

# **Baja California, Mexico Mission Trip**

## **Shenandoah Presbytery of Virginia**

### **July 17-23, 2016**

Shenandoah Presbytery congregations once again generously sponsored a one-week mission trip to Baja California, Mexico in July 2016. Highland Augusta Mission Community along with The Moffett Fund, Ramsey Fund, and 18 churches – 17 sent teams - gave generously to help make this mission trip a reality. Shenandoah church teams joined with congregations from other denominations and regions to carry out fundraisers and donated time, materials and funds to support all construction costs and team travel expenses in Mexico. This was the seventeenth consecutive year and fifteenth trip that Shenandoah Presbytery has made to Colonia Vicente Guerrero, approximately 200 miles south of San Diego, CA. The climate this year in Vicente Guerrero was comfortable in the mid-70s until the end of the week when temperatures rose into the upper 80s, even in San Diego where it is usually very comfortable.

Our team of 55 people comprised of members from Shenandoah and a few other congregations built four houses for needy Oaxacan Indian native families. Each house building team received a profile of the families two weeks before the trip, allowing congregations to know and pray about the families they would be supporting through their teams. Relationships are stressed as the most important part of the mission: with the Oaxacan families for whom we will build houses; with the missionaries at the local mission base hosted by Heart Ministries; and with other members of the team. Through this long-term mission program we have seen strong relationships develop between team members and families that received homes in past years, as visiting old friends in the colonias is a highlight for many returning team members. Team members have also built long-term and lasting friendships with many of the missionaries who live and work in Mexico.

Living in shacks often built of tarpaper, plastic sheeting, and flattened cardboard boxes, and nearly always with a dirt floor, the Oaxacans are exposed to the elements and bacteria in the soil, with no chance of keeping their homes or themselves clean by western standards. The houses we construct, though not like our houses here, are nonetheless very nice wooden structures built on a concrete slab. With the ability to customize each house according to family wants and needs with two, three, four or even five rooms, the houses provide the flexibility to have a kitchen and separate bedrooms, with an option for a family room.

Each house measures 20 x 22 feet. The cost of the base house this year was \$3,800. Paint, mattresses, used furniture, household items, groceries, an outhouse, a bathhouse, and lumber for building beds, water tanks, and shelves and kitchen counters for the families are additional expenses on each build site.

The build teams began work late Monday morning and finished up late Thursday evening. Build teams had 12 to 14 members and included an intergenerational mix of youth and adults. Because relationships are stressed as the most important part of the trip, a central focus of the work was to get to know the family members, interact with them and show the love of Jesus Christ.

Long-term relationships with a number of families for whom we have built houses have grown and developed over the years. On several evenings team members piled into vans to visit these families, renewing friendships and offering simple gifts. Hugs, meals, cups of coffee, stories, smiles, and some tears were shared. Some of the team members had made photo albums to take to the families, a treasured gift as most of these people have no photos of themselves and their families. Several congregations that have been participating in this mission for several years are visiting and supporting numerous families year after year. It was a wonderful week of renewing old friendships.

After the work day, the teams engaged in several outreach opportunities to share the love of Christ. They included trips to local churches, rehabilitation centers, and food distribution in the local community where we were building.

To date, 825 people have now participated in the Baja Mission trips which began at Augusta Stone Presbyterian Church in 2000. The project has grown to include members of 37 Shenandoah Presbytery congregations representing all six Mission Communities and several other ecumenical churches, and we have built 56 houses. We also have built two school houses; an addition to another house; rehabilitated a schoolhouse; re-roofed at least two other houses; helped with the construction of a church; and installed a water purification system. Several other miscellaneous projects have been completed at the mission base and in the colonias (communities) over the years. We now have built houses in fifteen different colonias. The Lord has blessed us with safe travels and changed the lives of many of our team members, as well as the Oaxacan indigenous people we serve.

All team members are responsible for personal travel costs within the U.S.: travel to and from San Diego, hotels, meals, ground transportation, airport parking, etc. Money raised through fund-raising, grants, and donations covers the cost of the houses; extra building materials, paint, etc.; mattresses, used furniture, household goods, clothing and groceries for the families; and the \$325 fee per person for lodging, meals and rental van travel in Mexico. Those who are not members or active participants of congregations in Shenandoah Presbytery have gone on the trip and pay their own travel/meals/lodging fee in Mexico of \$325/person. We are grateful to all those organizations, congregations and individuals who provided support.

