July 9-15, 2017

Mission to Mexico

Devotional
Introduction

Dear Team,
I am so glad you are taking part in this week’s mission trip to Reynosa, Mexico. We have a lot of hard yet rewarding work ahead of us. We will be toiling away in the heat to build homes for other people. That is part of what makes this trip so special – not only are we giving away our labor; we are also giving away the fruits of our labor. And why are we doing this? Because once upon a time we were told to love the Lord our God with every part of ourselves, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

This week is primarily about service to others in the name of Christ. But it is also about our own spiritual growth, as individuals and as a church community. To that end, we will get together twice a day – once in the morning and once in the evening – for group devotions. Our devotions will revolve around a theme for the day; and each day’s theme is based on a part of the Bible verse that will be our theme verse for the entire week. It comes from Acts 1:8:

“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Please read each devotion on your own before we discuss it as a group. There is also space in your booklet to take notes or journal.

Finally, I urge you not to forget that there are others back in Fayetteville who could not join us this week – members of your church family who join us in spirit and prayer. Be thinking about how you can share your experience with them. How can you tell them about the wonderful people you will meet this week? How can you use this week’s experience to help enrich their understanding of God’s love and compassion?

I look forward to serving with you this week!

In Christ,
Jonathan West
Monday, July 10: God’s Power
On our first full day in Reynosa, we will reflect on what Jesus meant by power. From where does our power come? What sort of power do we need to do our work in Reynosa? How will the Holy Spirit be involved in the work we will be doing?

Tuesday, July 11: Christ’s Witnesses
As we start to get to know the people we are serving, we will reflect on what it means to be a witness. What does it mean to be Christ’s witnesses? “To witness” can mean either to see something or to point something out to others (or both). In what sense are we “witnessing” in Reynosa this week?

Wednesday, July 12: Leaving Jerusalem
By the third day, maybe we are starting to get used to the heat in Reynosa. Or maybe we are missing the comforts of home (or, as Jesus might call it, our Jerusalem). Jerusalem is the safe, familiar place. It wasn’t all that hard to be a witness for Jesus in Jerusalem. What is our Jerusalem? Do we feel like we left it by coming to Reynosa? If so, how does it feel to leave the safe, comfortable confines of Jerusalem?

Thursday, July 13: Stretching Our Limits
By this point in our trip, we have hopefully gotten more comfortable around the people we are serving. Ideally, we have come to the conclusion that the Judeas and the Samarias of the world aren’t as formidable as they looked from “Jerusalem.” Judea is a little further beyond Jerusalem. Samaria is even further than that. By the time you get to Samaria, you’re well out of your comfort zone. Why did Jesus call his disciples (which includes us) to get so uncomfortable? Does Reynosa feel more like your Judea or your Samaria?

Friday, July 14: Returning Home
On our final day in Reynosa, we will reflect on Jesus’ commission of his disciples to the ends of the earth. The ends of the earth are the scariest places imaginable – the epitome of the unknown. Has Reynosa felt like that to you? How has this place stretched you? This is also the day we will be crossing the border to prepare for our return trip home. Jesus doesn’t say anything about going back to Jerusalem after reaching the ends of the earth. What does it mean to go back after this week?
Monday morning

Matthew 19:26

But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

First day of work in Reynosa! Many of you, especially first-timers, are asking yourself “why am I here?” It is hot (understatement), it is dusty, there are some strange smells, I don’t know the language, I have to think when I use the bathroom and on and on.

Take heart, today you will meet the family that God has called you to build a house for and you will see the joy in their eyes as well as the eyes of the volunteers. You will meet the staff that is going to direct you and help you with the task at hand. Though the task seems daunting, remember that you have been called to this mission by God. God never calls without equipping and “with God all things are possible.”

This week will give you the opportunity to experience God in a new and fascinating way. In the midst of building the home, take time to build relationships. See how the Lord cares for his people and how he cares for you. Take the time to be alone with God each day and spend a few minutes writing a journal of your experience.

Be sure to hydrate!

Know always that I and your church family at home are praying with you and for you.

Yours in Christ,

Herb Bryan
Monday evening

God’s Power/Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you....”

Jesus promises that Holy Spirit Power will come upon the disciples in the first chapter of Acts. He is speaking to his friends to console them as he is about to ascend into heaven, knowing that they will not meet him again here on this earth. He is going away. They will be left alone, no longer able to sit and listen to his teaching as he walks and talks with them. They are being left totally on their own in ministry, and they honestly do not have a clue what they should be doing. Jesus seems to expect “ministry” from them; for them to spread the “good news” – the Gospel. But they are not only afraid, they are terrified.

