their plans to work with the church of Mexico in 2005.

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