Funds over and above what was necessary to support the trip were raised, and those funds were taken to Mexico and distributed. On our final night at the mission base, the full team met to discuss ways in which the remaining funds should be used, and after prayerfully considering all the needs brought to the attention of the Leadership Team, decisions were reached in a collaborative atmosphere. Those benefiting included: the mission day care center; the mission kitchen staff; the mission food pantry; the new community church serving a large number of people; gifts to support the missionaries; medical expenses for a local child in need, a women's support & care center, and contributions to two special funds. These special funds were established two years ago to support ongoing programs: Uniform Fund (helps children purchase uniforms so they can attend school); and the Emily Sterrett Memorial Fund to support larger facility needs at the mission base. Other "private" donations from several individual congregational teams went to assist other missionaries and several indigenous families.

Because the build teams over the years have been intergenerational and comprised of members from multiple congregations, the trip affords the opportunity for everyone to make new friends within our own Presbytery & community. Many team members have become active in other mission initiatives, and many have called this a life-changing experience. God truly is working his purpose out as strangers in our local community are called to come together in the name of our Lord and to go live and work and serve alongside those in another culture. Out of the love and caring of all who participate directly and those who provide generous donations, relationships have been forged, lives changed, shelters built, the love of Christ known.

Yes, you are making a difference!!

### **2016 Leadership Team**

Keith Folsom, Bethel,; Jessica Little and Rhonda Richie, Olivet; Lindsay Sensabaugh, Mt. Horeb; and Doug Sensabaugh, Massanutten.

## Team #2 - Baja 2016 Mission Report

The Trajabadores: Kyle Cromer, Susan Cromer, Tom Cromer, Rachel Gray, Michael Hawes, Pete Hawes\*, Rebecca Hawes, Reed Hopkins, Merrily Kohler, Renata Martin, B.C. Sommerfield, Danni Sommerfield, Robyn Sommerfield, Josh Thacker

[\*Group Leader]



Years ago, I asked a fellow Staunton Covenant Presbyterian parishioner, who had just returned from the Baja Mission Trip, what it was all about. The response I received was something like this: “A diverse group of individuals with varying life skills (willingly) travels into the Mexican desert with a set of building plans and materials – and in four days, you build a house. And the whole thing changes your life and the way you look at things forever.”

Four days? Laypersons? Build a house? That stands up after you’re finished? Nah. Couldn’t be. And if it could be, I certainly couldn’t be part of a group that stands firmly on the fruits of a successful trip. And even if that happened, there’s no way I would look at things differently for the rest of my life. But what if it did? So I packed up my ten year old son (B.C.), my eleven year old daughter (Danni), and joined eleven other fantastically diverse individuals on my build team who I barely knew on this supposed trip of a lifetime.



### **BUILD DAY ONE: GETTING TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR**

Driving to the build site on your first day is sort of like agreeing to go on a blind date with someone your friends set you up with. You want to like them – you have high hopes, but you’re not quite sure. Only this date was set up by your Christian brothers and sisters – and God has a plan for you . . . so even if it goes badly, are you really going to complain?

I was a rookie – and I was pretty nervous. Driving down the dirt road in the Angelina Galvan Colonia, we spotted a small crowd gathered around the neighborhood’s entrance. And as our van slowed down, the patriarch of the Lazaro Muñoz family bounded towards us with the kindest smile. After seeing that smile, I knew that we had been set up with the right family.

The entire day was spent getting to know our “neighbor.” After receiving the warm handshakes and welcoming glances from the family, the eight veterans began digging into the materials that had piled high around the jobsite; the six rookies circled around, sizing up where we fit in and how we could help. Slowly, we ascertained each other’s strengths and weaknesses and began to understand how each one of us fit into the

process. And in a few hours' time, a rhythm in the work developed. There were mistakes; bent nails; reminders to drink plenty of water and put on sun screen; chastising of those who did not drink or put on sun screen. But by the end of the day a feeling of accomplishment was achieved by everyone on the jobsite. And all of our gifts were coming together to form a competent team. Renata could speak Spanish and relay the wants and needs of the family during the build; Josh possessed valuable carpentry skills; Reed possessed storytelling skills to entertain the neighborhood children; and Pete was a calm and effective leader who guided us safely in our tasks. It was all starting to click.



