



# MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

## DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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### *Desperate Times, Desperate Measures*



*The October 2018 caravan from Honduras arriving in Mexicali.*

Dear Mission Friends:

On most Sunday mornings, I drive the dusty road out to the Mexicali Valley to celebrate Mass at our chapel in Villa Zapata, and on most Sunday mornings, the drive is quiet and uneventful. One particular Sunday a few months ago, however, my vision of the road became increasingly impeded by a crowd walking toward me from a distance. There were hundreds and hundreds of people, and as we got closer to each other, I could gradually make out a variety of heights among them, then family units clinging together, toddlers in strollers, and babies tied to mothers' backs. Eventually I could differentiate faces, though they were all dusty and sun-dried.

I suddenly realized that this was the caravan of migrants who had walked from Honduras hoping to make it to the U.S. border—and I was soon to learn that this was just the first wave of about 7,000 in all.

They gathered in Mexicali's downtown area and volunteers from our parish gave out food and clothes to hundreds of them. After a few days of recharging, about 1,500 of the migrants continued on to Tijuana—mostly young men traveling alone because of the rocky mountains between the two cities. And so the thousands who stayed on in Mexicali were largely families with children, including those “on the way.” It was reported that nineteen pregnant women had travelled with the caravan.

Eventually most of the group who had stayed here in Mexicali dispersed, some finding work in the city's factories while others were resigned to head back toward home, searching for signs of a better one along the way. A few tried for the border-crossing in hope of applying for asylum, in spite of rumors of long lines lasting days and the poor odds of being accepted. One day I drove to the border-crossing to do my weekly errands and I had to maneuver around rolls and rolls of razor wire, ready to be attached to the top of the fence, as well as what appeared to be the whole U.S. army ready for battle.

Downtown one day, I stopped to talk with a young couple sitting on a patch of grass. They and their toddler daughter had been with the caravan but had been looking for work here rather than





risk being separated from their daughter at the border. That day they had fed her but not themselves, so I got some lunch for them and apologized that I had no answer for their quandary.

I have watched many a U.S. border patrol bus drop deportees off at the border and simply turn around to pick up another busload. Once off the bus, the people are pointed toward a chicken-wire tunnel leading to a government building. I don't know what takes place in the building, but when they come out, they are clearly lost and have no idea where to go or what to do next. Volunteers from our parish regularly go out in the streets looking for homeless migrants who, in all the confusion of deportation and separation, and in a city that is unknown to them, are clearly fearful and disoriented.

Our parishioners reach out to them with information and general help, hoping to ease their anxiety.

The most tragic component is the large numbers of parents who have been deported without their children. The "separated children," as they are called, crossed over into the U.S. with a parent, but without visas, and so were taken by officials of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Recently there were over 3,000 of these children in some form of custody. I remember all too vividly trying to comfort a sobbing mother who had been deported without her three small children, but she was inconsolable, repeating like a litany, "My babies, I will never see them again."

In recent years, though, the number of deportations *from the U.S. into Mexicali* has been even more problematic than the number of migrants attempting to *enter the U.S. from Mexicali*. A 2014 article which I saved from *The Washington Post* carried the headline, "Mexicali Has Become Mexico's City of the Deported as U.S. Dumps More People There," and five years later the situation has only escalated.





Earlier this year, the Mexican bishops met to form some joint policies, one of which is a commitment to “contribute to the common good...through their teaching, pastoral care and creating spaces for encounters, dialogue, and peace...We must not ignore the suffering of those who seek better living conditions and cross borders in search of work not only looking for the welfare of their families but also contributing to the common good.”

Besides our parish’s volunteers in the streets, the Church in Mexicali has long been fulfilling this new message from the bishops, above all by “creating spaces for encounters, dialogue, and peace.” At the border, just to the right of the government building, is the office of the Diocese of Mexicali, which provides deportees with an orientation to the city and offers them several options from which to choose for their immediate needs, allowing them to “regroup,” re-energize, and make thoughtful decisions about their next steps. At right are examples of three of those options.



The *Alberque del Desierto*, a shelter for women and their children, as well as for children who are unaccompanied, offering fresh meals, showers, and clean clothes. (Our next newsletter will focus on the *Alberque*, this quietly welcoming ministry for woman and children.)



*Casa Betania*, a similar temporary shelter for men. One of our parish’s ministries is to provide the meals here.



*Comedor Caritas*, a program at the San Jose Obrero Church near the drop-off point which, though not providing shelter, does offer hot meals, showers, and clean clothes—a fresh start for those anxious to begin seeking long-term shelter and employment on their own.



*Novice Master Fr. Anthony Rosevear brought the novices to visit the Mexicali mission and they were soon put to work. Left, one of our novices, and right, Fr. Bart de la Torre, one of our Mexicali missionaries, offering a hand and an ear to some appreciative men who had arrived with the caravan.*







Sometimes we must quell the noise of politics, party lines, and personal opinions and just listen to Jesus, whose simple law to *Love thy neighbor*, reminding us that “everything created by God is good” (1Timothy 4:4), will outlast all others.

In Christ's Peace,  
Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.

### Upcoming Mission Appeals

*If you are in the area, please come and say hello to our preacher and director, Fr. Martin Walsh, O.P.*

April 7: St. Boniface, San Francisco  
 July 21: St. Anthony of Padua, San Francisco  
 July 27-28: St. Anne, Las Vegas  
 Aug. 10-1: La Virgen de Guadalupe, Mesquite, NV  
 Sept. 28-29: St. Thomas More, Salt Lake City

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Phil. 2:3-5).

*The Province of the Holy Name of Jesus,  
 the Dominican Friars,  
 and the parish community of Santa Maria de Guadalupe  
 invite you to the Eucharistic celebration  
 in honor of*

*the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
 Ordination to the Priesthood of  
 Father Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.*

Friday, May 17, 2019  
 7:00 PM Santa Maria de Guadalupe Church, Mexicali

Mass will be celebrated by Bishop José Isidro Guerrero Macías,  
 Bishop of the Diocese of Mexicali  
 and concelebrated by Fr. Mark Padrez, O.P.

After Mass, you are invited to a reception in the church patio.

