

2011 Work Teams

Abby Gwaltney, U.S. Work Team Coordinator for Acción Ministries (Springfield, VA)

We had light work team traffic during 2011, but our dedicated volunteers were able to make big impacts for Acción. Just under 100 short term missionaries travelled to build homes and churches for needy communities in Mexico.

Many of you worked with Nico Alvaro as your Acción "staffer." I am pleased to report that

Nico will be joining the regular Acción staff year-round as an Assistant for Roger and Oscar. But don't worry, he'll still be helping with work teams!

We are excited about our six work teams signed up for 2012. Please contact me if you'd like to bring a work team to Mexico. (abby.gwaltney@gmail.com, 703-932-0812)

Team	Hometown	# People	Village	Project
First Lutheran Church	Fargo, ND	23	X-Pom, Yucatan	Building walls for a church
Our Savior's Lutheran Church	Devils Lake, ND	25	Mexil, Yucatan	Building homes for families
The Presbyterian Church	Fredericksburg, VA	9	Mexil, Yucatan	Building homes for families
Covenant Presbyterian Church (Youth)	Charlotte, NC	12	Mexil, Yucatan	Building homes for families
Covenant Presbyterian Church (Adults)	Charlotte, NC	12	Piste, Yucatan	Construction on the church sanctuary
Gettysburg Presbyterian Church	Gettysburg, PA	16	Chochola, Yucatan	Building homes for families



Donations to support Acción Ministries may be sent to...

Friends of Accion

c/o Covenant Presbyterian Church
1000 E Morehead St.
Charlotte, NC 28204

FriendsofAccion@carolina.rr.com

www.friendsofaccion.org

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1000 E Morehead St.
Charlotte, NC 28204

A Slice of the Action

December 2011
Issue 8



*People to people.
Person to person.
Relationships, not just a program.*

Merry Christmas from Mexico

Oscar R. Dorantes, Acción Director (Merida, Yucatan, Mexico)

Amigos,

May our Good Lord continue to bless you and your love ones. We would like to thank you for your prayers and support this past year.

In this economy the Lord has been good to us, we have been able to continue our programs, such as: The Mayan Children's Village (VIM) and CEM (shelter) our student program base in Merida. The Work Group program that we have in the summer is looking very promising, and we have already, some churches signed up for the Summer of 2012.

As a team we have seen the hand of the Lord working in our ministries. We have grown in our faith, as we continue to trust in Lord for our support. Sadly next year both our resident directors Isaac Ricardez (VIM) and Oveth Hernandez (CEM), will be leaving Acción. Our team will miss them, but they both feel, that God leading them to continue to do ministry in other areas.



Oscar R. Dorantes with his family (wife, Patricia, and children, Andre and Maya)

We know that you have seen a lot México in the US media, but we know that our God is good. Here in the Yucatán Peninsula we continue to enjoy peace. Our Mayan brothers and sisters continue to be peasants that live a simple, buy joyous life. Please keep our nation, in your prayers!

Our family is getting "older." Patty and I feel that our son Andre (9) and our daughter Maya (7) are no longer our babies. Andre continues to do Karate, he is a green belt and Maya is doing gymnastics. Patty continues to

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Arizona Trip (October 2011)

Did you know that Oscar and Roger visited Acción supporters in Arizona this fall?

It was Roger's first trip outside of Mexico, and so much fun they would love to visit more churches. Check out some pictures from their trip on the Friends of Accion Facebook page. Let us know if you'd to host Oscar and Roger for a visit in 2012!

(Quintana Roo, Yucatán and Campeche states).

Building our goals:

The first Shelter Director was Roger Avilés Estrella who is now one of the important parts of Acción Ministries in Mérida. Later, Moisés Velázquez Ovando developed the same position in 2003. In 2006, I became the third Director.

From then, the vision for the house was updated: (1) to let those guys from the poorest families in the suburbs or the less-developed towns to stay with us and complete a career and finally graduate; and (2) to achieve a personal relationship with God for each one of them so he could return to his town and mentor others.

Our graduated history:

Our list of completed students is too long to mention here. However a brief look to our graduates' list reads more than twenty nine students, fourteen of which now graduated all of these for the past 16 years. Their degrees are varied from engineering to theology, to business.

Our program is supposed to be a support for College or University students and seldom for high school degree or less. However, over the years we have widened our policies to accept people by being flexible.

It happened first in the year of 2000 when a 14-year-old student

named Oscar Abimael González came along with his respective parents asking for lodging so that he could to go to high school in the city. Two years later, Manuel Gómez Méndez did the same thing, and recently graduated with a degree in tourism.

CEM today:

A few years ago we started calling ourselves the "Student House" (Casa Estudiantil de Merida), which is abbreviated CEM and is now our new official name.