### **BUILD DAY TWO: WE WHISTLE WHILE WE WORK**



When we arrived on the jobsite, each of us seemed filled with energy and purpose – we all had a specific task to complete and the energy to complete it. Everyone has a renewal of spirits and the neighborhood kids began to come out of their houses to make themselves known to us. Smiles were a bit broader, looks were less suspicious, and a slight feeling of familiarity was entering the site. The most fulfilling part of the day was when we completed construction of the walls and began to set them up on the concrete pad. Apolonia, the family matriarch, stood under the olive tree in the yard as the 14 of us worked together to lift and position the walls into place. And I distinctly remember the look on her face. It was reminiscent of a kid who sees Disneyworld for the first time. Awe, wonder, and happiness all rolled into one glorious aspect in her eyes as the walls of her house went up. She put her hands to her heart, and looked away to dry her eyes.

### **BUILD DAY THREE: LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, EVEN WHEN YOU'RE REALLY, REALLY TIRED**



Day three taught us that pacing ourselves was important – we had gone gangbusters the first two days, which meant that on day three we were dragging a bit. But we still evaluated what needed to get done and worked hard to build on (excuse the pun) what we had accomplished the two days prior. After doing a final alignment on the walls and setting the ceiling panels in place, we connected the walls to the concrete slab and placed the plywood on the ceiling. Windows and paint became the focus and we rallied at the end, knowing we only had one more day before we turned the house over to the family on dedication day.

### **BUILD DAY FOUR: SERIOUSLY, WE BUILT A HOUSE!!!!**

You arrive on the jobsite with the added pressure that this is the last day – and as NASA says, “failure is not an option.” You sincerely believe you have done SO MUCH the past three days, but as you look through the punch list of tasks to be completed, realization sets in that as much as you have done, you still have more than you feel comfortable with. The veterans turn to the rookies with that all knowing look of compassion, pat them on the back, and say things like, “we’ve always finished – it always works out – we’ve got this,” and then you see them turn to another veteran to say something like, “man, you really think we’ll get it done?” Still, with the dedication of the house on the horizon, everyone puts their safety glasses on, grabs their hammers, and does what remains to finish the house. And when the last nail goes in, the final brush stroke is applied, and you turn over the house to the family, the dedication is emotionally overwhelming – not a dry eye. You are giving a deserving family something they could never give to themselves, and in the process, you are getting the opportunity to do this for someone who you have never met before, which is (in my opinion) the greater gift. So in four days, a diverse group of 14 individuals with varying life skills (willingly) traveled into the Mexican desert with a set of building plans and materials – and in four days, we build a house. And the whole thing changes your life and the way you look at things forever. If you don’t believe me, you should go on the trip and see what happens.

## **Team #1 Baja Report- 2016**

After several months of meetings, planning and fund raising 55 people from Shenandoah presbytery came together in San Diego, California to begin our Baja Mission trip. On the morning of July 17 we piled out of our hotels and into 5 vans for our trip "south of the border". Asher Motola, a missionary with YWAM (Youth with a Mission) handled the logistics of our trip and lead the group. After a 5 hour drive, more or less, we arrived in Vincente Guerrero, BC, Mexico and had dinner at Ruben's then settled into our bunks at the "Heart Mission" campus. Tomorrow we become Gods hands and feet.

Monday morning started with devotions and instructions before our team of Mac, Deb, Cheryl, Joan, Jesse, Dr. Bill, Chris, Kaci, Bill, Penny, Elmer, Graham, Andy, and Kim loaded into our van and headed to the job site.

Our priority upon arrival was to meet and get to know the family whose house we would build. Our family consisted of Hector and Ruth and their daughter Gladys as well as their grandsons Joseph age 12 and Hugo age 6. After spending some time with the family we were anxious to get to work.



