

Mexican family takes pride in new home CERI provided

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TUXTLA GUTIERREZ, Mexico—When a team from Children’s Emergency Relief International—the global arm of [Baptist Child & Family Services](#)—led a fact-finding mission to Mexico to assess humanitarian needs in Chiapas, one family captured their attention.



The CERI team stands alongside a grateful Salomon family.

They discovered the family on the outskirts of Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital of [Chiapas](#), one of the poorest states in Mexico. A 50-year-old widower—known to the CERI team only as “Señor Salomon”— and his two young daughters lived in a 10-foot by 10-foot makeshift shelter with dirt floors.

Old street signs and leftover scrap metal from local construction projects were laid overhead to block out the hot Mexican sun. But the mismatched materials left holes in the roof where even the mildest rain quickly turned the living space into a slough of mud.

Because the girls lacked birth certificates, they never had attended school.

They suffered routine bouts with lice and constantly were exposed to other health ills due to their home's unclean environment.

The CERI team found its mission—build the Salomon family a new home and find a way to document the girls in their home country so they might have access to education.

CERI Project Director Russ Massey had prior experience in construction and was able to reach out to former architect associates for help designing a new home for the Salomon family.



Norma is the youngest of Señor Salomon's two girls. Often noncommunicative and unemotional before the house was built, the young girl has blossomed since then, full of life and joy.

Planning was easy, Massey said. The team even built a "practice house" on the site of a Montgomery church to double-check the material list. It wasn't until the construction team returned to Chiapas the real challenges arose.

The volunteer team from Houston first set out to the Salomons' old,

dilapidated home and pick up the trash that was scattered over their small property.

After hours of clean-up, the space was finally cleared and a wooden floor was assembled on the property, which had a considerable slope. There was one catch moving forward, however. Most homes in Mexico are built with cinder blocks, but CERI's building plans called for wooden construction in order to get a house built in the time the team had.

The longest material available at the local merchants was 8 feet, but 12 foot and 16 foot material was needed to follow the design.

"We were able to find a lumber mill that actually cut the material we needed from rough stock. God always provides," Massey said.

The local lumber mill custom-cut support beams, and pre-made windows were able to be retrofitted for the home.

Once the walls were lifted to form four corners, the roof was constructed, with the rafters forming a natural ventilation system. Unable to find a pre-hung door, the team designed and built a custom door for the residence.

"This trip was on the extreme end of physically demanding," said Chuck Abernathy, a CERI volunteer. "But without a doubt, I would do it again in a heartbeat."

When the project was complete, Señor Salomon and his two young daughters, Adriana, 8, and, Norma, 5, stood in awe outside their new 12-foot by 20-foot house.



Volunteers lift into place the walls of a house.

The completion of the home was the climax of several firsts in the family's lives. Only a week before, the CERI Mexico staff was able to secure birth certificates for the girls. Mexico requires documentation to attend public school, a criteria that had excluded them from receiving an education. For the first time in their lives, Adriana and Norma had the opportunity to attend school.

After a moment, Massey gestured to the door, inviting the Salomon family inside for a closer look. As the girls and their father stepped up into the entryway, their mesmerized eyes swelled with tears.

Thanks to CERI supporters, the girls not only received their first mattresses to sleep on, but also were blessed with toothbrushes, combs, new clothes and toys.

"It's quite possible that these girls had never been given a gift before. So, when they saw all the presents in front of them, they didn't know quite how to react," Massey said. "What a humbling sight that was to experience.

"These two little girls finally had a home."

Not long after the Salomon family moved into their new home, the girls'

father approached the pastor of the local church.

“If this is what Jesus does through people who love him, I want to know who he is,” he said.

The pastor reported Salomon hadn't missed a church service since the CERI team left town.