Perhaps, this morning, as you began your work in Reynosa, you too were afraid. For those of you coming to a foreign country for the very first time, it is scary. You may not understand what people are saying all the time; you do not know what is expected of you. This first day, maybe you begin to learn what it means to serve Christ in a strange place. The people you worked with helped you feel more confident in your tasks – even if you didn’t always do it right. And in your insecurity, you probably whispered a prayer for strength – and the Holy Spirit entered where you were weak, and gave you strength.

There is a hymn in the new Glory to God hymnals that was written by Dennis L. Jernigan in 1990 with the title, “You Are My All in All.” Maybe some of you know it. The words of this song have been dear to me ever since I learned it back in the early 90’s. “You are my strength when I am weak; You are the treasure that I seek; you are my all in all. When I fall down, you pick me up; when I am dry, you fill my cup; you are my all in all. Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is your name! Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is your name!”

This week, the Holy Spirit will take you to places you have never dreamed before. You will find joy in serving God as you lean on him. You will find courage to share your faith with someone who needs it. You will find community with the mission team like none you have ever experienced before. And God WILL provide. All you have to do is ask him in prayer, and he will be faithful to deliver all you ask and more. Those of us at home are praying for you and holding you in our hearts. May you be blessed as you serve, released from your fears, and surrounded by his Love.

God bless you all!

Dr. Marcia Heirman Mervin
Tuesday morning

When I was a teenager, our youth choir WAS our youth group, and everything we did revolved around music. Our church had two worship services every Sunday; one at 11 a.m. and one at 7 p.m. Youth choir met for supper and choir practice every Sunday afternoon, and we sang an anthem every Sunday night, 52 times a year. The minister of music was an intense guy, and he made sure we took our role in worship seriously. We didn’t chew gum in church, we sat and stood in unison, we held our music so that we could see the words and him as he directed us, and we knew that our leadership in worship mattered, even though we weren’t adults yet.

One of the songs I remember well was based on Acts 1: 8, and the lyrics, were ‘Ye shall receive power ... and be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth” with some cool antiphonal singing of “Jerusalem” being answered by “Judea” and “Samaria” and then everybody singing “to the ends of the earth.” I always enjoyed singing about that promise and commission.

Jesus promised his disciples that no matter how scared they had been, they were going to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. That indwelling Spirit would turn them into witnesses who would take the message of God’s love and salvation to ALL people, everywhere. That commission belongs to us, too, because we have also received the Spirit, and we carry the good news of unconditional love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ to everyone so their lives can be changed, so they can be made holy, so they can be restored to a right relationship with God.

As you experience an unfamiliar culture with food and language and customs that are different from yours this week, you may feel disoriented and maybe even a little afraid. You may wonder if what you are doing matters. Just remember that you are all witnesses, in Fayetteville and Cumberland County and in Reynosa, Mexico, and anywhere else that you may go. You are a witness to Jesus Christ with your life, and nothing matters more than that. Thanks be to God for filling us with hope and joy and the courage to be witnesses through the Spirit!

Dr. Donna Fowler-Marchant
Tuesday evening

Dear Child of God,

I have called you to do a Great Thing. I want you to put down your cell phones, computers, the internet and all the other things you are doing to focus on Love. This week you will be my Hands and Feet to your neighbors, friends, and a few people you do not know yet. During this week, I will guard your steps, give you the words to say and help you fulfill the destiny I have set out before you. Because of your obedience I will rain down great blessings in your life and guard your heart. You are mine and I will never let you go. You are mine and you will one day be with me forever. I love you with all my Heart and I deeply appreciate and adore this great trip of love to my people, whom I, too, came to serve and love. You are all part of my Body and in you and through you we will do great things.

I will love you forever!!!! – Jesus Christ

Ezra 3:10-12: When the builders had finished laying the foundation of the temple, the priests put on their robes and blew trumpets in honor of the LORD, while the Levites from the family of Asaph praised God with cymbals. All of them followed the instructions given years before by King David. They praised the LORD and gave thanks as they took turns singing: “The LORD is good! His faithful love for Israel will last forever.” Everyone started shouting and praising the LORD because work on the foundation of the temple had begun. Many of the older priests and Levites and the heads of families cried aloud because they remembered seeing the first temple years before. But others were so happy that they celebrated with joyful shouts.

Building a house or any facility starts with a foundation. In the Bible reading, we hear that the priests and Levites praised God by putting on special garments and clashing cymbals. The older people cried in joy to see the temple being built again, and joyful shouts came from the people.

Imagine the joy that will come from your building and helping on this mission trip. Your foundation in the Christian faith has led you to act out this faith in action as you travel a long distance to help others. The foundations and

continued on the next page
other types of building work that you do will give witness to those you help. As in the scripture, people may cry aloud in joy as they see their homes and neighborhoods restored.

One can never know what kind of foundation all of you, by your work on this mission trip, will lay for others. The Christian faith has a spirit-filled way of spreading by the work and witness of others. From those of us at your congregation who remain at home, thank you for your faith lived out into work!

