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February 2022 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

In mid-February Greg Mihalevich, Larry Lewis, and his friend Sue Higgins traveled to Merida. We took with us a list of items we wanted to accomplish during our stay. However, we think Dorothy and Rudy changed the direction we had originally planned when Larry asked Luis whether he had made contact with the Escuela Hogar orphanage. He said he had not but we could drive by to see if there was any activity. We did and there was activity.



A new priest, Fr. Victor Carabes, had been assigned to the parish just four months prior. Fr. Victor and the campus administrator, Mr. Jamie Garza, greeted us and were very surprised by our visit. We explained how Dorothy and Rudy had purchased an electrical transformer for the school twenty years ago and that the Merida Foundation had provided meat for the orphanage for many years. The former pastor, Fr. Guillermo, had died about the same time Covid struck and we had lost contact with the school. They invited us to come in and sit down to see how we could work together to improve the lives of the children in their care.

This was Sue's first trip to Merida and she shared her impression of our meeting:
"I will never forget the look of "Providencia" on the faces of Father Victor and Jamie when we stopped by the Escuela Hogar orphanage to find out if they had

reopened. Yes, they had reopened and had 34 boys living there on their way to accepting 100. I was overwhelmed at the intense gratitude of those two men for our decision to 'Just stop by'. They could not believe the "Gift from God" that had just dropped from Heaven on their doorstep.

Their eyes were wide, and you could tell their jaws were just hanging open behind the Covid masks they were still wearing. Their needs are so great! They are taking boys off the streets and boys from families that are too poor to provide them with food and schooling and to giving them a chance to become productive citizens of the Merida community. These boys in this orphanage are clean and I could see by the look of innocence in their eyes that they were grateful to be there because they finally had a home. Food, Love, and Discipline."



We were joined by the associate pastor, Fr. Antonio, and we learned of their efforts to reduce the operational costs of the campus by installing more energy efficient lighting in some areas and their desire to upgrade all the lights and to eventually install solar photovoltaic panels.

They had an existing program to provide their students with ten new computers and work stations. They had already received donations for eight of the ten computers. The local office supply store offered them a 50% discount on the tables and chairs so that the total cost of the two computers and ten tables and chairs required to fully meet their needs was \$2,600 USD. A couple of days later we were able to give them the \$2,600 USD in cash and they were grateful beyond words. The Merida Foundation is happy to have re-established our link with Escuela Hogar and look forward to working with them on future projects.

Seidy Gutierrez, our Merida-based nutrition consultant, was with us most of the week and while we were at Escuela Hogar she talked with the kitchen staff about their facilities and menus. The school is spending 10,000 pesos per month (about \$500 USD) for fruits and vegetables for the kids. Parish families are



donating all the milk, bottled water, and cookies. The foundation may be able to supplement the school's current menu.



We had hoped to buy a newer used car for Sandro so he could help Luis distribute food to the villages. Pickings were pretty slim. We did find one 2014 Honda CRV, similar to the one we got for Luis in June last year. Unfortunately used car prices in Mexico are at a premium now just as they are in the United States. The “best price” they offered us was \$3,000 USD more than what we paid for

Luis's car eight months ago. After much discussion we decided to delay buying a car until the market cools off. Luis still has possession of the old 2006 CRV. It needs some work, but it still runs. We are going to let Sandro use it for now until we find a suitable, reasonably priced replacement.

One day we drove to the village of Cacalchén to visit a kindergarten that Luis had contacted about being added to our nutrition program. School was in session and the principal gave us a tour. They have 80 kids 3 to 6 years old. Many of the children said “hello” to us when we entered their classroom. Cute little kids that were all smiles.

Their playground had the usual swings and slides, but it also had antique, four-animal merry-go-round. Through a combination of use and time the animals had come loose from their poles making it more like the mechanical bull ride you see at some Texas drinking establishments than a piece of safe playground equipment. We promised to buy them a refrigerator and to pay to fix the merry-go-round. We will start delivering food to them March 1.





We only took one suitcase full of glasses with us this time since we had planned to buy a car and didn't know how long that might take. We spent parts of three days at the small villages of Citilcum and Suma and gave out about 400 pairs of glasses. Sandro and Genny were with us all three days and Seidy on two of them. They each had their own "clients" and really kept the

line moving. The days would have been much longer if not for their unselfish help. Gracias.

Here are Sue's observations about the distribution of glasses:

"The people were incredibly grateful when we showed up unannounced and immediately long lines of villagers started to show up. The villagers see the quick achievement of getting their "near-exactly" correct glasses as a "bit of a miracle" from our volunteers (the villagers call them doctors) who show up unannounced. Their gratitude is amazing. They go from person to person in our group making sure each person is thanked."

We are excited about the addition of the Cacalchén kindergarten and Luis is working to add more schools to the nutrition program. We realize we couldn't be expanding our program without your help and deeply appreciate your support of the Merida Foundation.

Larry, Sue, and Greg
For the Merida Foundation Board

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