We are now 16 people living at CEM, me included. In the meantime, we keep advancing and working each day to keep this beautiful ministry ahead. Nowadays, our building has been under construction, to create on a better place to stay. Our kitchen is almost finished and we expect to count on a renewed living room in the next few weeks. The services that CEM offers are: safe rooms, electricity, food supplies, a Monday-Friday hot lunch, and a broadband internet connection.



CEM Students in June 2011, standing in the refurbished entryway

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insisting that this special rock was around here somewhere. Within 5 minutes he'd found it and sure enough it held a beautiful band of cream colored flint. He hoisted the 80lb boulder atop his head and trotted it

I went to serve and to give, yet found the roles reversed

back down to his home giggling the whole way.

We spent the afternoon smashing and bashing this boulder, breaking off pieces of usable flint laughing all the while as chips and sparks flew in all directions. A most memorable day, that I will never forget.

I came home with several usable pieces of flint that I am now crafting into arrowheads and knife blades that I give away as mementos of our trip.

Each time I hold a piece of flint in my hand, my heart warms and a gentle smile comes over me as I remember the humble, gentle, loving, and laughter filled Mayan

named Anistasio, who in one week's time bored a big hole of friendship into my often times judgmental heart.

It is most likely that I will never see Anistasio again in this life. As it typical of most mission trips, I went to serve and to give, yet found the roles reversed as I was instead ministered to, and taught about the basics of life and faith by a simple and humble Mayan named Anistasio.



Anistasio, after the shaving cream fight

Isn't it funny who God places in our life paths, to teach, to show, and to model true Faith? Take a look around, you might be missing out on an excellent teacher!

"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you. So that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders."

1 Thessalonians 3:11-12

CEM—A Look Back with Oveth

Oveth Hernandez Sánchez, Director of CEM, Acción Ministries (Merida, Yucatan, Mexico)

How a dream came true... the beginning:

At the eve of 1995 a building was opened on "Calle 66" in downtown Mérida as place for students to stay while completing a school degree. At that time, the house was called

the "Shelter" (El Refugio) and it had ten young men, in both elemental and high school studies. These students came from throughout Mexico's southern peninsula

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work for the public school system as a pre-school teacher.

For the last two years I have been working part-time in the village of Chochola, Yucatán as a pastor. Mama and Papa Dorantes are

doing fine, enjoying retirement and their grand children. My brother Alfredo and his wife have a baby on the way, so grandma and grandpa will have 6 grand children!

Thank you for helping us expand His Kingdom.

What the "Friends of Accion" Have Been Up To

Rich Neidinger, Friends of Accion President (Charlotte, NC)

Acción's programs for the youth of the Yucatan are maturing, a joy and challenge for our supporters. We are celebrating a new program name in Merida and a number of girls at VIM!

What was known as the Boy's Shelter and will now be called the Merida Student House, or CEM for the Spanish name "Casa Estudiantil Merida." There are now 15 students, including three newcomers, whose higher education is possible thanks to this facility.

The name change just reflects what developed in Spanish many years ago. The original Spanish term Refugio has the same connotation as the English translation Shelter, which can be more of a homeless facility. So, several years ago, they started calling it simply Casa Estudiantil. CEM may be destined for common usage, since VIM has become such a standard way to refer to Villa Infantil Maya which translates as Mayan Children's Village. I'd pronounce CEM with a hard C as in Casa, since that is the Spanish pronunciation. Let me know by email if you don't like such acro-

nyms or have other reactions or feedback (rineidinger@davidson.edu).

VIM is up to 31 students, including ten girls this fall, who attend high-school or earlier grades that would otherwise be inaccessible. This is double the number of girls from last year and is beginning to fulfill the dream of more opportunity for young women from the small rural villages.

Since VIM opened in 2006, most Mayan families preferred to send boys, possibly a cultural bias but also possibly because they were

What was known as the "Boys' Shelter" and will now be called the "Merida Student House"

hesitant to entrust the program with their daughters. Now, the original design of a

girls' dorm on the left and boys' dorm on the right is functional.

The students there are dedicated. They roughed it through the beginning of the year when the electric transformer was broken by

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a lightning strike, leaving VIM with only generator power for almost a month. Eventually our financial support and staff efforts were able to get power restored.

It is a financial challenge to keep up the monthly support to care for these youth. The facilities have waiting lists, but the enrollments are limited due to our finances, the level of staffing, and space in CEM and lack of an adequate dining hall at VIM.

Another part of a maturing program is that maintenance and repairs are a constant expense. Physical improvements and vehicles are always good capital projects for a devoted group.

Our first priority is to cover the monthly expense needs for the youth at VIM and CEM. Thank you for making this possible! We need your regular support to be able to continue this ministry. God is transforming the lives of these youth and we pray that we might carry on His work.



