



P.O. Box 105431
Jefferson City, MO 65101

www.meridafoundation.org



December 2023 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

Christmas Greetings from the employees and the board of the Merida Foundation!



Last month a group of us went to Merida to continue to deliver glasses and visit the schools. At a birthday dinner for Genny Castro, who was supported by Dorothy, Sam, and later Rudy in her dreams to become seamstress and fashion designer, Genny reminisced about the birthday cake that Dorothy and Sam had brought her for her eighth birthday. Genny has become a successful fashion designer and has helped her family to achieve their dreams through her business. Her younger brother, Sandro, is an employee of the foundation and is also a veterinarian. He was to have been named "Samdro" after Sam, but the "m" was inadvertently changed to an "n" on his birth certificate. After forty years the good work begun by Dorothy, Sam, and Rudy is continuing in the Yucatan.

One objective of every trip is to deliver glasses and fit them for the Mayan people in the rural villages around Merida. This trip included visits to Tetiz, Kinchil, Hunucma, Dzitya, and Escuela Hogar. About 420 glasses were fitted and 250 pairs of sunglasses were also distributed. At every village there were long lines and many thanks for the glasses. One lasting memory was the joy on the face of an elderly man who could suddenly see his family and his surroundings because of the glasses he was given. That same joy repeated itself over and over. At Escuela Hogar several of the young men were delighted that they would be able to see the board without sitting in the front row.



The group -- Larry Lewis, Greg Mihalevich, Pat Joyce, and Jaime Schulte -- traveled to each of the 12 schools that are currently in the nutrition program. At each school the principal, the

teachers, the mothers who volunteer and the students expressed their deep appreciation for the nutrition program.

Larry and Greg also went to another elementary school with 70 students that wanted to be added to the program. The school will need to add a kitchen before we can consider including them, but we will help them with that.

At each school the principal had requests for items that would improve the safety and function of the school. The board is considering all requests and will try to provide for their needs. These include place settings, pots and pans, a pressure cooker, blenders, and a ceiling fan for their kitchen. **Prices for these things in Mexico are much the same as in the U.S. and covering the cost of one would be a great addition to your Christmas gift list.**



At some of the schools the parents and the teachers were hoping to give a gift to each of the students for Christmas. The cost is just under \$3.00 per child and we have committed to funding the gifts for 120 students. **We could certainly use your help in fulfilling this Christmas promise.**

Two of the newest schools that were added were one-room schools like what we used to have in small rural communities. In Nochaka, the school has 10 students in grades one through six and five kindergarteners in an adjacent building. The principal told us that the nutrition program allowed the school to use their Mexican government grant money to improve the kitchen and the bathrooms. The mothers volunteer to cook the food for the children and pay each month to fill the propane tank that fuels their stove.

At Chucanam, there are 19 students in grades kindergarten through 2nd grade. Each parent contributes \$1.50 each month for repairs to the school, but it is not enough to take care of their needs. With the help and guidance of Seidy, our nutritionist, the children are now growing tomatoes to supplement the nutrition program and learn about growing their own food. The foundation hopes to encourage that in all our schools.



Three schools have been in our nutrition program for 20 years. One of these sites, Telchaquillo, has a student population of 57 students in grades 1-3. Beatrice, who volunteers at the school stated, "I want to thank the foundation for the food program. My son, Juan Miquel, and my two daughters have benefitted from the program, and I currently have several nieces and nephews who are at the school. My sister wants to thank you as well." She indicated that Juan was very tall.

When the food program was started, it was the goal of Dorothy and Rudy to help the children with a nutritious meal that would help them grow big and strong. **MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!**

The parents are holding a fundraiser to buy Christmas presents for the children. The foundation will help with any deficit.

There are so many other stories just like this at each of the schools. We have added four new schools in this school year with a total of 101 children added to the program. Costs in Merida have increased just as they have here. Your additional support is greatly appreciated. **If you could share this newsletter with your family and friends, our good work will continue and expand.** Almost all funds go to Merida to support our delivery of glasses, the nutrition program, the needs of our 12 schools, Emmanuel and Escuela Hogar.



One of our sites which provides food is Emmanuel which was started 22 years ago by Gabby with the help of the local Rotary club. They currently provide hot meals 3-4 times per week depending on their budget. Currently, they provide lunches for 62 children, some of their mothers and 9 seniors. The cost of each meal is \$1.75. Gabby has started a new program to assist the families that attend the program. A supplemental food package is given to families to extend their food resources. At a cost of \$17.00 per month a family of four will receive 2 pounds of fresh meat, tuna, spaghetti, macaroni, beans, rice, oatmeal, oil, milk, sugar, cookies and toilet paper. There are 35 families receiving this package. **Your gift could help expand this program.**

No trip would be complete without going to Escuela Hogar. As you might remember, they operate a boarding school for 33 boys coming from poor and troubled home situations in Merida and the outlying villages.

At every opportunity we try to bring new people with us on the mission. In February Deacon Enrique Castro and Jake Seifert, mission director for the Diocese of Jefferson City, went with us and were quite impressed by the work of Escuela Hogar. They returned in November as well. The mission office was able to make a sizeable donation to the school to help them install solar photovoltaic panels to reduce their monthly electric bill. (Dorothy and Rudy had donated money to furnish and install an electrical transformer over 20 years ago.)

With the savings from the solar panels, the school has plans to continue improving the physical plant and, most importantly, to increase enrollment. The first savings will be used to upgrade the wiring. Funds have been raised to improve the kitchen and the dining room as soon as the wiring is upgraded.

Jaime Garza, a volunteer administrator at Escuela Hogar, said that the food has improved, the education has improved, the boys have uniforms and shoes, English and French have been added to the curriculum, a new science lab has been developed



and the computer lab is fully operational. School director Father Victor, associate director Father Anthony, and Jaime, all report that the children are looking forward to the future. The education, for example, and support the boys receive will give them opportunities to accomplish things they never dreamed of for themselves and their families. Currently, five students attend public high school, four attend private school and students are enrolled at the university.

On the last day Jake had some rosaries remaining from the hundreds he brought to give out when we did glasses. Turns out there were 33 left, exactly enough for the 33 students at Escuela Hogar. Another sign that our work in Merida is watched over and blessed!

According to Fr. Victor, the students and staff of Escuela Hogar lift you up in prayer, grateful for your generosity that directly benefits them and so many other children. **We join them in that prayer, acknowledging that all these wonderful things we describe in this newsletter would be impossible without you.**

As we look forward to the coming of Emmanuel, of "God with us" we humbly ask you to continue to be with them, the poor and hungry we serve in Mexico. Through your generous financial assistance, we join hands with the teachers, the mothers, Gabby, Jaime, Father Victor, Father Anthony, Sandro, and Seidy to provide food, sight, and hope to some who need it the most.



Blessings and good wishes for you and your family in the Christmas season and throughout the New Year.

Patricia Joyce
For the Merida Foundation Board
Dorothy and Rudy Lemke, founders

