

**AN EASTER ADVENTURE:
MISSIONARY
FOR YOUNG MEXICANS
(District of North Mexico)**

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Perhaps our readers would be interested in an account of a missionary venture undertaken by some young Mexicans. We shall first give an idea of how the venture began. We shall next explain how it is continuing, with its preparation, the people helped and those in charge. The final point will be to show what has been so far accomplished.

It was in Holy Week 1982 that our missionary venture to the Sierra de Durango was started by the Brothers' North Mexico District or Province. Like many other such ideas, it was first put into operation in a modest way, but by now it has reached quite sizeable proportions, and takes place in various places during Easter time.

Even at the beginning of the operation, those interested were quite numerous, consisting of a group of a hundred boys and girls studying the possibility for them of a religious vocation; then there were a dozen Brothers connected with the affair and who were in charge of four different confraternities, the name we give to our mission camps; finally the Brother who looks after vocations in the district, was in general charge of the venture.

The first goal when it started was for boys and girls with a religious vocation in mind to have some experience in missionary work undertaken together as a group in order to spread the faith. The results, to everyone's satisfaction, turned out better than we had expected, some youngsters joining the Brothers' novitiate, others, Sisters' orders. We were however especially pleased to see the missionary work go ahead, and this soon encouraged other Brothers, parents, teachers and older students of the De La Salle Brothers' schools to take part the following years.

We soon had to give a clear definition of our objectives, so on reflection, we realised that Missionaries, no matter where they actually live, have to keep in mind that they are in Our Lord's church in this present

world: that's where their vocation is: feet on the ground here and now with the goal of building up God's Kingdom. We had to do this under the banner of brotherhood, because in John's Gospel Our Lord says: "that this (brotherhood: loving one another) is how they will know you are my disciples". (Jn 13.35) Of course we recognised that we must try to receive vitality for this work by being united as far as possible with Christ, because we are expected to be his ambassadors, and we hoped that it would be his Spirit that would keep us going in our efforts to spread knowledge of his life, passion and death by the way we lived and helped others to live.

So how did we prepare for all this, and how do we prepare for it now? Let us first mention the preparation of the missionary him/herself. As preparation we have to learn some theory, and of course the best way of doing that is to have an interview or two with those who have already done some missionary work. After that we compare notes with one another. The next item is to find out what the people and places really need, otherwise the mission would be an vague abstraction. We are also informed of the kind of competition we are likely to meet, and that needs some special training, for which perhaps Jehovah's Witnesses can teach us a thing or two. We finally fix the dates for our missionary venture, then look into costs and how to economise.

The next part of the preparation is spiritual. Some retreats with mission as theme, take place with their usual prayer and reflection time and reception of the sacraments.

As for when we get on the "mission field", we have liturgies prepared in advance, and we try to arrange for a priest to be with us at some time between the beginning and end of Holy Week, for as we mentioned above, these ventures take place at Easter Time. If a priest is not available, we plan for simple ceremonies which the people will readily understand. As for ourselves, we have to think of prayers for each day, as well as Mass, or failing that, a prayer session of our own invention. Preparation for the sacraments of the people we are trying to help, consists in seeing the parents and godparents: this is the case when it comes to baptism; we have also to think of first communions, penance, and Easter liturgy. For the last three days of Holy Week, we plan to keep the way of the cross in mind, and on Holy Thursday and Good Friday we try to arrange adoration of Blessed Sacrament for both the team and the local people. Easter Sunday itself is the grand finale of the apostolic period. Turning again to ourselves, we have a vocations day for the confraternity, explaining various careers, with special emphasis on religious life and the priesthood.

Now who form the team, and who are those in charge? First let us state that each centre has a male guide who is either a Brother or teacher, and a female guide, teacher or one of the mothers, who look after

a group of 15 to 20, with equal numbers of boys and girls. It is these guides who are finally responsible for the mission, but they try to stay in the background. The general coordinator of the mission can be either a boy or girl elected by the group and meant to stir up enthusiasm and see to the final assessment of our efforts.

Then there are managers for matters like cooking, community prayer, health, sleeping quarters. Next come those in charge of pastoral affairs and of getting things moving. Others see to catechism, which is an important aspect of the programme. The latter covers instruction for the young as well as for older persons, even adults; one could divide the religion lesson groups into those preparing for baptism, then first communion sessions and finally the older groups intent on keeping up the faith. In the matter of pastoral affairs, a big issue is seeing to the liturgy for the team and the people. The priest's visit has to be settled, Holy Week Ceremonies, confession, Way of the Cross, and teaching aids for Religion lessons decided on. Ensuring success also includes preparing methodology as well as aids for the different religion groups, and the provision of better church and school material. Each confraternity divides into work groups, who begin the day with morning prayers and end it with evening prayers, the latter, which incorporates a review of the day, takes place about eleven o'clock at night.

Where does all this missionary work take place? We have so far been working in three areas. The first is Sierra de Durango, which is pretty difficult to reach because of the terrain and poor roads. It's in the Prefecture of Salto, and there we visit 46 hamlets, some of which you can get to only by mule. The next is the Sierra de Chihuahua, in the Prefecture of Madera, which is not quite so hard to reach, but which has a different kind of population, either Taramara Indians or mestizos, whose traditions are steeped in the Colonial past.

The final regions are the desert areas in the Coahuila, Tamaulipas and Lower Californian states, where the people are extremely poor and who seemed spiritually abandoned until we started doing our bit.

The three last mentioned regions have some similarities. The first is that they have no one to see to their spiritual needs, since there are hardly any priests or parishes around. The next item is that they are being approached by various Protestant sects and by Jehovah's witnesses, who want them to change their religion. They are in fact very religious, but don't have any religious knowledge worth talking about. They are very simple folk, living off their work in the woods or

from carpentry, or from making lace. There is hardly any water, no electricity, their possessions are almost nil and their culture not particularly noticeable.

What has come of our efforts? For the missionaries themselves we can point out that their faith and experience of the spiritual matters is renewed. Just look at some of the remarks by those taking part: "The whole time of the mission I thought God was with me"; "I went to help others to God, and it turned out that they helped me instead"; "Thank you Lord, for allowing me to work here and showing me your presence in the kindness of the people"

For the group composing the educational team, there was a renewal of their faith, and this applied to students, teachers and parents, whose acceptability of the Gospel acquired a new lease of life, as did their prayer and sharing the faith and living by it, as well as telling people about it. Prayer groups were formed and groups for study of the Bible, religion teaching and social work, especially by the older students. The parents have been so enthusiastic about the whole business that they have joined in it themselves, and have now decided to set up medical groups, each with two doctors and a dentist, and which visit and help in developing the areas. Naturally the participants' social consciousness is aroused, and their Christian and Lasallian spirit is increased as they join in events connected with their faith and service in such a fraternal manner.

The La Salle district of North Mexico has profited too, because the Brothers have noticed both among themselves and among their students, an increase in active faith, shown in the pastoral work which is done for others. A desire to spread the Gospel and to be affected by it themselves is also noticeable. A missionary sense has increased among the Brothers, 50% of whom are taking part in this venture. Finally, but not least, new "vocations" are appearing for the Institute, and this seems to be the result of the pastoral work done together.

To sum up, we can't but insist that these ten years of missionary adventure have caused everyone who has taken part to become determined about their faith and about their being members of the church, and that the Lasallian philosophy seems to be urging them to good work, which in turn is making Our Lord, so to speak, visible all around.

Finally, if you want further information on the above topic, you have only to contact Brother Lorenzo Gonzalez, who lives at "Apdo. 4581 Suc.J., in Monterrey N.L., Mexico. May be you would like to join in!