Thanks to Bill at Heart Mission the building pad was in place and the wood on site. We began with roof panels, which proved to be a challenge, but we prevailed and got the panels done and on to the walls. During the next 3 days everyone discovered their strengths and weaknesses. We shared laughter with each other and our family as we overcame obstacles like an outhouse with no hole and a second coat of paint on the house. The walls went up, the roof put on, doors and windows were installed, beds and kitchen counters were built. An outhouse, shower house and water barrel were set and by Thursday afternoon we had a completed house ready to give to God and our family.



Our week was not just spent building a house but building relationships with each other, our wonderful giving family, and the amazing community in which they lived. God's presence was with us all week but I think we all felt it strongly at the house dedication. This family was so giving during the week, providing us shade, food, labor, music and most of all love. Hector had served as a pastor for 40 years and when he left the pulpit at age 65 he and his family were left homeless. Through our hands and hearts God provided for this loyal servant. We were so blessed to be chosen to do his work.

Our week was not all spent with hammer, saw and paint brush. We attended a local church service, renewed friendships developed during previous trips, visited an orphanage as well as a women's shelter. We had an opportunity to swim in the ocean, shop for local wares and visit the ice cream shop. Our week together ended on the beach as the waves rolled in and the sun set over the ocean. We shared the bread and wine at The Lords table and knew he had been present all week keeping us safe and guiding us each day.

### Total Receipts Donated 2016

Total Receipts			<b>\$ 45,522.00</b>
Participants Fees: YWAM	\$ 325/person	55 participants	\$ 17,875.00
Construction Costs	\$ 3,800/house	4 houses	15,200.00
	Balance Available		<b>\$ 12,447.00</b>

### 2016 Final Accounting of End-of-Week Funds

Funds for House Furnishings		\$ 12,447.00
Additional Funds – End of week		+ 1,153.00
Total Available Funds Available		\$ 13,600.00
Money spent on Furnishings		- 7,800.00
Remaining Funds		\$ 5,800.00
<i>Donations – End of Trip</i>		
Bill Sopher		\$ 750.00
Asher Motola		750.00
Rich (build assistant)		350.00
Kitchen Staff		500.00
Day Care Center		350.00
Uniform Fund		500.00
New Beginings Women’s Ministry		800.00
Baby Ivan (build team family)		100.00
Dispensa Food Fund		600.00
Community Church Roof Fund		250.00
Randall Family		300.00
Isaac and Family		50.00
Sterrett Memorial Fund		500.00
<b>BALANCE REMAINING</b>		<b>\$ 00.00</b>

## Baja Mission Team 2016

### Team One

Mac Sterrett	Augusta Stone	Adult
Debra Dodge	Warrenton	Adult
Cheryl Byrd	Hermitage	Adult
Joan Bundy	Warrenton	Adult
Jesse Montgomery	Warrenton	Adult
Bill Burslem	Opequon	Adult
Chris Foster	Bridgewater	Adult
Kaci Foster	Bridgewater	Adult
Bill Hopeck	Opequon	Adult
Kim Lavinka	Richmond	Adult
Doralee Magyar	Warrenton	Adult
Elmer Magyar	Warrenton	Adult
Wilton Taylor	Opequon	Adult
Easley, Andy	Staunton Second	Adult

### TEAM TWO

Brandan Sommerfield	Covenant	Child
Danielle Sommerfield	Covenant	Child
Robyn Sommerfield	Covenant	Adult
Michael Hawes	Loch Willow	Adult
Paul "Pete" Hawes	Loch Willow	Adult
Rebecca Hawes	Loch Willow	Adult
Michael "Kyle" Cromer	Loch Willow	Adult
Susan Cromer	Loch Willow	Adult
Thomas Cromer	Loch Willow	Adult
Rachel Gray	Hermitage	Adult
Edward Reed Hopkins	Loch Willow	Adult
Merrily Kohler	Loch Willow	Adult
Josh Thacker	Hermitage	Adult
Renata Martin	Loch Willow	Adult

### TEAM THREE

Alice Elkins	Tabernacle	Adult
Becky Elkins	Tabernacle	Adult
Maxwell Elkins	Tabernacle	Adult
Samuel Elkins	Tabernacle	Adult
Steve Elkins	Tabernacle	Adult
Will Elkins	Tabernacle	Adult