The Acción Staff with their families. Top row: Ana and Roger Aviles, Oscar and Patty Dorantes, Oveth, Kipo, and Nico. Bottom Row: Andre Dorantes, Eduardo Aviles, Cristina Aviles, and Maya Dorantes.

An Unexpected Mentor

Rollie Johnson, First Lutheran Church (Fargo, ND)

I sat in the tiny children's chair of the small one room concrete school in our village of X-pom, in the remote heart of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. The rumble of the generators motor outside provided light and electricity in this town that otherwise had none.

I was tuning my guitar in preparation for our evenings group gathering for singing and devotions when a local villager came and sat down in the chair next to me. My initial reaction was mostly negative. He'd completely invaded my space.

He appeared to be middle aged, deep dark skin, hair unkempt, shirt hanging out, with dirty old polyester pants. A pair of dusty plastic jelly sandals hung loosely over his feet. Within seconds I'd judged him as a drunk. What did he think he was doing? Who did he think he was coming in and sitting down in our little meeting space? My quick judgments were both harsh, and completely inaccurate.

As it turns out his name was Anistasio and he was to become my fast friend and most cherished memory of our short time in that remote village.

Anistasio had a wide and infectious smile that he flashed frequently throughout our days. He loved to join in the pick-up soccer games on the dirt and concrete field in the center of the village or the simple baseball

games that started up with nothing more than a stick, a tennis ball and bases etched in the dirt.

He helped on our work site, and came to our sing-alongs and devotional times. I hadn't even realized it but it turns out that he was one of the hosts, who were lodging 4 of our men on the other side of the hill in his family's one room block house. He and his wife and kids had moved out into their thatched roof/stick hut to allow our guys to stay in his house. At the end of the week when we had a giant shaving cream fight, Anistasio was in the heart of the battle and I can still picture his big grin and wide face covered completely in white as he laughed with sheer delight at the joy of our playing.

One afternoon I purchased a beautiful 5" long knife blade made of some type of white flint from a nearby rancher, most likely made by an ancient Mayan hundreds of years ago. Upon seeing my delight Anistasio commented that he had some of that same flint on a rock back in the woods. Off we went on a tour of his land.

Narrow dirt trails snaked through the thick vegetation as he showed off his bee hives, his gardens, his home and pointed out a special cave.

We popped out on top of a hill, where an old abandoned hut lay in ruins. Boulders were everywhere and Anistasio looked all around

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Upcoming Garden Mission Trip (March 2012)

Louise Ripple, Covenant Presbyterian Church (Charlotte, NC)



Louise Ripple

The Villa Infantil Maya is getting its very own garden this winter!

Rev. Oscar Dorantes, Sr., who was the designer of VIM, first envisioned a permanent garden there as one of his goals for VIM is to become more self-sustaining. A water

filtration system was donated and installed two years ago providing inexpensive drinking water for the facility. Now the hope is to teach gardening skills to the students as well as provide vegetables for their daily meals.

Along with building the garden, the work team, from Covenant Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC, will do an art project with the students and help with their homework after school.



Left: Henry Owen with some of his vermicomposting worms
Right: One of Henry's "friendship gardens" in North Carolina

Community Gardener and Covenant Presbyterian Church's community outreach coordinator, Henry Owen, along with a gardening team lead by Karen Harriss and Louise Ripple will be helping to fulfill Oscar Sr.'s dream of creating a garden at VIM. Henry is also the coordinator of Friendship

Gardens of Charlotte. He oversees fifteen local gardens which provide fresh produce for Friendship Trays, a non-profit organization which delivers nutritious meals to people throughout Charlotte who are unable to prepare meals for themselves.

With input from Mexican locals, the team will design the garden and provide all the tools, plants, and seeds necessary to get the garden started. The plethora of rock found at the sight will be used to create the borders for the raised beds. Good dirt will be trucked in and a watering system will be installed.

We will post pictures and an update of this exciting project on Friends of Accion's Facebook page so look for them this spring!

Learning a New Rhythm

Jim Toler, The Presbyterian Church (Fredericksburg, VA)

There's a rhythm to life in Mexil, a village approximately three hours southwest of Cancun. That thought occurred to me as I climbed into my hammock for a little afternoon siesta a couple days into the college mission trip. A breeze wafted through the open doors of the casa our team called home in this village on Mexico's Yucatan peninsula.

The soft voices of the family who shared their palm-thatched-roof homes with us mix with the sounds of the men working in the forge a short distant away. They bang away on red-hot metal to make tools—machetes, hammers and hatchets—the way Mayan men have for generations. In Mexil, the two blacksmith shops create quite a cacophony.

Air circulating through a swaying, mesh hammock cools the body after spending the early morning hours mixing cement by hand. Before the sun gets too intense, we carry countless buckets of the gray mud to seal the roofs and pour the floors of small cinderblock buildings that will serve a hurricane shelters for families of Mexil.



Mexil is known for its metal tool-making industry.



