

Methodist Border Friendship Commission **- 2003-04 Report -**

The South Texas and Northern Mexico Border is an exciting place to be in mission! Weekly, on either side of the border, we see United Methodist Volunteer in Mission (UMVIM) groups from across the country come to serve in some type of ministry, whether it be building wheelchair ramps, renovating home, assisting in the building of new home, holding mini-medical clinics, doing Mission Bible Schools, distributing bibles, working on churches or parsonages, teaching sewing and other skills, tutoring, conducting ESL classes, feeding those who are hungry, gleaning, collecting items for distribution to those in need, praying and serving in so many other ways. Requests for assistance come from many places such as various community and social service agencies asking for assistance with some of their programs and clients and the United Methodist/Methodist Church and its ministries on both sides of the border.

Through your physical and monetary support and prayers the Methodist Border Friendship Commission (MBFC) is able to offer assistance to many of the ministries and programs on either side of the border. In many instances the Commission is able to link volunteers and funding to identified needs and on a priority basis. Funds arrive through the Advance Special Program of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) *and through your direct monetary and physical contributions.* A few of the ministries that have received assistance through funding from the Commission are:

- (1) **Breakfast and Lunch Programs** in several of the churches in Mexico are for children in communities surrounding those churches. This year, three new programs have been developed and are being supported. They are in a church in Rio Bravo, Ciudad Valles and Tampico. Funding permitted, other programs are being planned for this coming School Year.
- (2) Both last year and this year the Commission has been able to give over \$5,000 toward **scholarships** for pastor's children. These scholarships were granted to pastor's children whose families meet the criteria of being at an extremely low income level.
- (3) \$6000 was given for **food/feeding ministries** in each of the four Districts, \$1500 went to each District for Food Pantries and food bag distribution.
- (4) \$1800 was granted to 3 locations in Mexico to provide **baby chicks** to families. The church community was able to build the coups for the chickens and purchase chickens for several families in the community. This was a pilot program and will be evaluated for effectiveness to determine the feasibility of continuing the venture.
- (5) \$2000 was approved for the purchase of **Religious Materials and Spanish Bibles** for use on either side of the border. \$3700 was also donated by an individual for purchase of Bibles in Mexico.
- (6) \$4000 was given for assistance with **School Pack/Backpack Program**. Additionally, several hundred backpacks have been assembled from different locations over the US and brought or shipped to us. These were distributed to UM/Methodist supported ministries on both sides of the border at the beginning of the school. We have already heard from many others who are preparing to bring backpacks this year. We will need more, so if your church would like to help

with this ministry, please let me know. Funds have been provided again this year to help purchase school supplies.

(7) \$2400 was given in support of the ***development and continuation of the social programs*** of the Methodist Church of the San Pablo District of the Methodist Church of Mexico. These are ministries such as sewing programs, English classes, tutoring classes, day-care centers, computer classes, etc.

(8) Funds have been granted to the Eastern Conference of Mexico to assist in the ***continuing education and leadership development for pastors***. The funds granted are used to assist pastors who might otherwise not be able to attend.

(9) Last January, \$5,000 was given to the Eastern Conference of the Methodist Church of Mexico to purchase ***blankets for those in need***, instead of obtaining them from CWS and trying import them into Mexico.

(10) ***Clinica Betania, Eleazar Kindergarten and Betania Elementary School*** is one of the ministries of the Methodist Church of Mexico. It is supported through GBGM Advance giving and by the MBFC. The school has added two new classrooms and will add second and third grade this coming school year. It is the vision of this school to continue to grow to have grades K-6th. This effort, as well as the completion of the Surgery Room of Clinica Betania have been assisted with funds from the MBFC. Further teams and monetary support are needed for the classrooms and clinic. Please see the article on Page 7.

(11) ***Sewing projects*** have been assisted and started in numerous places. Funds have been given to some locations to purchase machines and get their program started. Others have been supplied with new machines. These programs are located in churches on both sides of the border. Fabric and sewing notions are always needed.

(12) ***Computers*** are being refurbished and donated to Mexico by different churches and people. These are given to pastors, for internet communication, as well as to churches for computer classes and tutoring.

(13) Visiting teams come from all over the United States to share the love of Christ. There have been over 160 teams have come to the area. In northern Mexico, ***medical teams*** come to do screenings and take care of people. Some are dental and eye care teams. Some of these teams do not have a building to work out of they work under tents, shielding themselves from the sun. There have been over 45 medical teams working with the Methodist Church of Mexico since the beginning of this year. An average of 100 people are seen in one clinic day at the many different locations. There has been approximately \$80,000 worth of medications given since January of this year. We have equally as many, if not more, ***construction teams*** who bring at least \$100/team member for project supplies alone not to mention the gift of time and love they bring. We have VBS teams that visit and teams that volunteer elsewhere. To put an actual \$ amount on what is brought to this area by UMVIM teams would be difficult. So far, there have been more than 24 teams working on the US side *alone* between June and August.

(14) The ***"Border Awareness" Tours*** have been developed for individual churches, mission teams and different conference leaders. These tours, are gaining popularity and have generated support for the many ministries and UMVIM teams that come to the area.

(15) A **20 minute video** was made by the Women's Division of the GBGM, addressing border issues for the United Methodist Women School of Mission Study last summer on Mexico. The video addresses many issues that affect our entire border area and what the UM/Methodist Church is doing to address these issues. This video, "Crossing Borders" is an excellent educational and awareness resource and is available through the GBGM Service Center: Stock #03290.

(16) The MBFC sponsored a **joint UMVIM team** to the *Sierra Madre Mountains in San Luis Potosi, to partner in the ministry of the Methodist Church of Mexico and its missionaries in their work with the in-digenous people called the N'jie Xi'iuy*. There are several things that were particularly exciting about this mission; (a) the team consisted of individuals from the Methodist Church of Mexico and from the McAllen District of the SWTX Conference of the UMC; (b) the team went in partner with and support the three missionaries that have been sent by the Methodist Church of Mexico, (c) the MBFC contributed \$4,000 to drill two water wells in two of the 22 communities where the Xi'iuy live, (d) the McAllen District sponsored the team's work on the construction of the community center near the villages, and (e) the Wycliffe Bible Institute is working on translating the Bible into the native dialect of the Xi'iuy. The book of Mark is the first book to be nearing completion. What an awesome experience it was to join in God's mission there!

(17) During the months of January, February and March we saw 23 teams of **NOMADS** in the area. Estimated figures for labor alone of these volunteers would equal approximately \$135,000 (conservative figures). They brought with them not only their expertise, but in many cases they brought project funds, as well. Projects have been scheduled for the beginning of the year 2005. The NOMADS will be a blessing once again!

(18) Once again, the MBFC served as the central coordination of the ecumenical effort of requesting and disbursing of over 9,500 blankets, 3,000 sewing kits, 750 layettes, 150 health kits that were distributed by over 350 ecumenical food pantries and ministries in South Texas and Northern Mexico. These are sent to us from **Church World Service (CWS) Tools of Hope**. Also, two photographs of recipients of those blankets and "tools of hope," from the border area, were chosen to be in the 2004 CWS calendar.

Again thank you for your support, gifts of all kinds, and most of all your prayers! What a blessing it is to be sharing in God's mission along the border!

In God's Name!

Susan Hellums

Border Area Mission Coordinator

Methodist Border Friendship Commission

GBGM, National (Regional) Advance Special #982443

Southwest Texas Conference Advance Special #2016