Daniel Woodworth	Hope Comm	Adult
Doug Sensabaugh	Massanutten	Adult
Lindsay Sensabaugh	Mt. Horeb	Adult
Heather Sager	Ivanhoe	Adult
Sarah Leatherman	Moorefield	Adult
Laura Barmore	Bethel	Adult
Allyson Clawson	Tabernacle	Adult
Darlene Mason	Stn Second	Adult

## Team Four

Clay Bartley	Olivet	Child
Kahlan Campbell	Olivet	Child
Laura Floyd	Olivet	Adult
Riley Floyd	Olivet	Child
Nikki Griffin	Hebron	Adult
Gary Milstead	Olivet	Adult
Christel Nicklas	Olivet	Adult
Rhonda Richie	Olivet	Adult
Kimberly Smith	Olivet	Adult
Kenneth Olson	Bethel	Child
Robert Olson	Bethel	Adult
Keith Folsom	Bethel	Adult
Kymberlee Schneider	Bethel	Adult

**Baja Mission Trip  
Participating Congregations (Presbytery)  
2000 - 2016**

	<b>Church</b>	<b>Mission Community</b>
1	Augusta Stone PC	Highland Augusta
2	Berryville PC	Mountain Valley
3	Bethany PC	Highland Augusta
4	Bethel PC	Highland Augusta
5	Bridgewater PC	Central Valley
6	Covenant PC	Highland Augusta
7	Elkton PC	Central Valley
8	Falling Waters PC	Eastern Panhandle
9	Finley Memorial PC	Highland Augusta
10	Goshen PC	Maury River
11	Harrisonburg First PC	Central Valley
12	Hebron	Highland Augusta
13	Hermitage PC	Highland Augusta
14	Ivanhoe PC	Potomac Highlands
15	Lexington	Maury River
16	Loch Willow PC	Highland Augusta
17	Mary Baldwin College	Highland Augusta
18	Massanutten PC	Central Valley
19	Millboro PC	Maury River
20	Moorefield PC	Potomac Highlands
21	Mossy Creek PC	Central Valley
22	Mt. Horeb PC	Highland Augusta
23	New Providence PC	Maury River
24	Olivet PC	Highland Augusta
25	Opequon PC	Mountain Valley
26	Rocky Spring	Maury River
27	Smyrna PC	Highland Augusta
28	Staunton First PC	Highland Augusta
29	Staunton Second PC	Highland Augusta
30	Timber Ridge PC	Maury River
31	Trinity PC	Central Valley
32	Warrenton PC	Mountain Valley
33	Waynesboro First PC	Highland Augusta
34	Waynesboro Second PC	Highland Augusta
35	Westminster PC	Highland Augusta
36	Zetta PC	Highland Augusta
37	Presbyterian Campus Ministry	Central Valley

# **Baja Mission Trip Participating Congregations 2000 - 2016**

## **Central Valley Mission Community**

Bridgewater PC  
Elkton PC  
Harrisonburg First PC  
Mary Baldwin College  
Massanutten PC  
Mossy Creek PC  
Trinity PC  
Presbyterian Campus Ministry (JMU)

## **Highland Augusta Mission Community**

Augusta Stone PC  
Bethany PC  
Bethel PC  
Covenant PC  
Finley Memorial PC  
Hebron PC  
Hermitage PC  
Loch Willow PC  
Mt. Horeb PC  
Olivet PC  
Smyrna PC  
Staunton First PC  
Staunton Second PC  
Waynesboro First PC  
Waynesboro Second PC  
Westminster PC  
Zetta PC

## **Eastern Panhandle Mission Community**

Falling Waters PC

## **Maury River Mission Community**

Goshen PC  
Lexington PC  
Millboro PC  
New Providence PC  
Rocky Spring PC  
Timber Ridge PC

## **Mountain Valley Mission Community**

Berryville PC  
Opequon PC  
Warrenton PC

## **Potomac Highlands Mission Community**

Ivanhoe PC  
Moorefield PC

## **Other Participating Churches**

Hope Community Church - Waynesboro  
Lutheran Church – Augusta County  
Vienna PC  
First Pres – Charlottesville  
Tabernacle - Fishersville