

From June 19-25, eight high school seniors from Sts. Peter and Paul Greek Orthodox Church in Glenview, IL, with the blessings of their Spiritual Father Rev. Fr. James Dokos, embarked on a spiritual journey to build a home in the outskirts of Tijuana, Mexico. The Group was led by Ms. Christy Gouletas.

We set up our tents for the week at St. Innocent Orphanage, where we attended daily prayer services, showered with a bucket and befriended the orphans. Our church, along with 40 other participants, built two houses as part of the St. Innocent Orphanage's Orthodox Basic Training mission trip program.

The minute our caravan crossed the border into Mexico, the car was silent. Everyone was taking in the dirt roads, broken houses and extreme poverty. At that point we knew our week would be eye opening.

On the first and most rigid workday we arrived at the site to meet the family. Their living conditions were beyond what we could have even imagined, with a family of seven living in a one-room trailer. The house we built for them was a timely blessing, as the family was about to be evicted from their trailer.

Throughout the workweek, we leveled grounds, mixed cement, poured a sturdy foundation, framed walls, protected the frame with chicken wire and stucco, and constructed a waterproof roof, all this without the use of power tools. This strenuous work helped us appreciate the strength God gives to each and everyone of us. We were also blessed to have the mother of the household help us build everyday, every step of the house. This not only gave her the satisfaction knowing she help build her house, but also taught us how thankful she was of our hard work.

But complaining about the eight-hour workday felt selfish. The physical hardships we encountered were minute in comparison to the everyday struggles the people of a third world country faced. The physical hardships we endured were well worth it, both for the fruits it produced for the family and within ourselves as we reached out to help them.

This humbling experience was life changing because we forever changed the lives of people in need. We provided this family a roof over their head and a cement floor. These two features will protect them from the harsh elements that come in the form of rain in the spring. More importantly, we traveled more than a thousand miles in order to provide this family with the hope that only the light of Christ can provide.

When our work was complete, the St. Innocent orphans and missionaries gathered one final time to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the native Spanish. This was an awe-inspiring experience as we worshiped together with the Orphans of St. Innocent ranch and other members of their local community, including families that had been previously supported by Project Mexico. Though it was the same, familiar liturgy, in this new context we could feel Christ's presence in a new and refreshing way as we prayed together: Americans and Mexicans, rich and poor, but all one in Christ.

As Greek Orthodox Christians we are grateful to our home parish and community for once again supporting this ministry. Our Parish has been sending mission groups to Project Mexico since 1992, this a true blessing that has only been

made possible by the love and support of our parish and the most especially our Lord that guides us to help those in need.