

UNT student missionaries show God's love to Mexican orphans

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Jillian Daniels from the University of North Texas plays with a group in children in Mexico.

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By **Jillian Daniels**

University of North Texas

A college girl approached two young boys fighting over a soccer ball in the Mexico orphanage she was visiting, asking why they weren't sharing.

"I don't want to share because he doesn't ever give me anything," one answered.

The other looked down at his hands. "That's because I don't have anything."



An orphan in Mexico embraces Chelsey Burleson from the University of North Texas—and captures her heart.

University of North Texas students from the Baptist Student Ministry used spring break as an opportunity to go on a mission trip to Reynosa, Mexico. The 27 students and adults worked alongside Borderland Calvary Chapel in

San Benito and the orphanage Refugio Internacional de los Ninos. The team led a series of Vacation Bible Schools and distributed rice and beans to impoverished neighborhoods.

Chris Newby said that such a trip was a welcome alternative to the standard college vacation hot spots. "I wanted to do something new with my spring break," Newby said.

This was the second time for the North Texas BSM to serve in this part of Reynosa with Pastor Eduardo Hernandez of Borderland Calvary Chapel.

"Last year, the trip was so fulfilling and memorable for students," BSM Director James Quesenberry said. "It was almost natural to go back and do the same thing this year."

Quesenberry said that the group hopes to continue serving in the same area in order to build relationships with the communities and churches over time.

"The idea behind it is, we want [our students] to be able to see what it's like to partner with other Christians and other churches," Quesenberry said. "Hopefully, [we will] be able to see growth and change in areas and build momentum trip after trip."

For some of the students, like NT sophomore Yandira Tenorio, it was their first encounter on the mission field. "Even though I had no experience, I just knew that He called me and said, 'You need to be my messenger,'" Tenorio said. "Sure I had fears and doubts of my abilities, but I had to remind myself that it's not me - God works in and through me."

Conversely, NT sophomore Brandon Falk, had been on previous mission trips and was left unimpressed - until this opportunity.



Brandon Falk from the University of North Texas enjoys a special moment with an orphan in Mexico.

"I wasn't planning on going on another mission trip but when I found out that we were passing out rice and beans and going to an orphanage, I decided to go," Falk said, "It was actually doing what Jesus said - showing people love - feeding the hungry and visiting orphans. God wants us to provide for His children and we're God's hands - the extension of God to this world."

Monday and Tuesday mornings and afternoons the group was at Refugio Internacional de los Ninos, where students led a VBS and sang songs in Spanish, in an effort to show the children Christ's love.

Six fluent Spanish-speaking students helped ease the language barrier, however many of the other NT students could speak limited to no Spanish. For this reason, the majority of the communication was outside of translators and communication was shown simply through loving the kids with play, hugs, and smiles.

"Many of them were too young to understand," Tenorio, one of the fluent

translators said. "So we had to show them Christ's love." And within those shared interactions, Tenorio was able to see more than simple smiles from a child, but the beauty of the Creator as well.

"In the orphanage, just being with those kids, God put a huge love in my heart for them," Tenorio said. "By seeing their smiles and their eyes sparkle so beautifully, I could just see Christ's love and God's beauty in them."

According to Falk, the unveiling of beauty has been a typical reaction to service in his experience. "Everything around you becomes more beautiful when you're doing God's will," he said. "You appreciate people more when you're ministering to them and the people you're ministering with are more beautiful. They shine, but in a very literal way."

Upon the group's arrival at the orphanage, BSM intern Stephanie Gates said she did notice some remnants of their trip last year through the call of recollected names and knowing gazes. "Those kids remembered us and that's huge," Gates said. "It's so important to invest in those kids and let them know that we come back because they are important to us."

A couple hours each day was reserved to pass out bags of rice and beans in different destitute neighborhoods. Each Spanish-speaker led a small group that went door to door with a slightly different goal than last year's distribution, said NT senior Liand Cotto - "more quality than quantity."

"Last year we tried to help more families by giving out more rice and beans," Cotto said. "This year the rice and beans were more of a gift to give the families after we had really talked and invested in their lives."