Fredericksburg team members monkey around during VBS.

Acción's Work Team program is hard, unskilled physical labor, but work that will save lives in this pueblito when the big storms come to this region about 100 miles from the Gulf of Mexico.

The immersion experience allows missionaries to share in the family life, faith and the culture of the Yucatan.

After lunch and maybe a little more rest, it's time to get ready for Bible school in the commasario, where our team eats meals and holds

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daily devotionals. Some children arrive while we're planning to tell the story of Jonah. We put them to work coloring the big fish that swallowed up the reluctant prophet.

In the evening, mothers bring their children to Bible school under the pavilion in the center of Mexil for songs, crafts and stories about heroes from the Bible. With some translation help from Nico Alavaro, a lay pastor and team leader with Acción, the mes-



Fredericksburg team members move blocks to build a roof.

sage gets through.

The children are anything but reluctant about recreation time after Bible school. We play Whiffle ball, Frisbee, soccer and jump rope with them until suppertime. They draw pictures for us and ask how to spell our names for notes they put on their artwork.

As night falls, we play some volleyball with men under the lights in the village center. It's competitive. The loser buys the 2.5-liter Coca Cola. Actually, everyone breaks out the coldest soda they have to enjoy together after the game.

The hammock in our casa beckons. We know that the roosters crow early and often in Mexil and we'll do all this again tomorrow.

More Reflections on Mexil from the Fredericksburg Team

This college mission trip was the best one I have been on and I am sad that this was my last. I love working hard outside and don't mind being grimy. It was gratifying to lug buckets of concrete weighing more than 40 pounds when I knew that each one got us closer to completing a shelter for a family. I also loved spending time with the children doing VBS. Even with relatively short supplies and songs in Spanish, we still pulled off it off, with pretty entertaining skits that inspired learning and laughter. I got to know so many people and as I realize that their lives will never be like ours, I desire to learn more about them and from them, and I hope they learned about us. I loved the experience and I would go back in a second. ~Kelly Baer

What struck me most about the college mission trip was not the work we did or the things we saw. Rather, it was the spirit of the people in the village. Going into the trip, I expected to be working with a group of impoverished people who struggle each day to get by. I expected to encounter jealousy or resentment of the comforts Americans enjoy. I anticipated working with people entirely dependent on groups like us to survive. This couldn't have been farther from the truth. The people in Mexil were certainly not rich. They didn't have much. But they thrived off of what they did have: family, community, and God. By the end of the week, I was not sure I had ever seen a group of people more content with their situation. I have no doubt that the people of Mexil will continue to thrive for years to come. ~Daniel Lockett

Oh, thank you Aunt Jane, the scarf is... lovely.

Abby Gwaltney, Friends of Accion Vice President (Springfield, VA)

I don't know about you, but I'm in the thick of my annual Christmas gift melt-down. I don't like shopping, and I'm not a big "gift" person. I know for a fact that my family hates shopping for me. I don't mean to be difficult, it's just that I'm picky, practical, and don't have a lot of storage space. For me, gifts are more about acknowledging special relationships rather than getting or giving the actual "stuff."

The heart of our gift-giving tradition is really the acknowledgement that these people are important to us. If you have some "difficult" people like me on your gift list this year, consider an alternative "gift" of a charitable donation in their honor. Gifts to charity acknowledge that you care about the person, but don't want to add another scarf to their closet.

Anyone who has been involved with Accion Ministries over the years would probably be thrilled with a gift in their name to support our work in Mexico. The box to the right has some gift "items" to give you an idea of Accion's operating costs.

If you don't want to go entirely "alternative" with your gift giving, a cute idea that I've used before is to couple a donation with a small gift along the same vein. For example, to the kids on your gift list, you could give a few books and include a note that you're supporting the education of children in Mexico as well. For adults, you could give a food and drink gift basket and mention that you

have also made a donation to support food and drinking water for students in Mexico.

If you would like to RECEIVE alternative gifts, —instead of whatever your friends and family come up with on their own—don't be shy! Let them know which organizations you'd like to support. If they're anti-shoppers like me, they will be relieved not to have to brave the mall in search of your gift.

Friends of Accion Gift Ideas

Your gift will support our students at the Mayan Children's Village (VIM) and the Merida Student House (CEM) to provide them with meals and housing in a supportive Christian environment as they attend school from these homes away from home.

- \$30** propane gas for a month of cooking meals at VIM or CEM
- \$7** purified water for a week at VIM or CEM
- \$15** tortillas for a week at CEM
- \$35** weekly room and board for one student at VIM or CEM
- \$125** monthly room and board for one student at VIM or CEM

To Make a "Gift" Donation...

Send your check to Friends of Accion (the address on the back of this newsletter) and send me an email (abby.gwaltney@gmail.com). I will mail or email you an acknowledgement that you can give to the gift recipient.