



# Comunidades Unidas Pro Salud

August 2008

This issue focuses on CUPS volunteers, letting them speak to you in their own words about their mission trip, and the work in Mexico.

A CUPS' mission volunteer can be anyone. Young. Old. Short. Tall. Can sink a nail with one blow. Can't find the hammer! Don't think you can contribute anything. Fluent in Spanish. Fluent in smiles and hugs. There is room for everyone on a mission trip.

This year a little more than half of our volunteers had been on at least one previous CUPS' Mission Trip. Five percent had participated in 10 or more trips. The youngest was 8 years old; and the oldest was 88.

There is room for everyone on a Mission trip!

Gracias to all.

*Louise, Laura, Fidencio, Julio, and Victor*



**IMAGINE THIS...**

A fun group of twelve people! Now, imagine this, a fun group of twelve Presbyterians! How about a fun group of twelve Presbyterians ranging in age from 16 – 75? Add to that, a fun group of twelve representing six Presbyterian churches, four presbyteries, and two synods. And you're saying, "No way?" Read on....

On the morning of Sunday, June 15, 2008 this fun intergenerational group of twelve Presbyterians set off on a mission – a mission trip, that is, a mission trip to Mexico. Our group of twelve gathered under the leadership of Spring Branch Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas and Brenham Presbyterian Church in Brenham, Texas.



Thanks to a generous grant awarded by the Synod of the Sun, this group spent five wonderful days together in Valle Hermoso and Matamoros, Mexico working with CUPS (Comunidades Unidas Pro Salud/Communities United For Health), an ecumenical ministry founded to improve the health and education environments in communities in northeastern Mexico. Our specific project involved the completion of a special education classroom in an overcrowded public elementary school in Matamoros. The school was so overcrowded that the buildings were used each day by two completely different schools. One elementary school utilized the buildings in the morning, and the other utilized the buildings in the afternoon. What a gift we had received – the opportunity to serve and be served.

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And I said, "Here am I; send me!" Isaiah 6:8*

Susie Machemehl, Brenham Presbyterian Church, Brenham, Texas

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## CUPS AND FAMILIES

I don't know exactly how I became aware of my magnificently privileged life. Perhaps it was on one of my first trips into inner city Philadelphia when I was 18 and encountered my first homeless person. Or maybe it was a few years later when I was working for the United Way of Delaware and began to see just how many people in this country are in need of basic services like medical care and food. But none of that compared to the disparity I encountered on my first trip to border ministries as a new pastor in Texas. I was moved by the grace, generosity, and simplicity of our Mexican hosts and a love for cross cultural dialogue and ministry began to grow.



David & daughter Ellie

When my husband and I had children we tried to share this sense of gratitude with them, but that can be a real challenge when we are surrounded by other kids who seem to have the newest computer games, and who tease other kids for having "Wal-Mart" sneakers. Nothing ever seems like enough. We longed to show them a simpler life and to introduce them to another culture in a safe environment. When we learned of our church's mission trip with CUPS it seemed perfect - and it was.

My main concern for the trip was how my 8 and 10 year old would handle new food. They are pretty average kids, and like their food familiar if not boring. I also wondered how they would handle the language barrier since none of us spoke any Spanish. All those concerns disappeared within hours of arriving in Mexico. CUPS had arranged a fabulous dinner, and the kids loved the meal and the fun of being on an adventure with other friends and families. We even liked sleeping together camp out style in the hotel.

The language barrier was no problem either - since every child speaks fluent soccer. We had a few balls with us and somehow the word got out in the neighborhood. Soon pick up games were happening right alongside the worksite. So you could hammer nails or shoot a goal - your choice. My son even had the unique opportunity after a few days of playing to be invited into one of the boy's homes. He marveled at how many folks fit into one house and wished we had chickens in our yard too. My daughter loved being included in the building and painting projects. It made her feel truly grown up. She also made friends with a young local girl, and out of some of the scrap wood and paint they fashioned a tiny dollhouse together.

There is no greater joy than watching your children's horizons and understanding of the world expand right before your eyes. Add to that the benefit of making a tangible difference in the world and one's soul fairly sings. I continue to be grateful to the folks at CUPS for providing such a safe and gentle introduction to another country, another culture, and giving us an opportunity to both learn and serve in the name of Christ.

Liz Forney, First Presbyterian Church, Clarksville, Clarksville, TN.

