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TO: All Shenandoah Presbyterian Churches

FROM: Baja Coordinating Team

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The New Year is here and we will soon be making new appointments, scheduling vacations, and setting goals for 2019. This letter comes just in time for that.

The congregations of Shenandoah Presbytery are again sponsoring a mission trip to Baja Mexico, on July 7 - 13, 2019. We will begin mission work with the Oaxacan Indian people living and working in the area of Colonia Vicente Guerrero on the Baja California peninsula of Mexico. We will be serving the Oaxacans in showing the love of Christ as we build houses and relationships during the week and participate in outreaches during the evenings.

This an ongoing mission program with continued participation, year after year, from "rookies" and "veterans" alike, confirming the value of this experience. Spaces are available for approximately 60 people in 2019. Priority is given to all members of congregations in Shenandoah Presbytery. Space is limited and deadlines are set so we can finalize preparations and begin fundraising

The most important aspect of this mission initiative is to build relationships. Relationships and friendships form not only with the people we serve in Mexico, but also among the congregations of the Presbytery. Each year the team consists of people from 10-15 different congregations; we have had as many as 18 congregations participate in a single trip, and over 807 people from 39 Shenandoah Presbytery Congregations have participated since 2000. Serving together in mission has led to increased understanding among members of different congregations; youth groups teaming up with other youth groups for events; and members visiting other congregations for worship and special events.

The Baja mission experience helps form new friendships and caring relationships with Oaxacan families. Our teams have been going to this same community for sixteen years, and several congregations now are helping to support families for whom we have built houses in the past. Returning team members view this as the highlight of their trip each year.

Many team members have also formed life-long friendships with several of the missionaries who serve the Oaxacan people, and we stay in contact with them throughout the year via phone, email and Facebook. Three have become such dear friends, that they have traveled here from California to visit and worship with us.

Many of those participating in this mission experience have been inspired to become involved in other mission initiatives. Some have joined the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps or similar organizations. One has said the experience inspired them to go to seminary. Every year we hear from parents who tell us of the life-altering changes they see in their teenagers who have benefited from the experience. To read National Geographic is one thing; to experience it first-hand is quite another.

Many have accepted Jesus Christ during our weeks with them. But beyond a doubt, it is we, the members of Shenandoah Presbytery, who receive more than we give. This trip often is the first time someone has been out of the United States, and for many it is their first experience in a less developed country. It is an empowering experience, giving them the confidence to participate in other mission initiatives and giving them a broader world view by learning about the life and worship of Mexico and the developing world.

The easiest way to evaluate the success of the week is to stand in the circle of house builders and indigenous family members on the final evening of our builds as we dedicate the week, the house and ourselves to the glory of God, and hand the family the keys to their new home. There seldom is a dry eye in the desert dust. There is no way to place a value on such an experience.

Some statistics: 807 people have made this trip since 2000. We have built 58 houses for people who lived in dirt-floor shacks made of tar paper and plastic. We 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. We have provided support to day care centers, churches, medical clinics, rehabilitation centers, work camps, missionaries, other families in need, and ministers. We have paid for the funeral of a nine year old girl who died from falling out of a bunk bed; her family could not afford to bury her. 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.

Participants are responsible for their own travel costs incurred in the U.S. to and from San Diego, CA. Churches are encouraged to sponsor their members. The fees and costs in Mexico are raised through grants, donations, and fundraising. This includes materials to build houses, furnishings (including bedding), purchases of housewares and groceries, shoes and clothing for children, school uniforms and school supplies, and participants' lodging, meals, and transportation in Mexico.

Please share this information with all members of your congregation. All are invited to join in this life changing experience. If you have anyone interested in making this trip, please direct them to the FAQ and the registration forms online at <http://shenpres.org/baja-mission/> or call one of us to discuss this great opportunity. We also welcome those interested in fundraising, making donations of money toward this trip, donations of time to prepare for this trip and of course prayers for the preparation, safe travels and testimony that we have the ability to share.

In Missions,  
Baja Leadership Team

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