One such investment occurred when NT freshman Brittney Bell was able to share a life-story that related to a Hispanic woman dealing with a difficult situation. "I was able to take something that was so American and make it so Mexican," Bell said. "I was able to see how Christ is multicultural - He

knows no boundaries, no borders, language, love or location.”

Tenorio, as a translator, said she also had an opportunity to see God overcome language barriers when going door to door. “The first day was hard because I usually don’t speak Spanish every day,” Tenorio said. “But I noticed how God reassured me that it was going to be ok. Even though no people were saved right on the spot, I planted a seed and God was glorified through that.”

For encouragement, Tenorio said she held fast to Galatians 6:9. “I would repeat it to myself constantly,” she said. “‘Let us not become weary for at His proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.’ So I never felt like any day was a failure because I wasn’t giving up.”

Gates said a ministry such as passing out rice and beans gave the group an opportunity to be the “hands, feet and mouth” of the undersized neighboring church with which they were serving, Borderland Calvary Chapel in Reynosa.

“With such a small congregation, they were unable to meet the physical needs of the community,” Gates said. “So through us knocking on doors, saying hello, and passing out food we were able to open up opportunities for Pastor Ed to fulfill spiritual needs and strengthen his ministry in Reynosa. That’s a great picture of the body of Christ. Christ met physical needs, emotional needs, and spiritual needs.”

Wednesday and Thursday evenings the team held a VBS at Borderland Calvary for the local children in Reynosa. Through interaction with the children, Newby said he found a new means of communication that did not require any Spanish knowledge – and it came in the form of his newfound nickname ‘caballito’ (little horse).

“The last night of VBS I really wanted to focus on one kid – a little girl named Leslie,” Newby said. “And all she wanted to do was get on my

shoulders and ride around.” However, he said that through countless horse-back rides he was able to communicate something a bit more profound.

“Through translation I found out that Leslie really cared that I was there,” Newby said. “She really loved me and appreciated that I helping and focusing on her. I wanted her to realize how much Christ loved her.” After two days with Leslie, Newby said that he was just picking up and leaving without a second thought was not an option.

“At that point I realized that I can’t just stop there, talking to her just in Mexico,” he said, “but also keeping in constant communication through letters and pictures from the week. I want to show her how to pursue something more than what she has there in Mexico.” It’s this kind of personal ministry that Newby said he finds most effective.

“First you get to know them and then get a chance to talk to them about God,” he said. “He’s more like just a storybook character to them than a Savior at that age. But if they realize how much I love Christ, and what he’s done for me, hopefully in some way I’ve planted a seed and they realize how much Christ loves them.”

Instead of the construction of homes, the goal for this trip was instead, the construction of hearts that know the Father – a type of ministry that relies heavily on faith, Gates said. “On many mission trips, you go, build a house, and see the progress. When you’re done you see the finished project,” Gates said. “But this trip was not like that at all.”

While a trip such as this may not have the structure of a building, it has the benefits of dealing with God’s people and investing in lives in a different way than lumber and nails.

“Each conversation is a chance for God to move in someone’s life, but we never get to see the end result,” she said. “The gospel tells us to go out and preach the good news and then to trust that God is in control of that. At the

end of the day, without particularly seeing any progress, we are able to glorify God by being faithful to the call He has placed on our lives.”

Now as the group has returned to the University of North Texas, the real question is not only how their ministry this spring break changed the people they came into contact with, but also how it has changed the students themselves.

“I find that spending time with the kids and seeing the devastation with poverty has really changed my life,” Newby said. “Now I realize that as a poor, broke, college student I have it pretty good compared to people I’ve seen in Mexico this week.”

According to Tenorio, the root intention for this mission trip, and all of the life lessons learned there from, can be traced back to those first two boys fighting over the soccer ball at the orphanage.

“It broke my heart but I know that I was put there during that situation so that I could reassure that little boy that he has Christ’s love,” Tenorio said. “He may not have material possessions but he has the greatest gift. None of those material possessions put together could surpass Christ’s love.”

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