## WHAT DID WE ACCOMPLISH?

The physical results were a completed shade area at the clinic with benches so the patients will not wait in the sun for the doctor. Next, the library roof and ceiling were repaired and the entire building inside and outside was given a fresh coat of paint. Finally desks newly cleaned and brightly painted -with love- were delivered to a new school in the area.

Much could not be measured in a material way. The intangible results are measured in the words of some of the volunteer participants.

"I absolutely loved this mission trip. Not only was it loads of fun but it also gave me the opportunity to give back to the world. It also had an enormous impact on me. I always hear about the communities in our world that are in complete poverty and without running water and electricity but I've never actually seen it... What impacted me the most was playing with the children. Even though they had difficult lives they were still so lively, happy and they always wore smiles on their faces. My favorite memory was when Sean McCormick played with the children. Even though they spoke entirely different languages and could not understand a word the other was saying and had completely different backgrounds they were still able to play together".



"At the library one of the men told us that all the children love to come to the library and hearing that just made me want to do more. I wanted to keep working until the library looked spectacular... I really learned not to take things like running water or a toilet for granted anymore. The children were running around with a flat soccer ball and yet they were still happy. Overall my experience in Mexico was life changing and I am so glad I did it."



Recipients of desks

"The CUPS mission in Las Higuerrillas was an amazing experience for us as individuals, as a family, and as members of our community. Our time there made us reflect on our lives and how blessed we are to be who we are. It feels good when you have extended your hand to someone and when you have developed new friendships."

Tom Egolf, St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Church, Houston, Texas

## WHAT DID YOU THINK...?

CUPS Volunteers completed a survey this year, giving us feedback on their mission experience. The responses uplifted us and gave us ideas on how to be even better next year.

We thank everyone for sharing their experiences; now we share their thoughts with you as well.

### What is your favorite memory of this trip?

- Seeing how much was done with our small group.
- Watch new participants' enthusiasm.
- The sense of family that developed within our group.
- Seeing our kids and adults work together.
- I was sweeping the entrance to the Health center and a man shook his sandals to clean them before entering.



### How did you change spiritually?

- We take too much for granted north of the river; our troubles arise from our abundance not from our want.
- I am continually amazed at God at work in His Kingdom.
- It has made me want to make a difference versus having to make a difference which really means a lot to me.
- Knowing that I was being God's hands and feet, helped me feel more connected to God.
- Made me want to make Missions a habit.

### What would you tell someone about your experience?

- This is one of the most meaningful experiences you can share with your children and family.
- That I would be coming back and that they should come next year.
- If you want to feel that you are doing what God intended you to be doing and to feel that your presence on earth is worthwhile you should volunteer a week with CUPS'.
- After about three days, Mexico does not seem strange or foreign at all. The people are wonderful and the inconveniences we might consider hardships: bad plumbing, shaky electricity, no potable water—become commonplace after realizing that for most of the country, they're round the clock circumstances.
- Amazing. The CUPS trip was a blessing. It rejuvenated me from within.



### What did you learn?

- That I really didn't mind being extremely dirty & sweaty all day! It was all worth it.
- That simplicity is holy – that we can be happy with so much less. Leadership can be by example.
- I was reminded that God's presence is more easily experienced away from all the excesses of our daily lives.
- That you can have just as wonderful time doing a mission trip as going on vacation – actually more wonderful.
- Not all Mexicans are good at soccer, but most are.

## Donations

Volunteers construct but they also leave other signs of God's love in this part of border Mexico. Books are given to school children, schools, and libraries. Health and medical equipment and supplies are identified, transported and given where there is need. Used computers make a big difference in schools in Mexico where there are no or not enough computers. Children in need of school supplies benefit from the pencils, spiral notebooks and other donated materials required for school. All told, we estimate a little over \$4,000 worth of goods and supplies were donated so far this year.

You can help with donations to Mexican communities too. Contact our office.



Yes! I want to help CUPS in its' important mission: Working together with communities on the Mexican border to meet their needs and share God's love.

Please check all that apply:

- Here is my pledge to the CUPS 300 Club for 2008:  
 \$25 per month -OR-  \$300 per YEAR and my check is enclosed.
- At this time I am unable to pledge, but enclosed is my donation of:  
 \$500.00  \$250.00  \$100.00  \$\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Church or Volunteer Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail your donations, along with this form, to PO Box 6933, Kingwood, TX 77325 OR donate online at [www.cupsmission.org](http://www.cupsmission.org).

CUPS is a 501 (c) (3) organization. All donations are tax deductible.

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