Prayer:

God, we thank you for this productive day and for keeping us safe and healthy. Give us a good night’s rest. Thank you, Jesus, for being the foundation of our faith; help us to share it as we work this week. Amen.

Kevin Hall
Wednesday morning

Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

The summer between my junior and senior year of college, I had a job as a camp unit counselor at an overnight girl scouts camp. I was among a diverse group of young women from all different parts of the world. I even had a camp name, “Tater” as my maiden name is Tate. We spent the first 10 days in staff training, learning things from how to facilitate rock climbing to nurturing children who are suffering from homesickness.

I would like to say I felt totally in my element. However, it was a heavy responsibility to oversee 8-12 children whose parents dropped them off and expected you to keep their children safe while making a positive impact on their lives. Not to mention being in a new place, with new people and I was never a girl scout! Also, this was the last – let’s say “fun” job – I would have because the next summer I would be looking to start a new career upon college graduation.

Looking back on this experience I think of the Scripture above. I carried great responsibility that summer and extreme worry. At the time, I did not understand how the job would impact me but I do remember feeling like I was exactly where I needed to be and I thanked God for it. I grew so much that summer by being out of my comfort zone.

As you approach today’s task ask yourself has the Lord placed you out of your comfort zone? Discuss your answer.

Prayer for the day:

Loving God, we know it’s easy to stay in our comfort zone. We ask that you give us strength to trust in you to guide us. Help us to trust in you Lord, as we cannot comprehend all you have planned for us. Send your Holy Spirit into our lives to change us and make us more like Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Britany Spivey
Wednesday evening

Greetings Mexico Mission Team:

Well, it’s the end of Day Three... just two more days to go! I pray that you are all well and in good spirits. By now, I’m guessing that some of you are just as pumped and excited as you were when you arrived, while others may be feeling a little overwhelmed due to the heat, new surroundings, or maybe even a little homesick, especially if this is your first mission trip. I’ll bet the disciples experienced some of the same emotions, fears, and excitement when they left Jerusalem. And just like the disciples, each of us has the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s that power that equips each of us with everything that we need to serve as witnesses to the love of Jesus Christ to everyone that we meet. Ephesians 2:10 says that “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

As Christians, each of us has been called to be witnesses to the Good News of Jesus Christ... to the ends of the world. The ends of the world for each of you this week has been Reynosa, Mexico. And by now I’m sure that you have discovered that the neighborhood where you are working is nothing like what you are used to. Seeing and experiencing the horrible living conditions that the residents of Reynosa have to endure every day can be very overwhelming for many of us, stirring strong feelings of sympathy and pity, creating a sense of urgency to try and address the material needs of these people. And when our mission work takes us to a place where living conditions are as bad as they are in Reynosa, it can be very easy to lose sight of your purpose for being there. As missionaries, you are there to carry out what Jesus commanded his disciples, and us, to do – “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). As you continue your work this week, rely on the truth of the Scriptures and the power of the Holy Spirit to get you through those times when things may seem overwhelming. Relax, let go and let the power of the Holy Spirit take over. Let the Good News of Jesus Christ be reflected in everything that you do, and to everyone that you meet so that they will come to know Christ through you.

While your time in Mexico will come to an end in a couple of days, your call to witness will continue, no matter where you are. God creates opportunities for us to serve each day. Sometimes the opportunities are easy to recognize,
like a house that needs a roof, or a child that needs food or clothing. Sometimes it’s a little harder... like the person standing right in front of you, or sitting right beside you on the airplane, who doesn’t know God, or has a broken relationship with God and is suffering as a result. Let them come to know God though you.

Enjoy your time in Mexico. Find joy in spreading the Good News! Let our 2017 Mission Conference theme be your motivation – “Declare his glory among the nations; his marvelous deeds among peoples” (Psalm 96:3). Know that your First Prez family is praying for you daily.

Peace,

Terry Plummer
Thursday morning

By now you have reached some decisions about the Mexican people you met this week. If this is your first mission trip to Reynosa, hopefully you view the Mexican people much differently than you did prior to this trip. On my first trip, I expected to see sad, depressed people living in poverty. Instead I saw happy, laughing people, filled with life and rich in spirit in spite of their poverty. I returned with a different perspective on how our government should respond, not just to our Mexican neighbors but to the many undocumented Mexicans living in the United States.

When I returned from Reynosa, I heard comments to the effect: Instead of sending volunteers to build houses, wouldn’t it be better to take that money and send it to Faith Ministry? Wouldn’t this enable Faith Ministry to help more people? Our Scripture says “…you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” I can truly say that my life changed dramatically as a result of my first mission trip. It felt as though the Holy Spirit touched my life each day in Mexico. Had the church simply sent money, nothing in my life would have changed.

Jesus said “you will be my witnesses.” But how can I be a witness if we do not speak the same language? Language is more than words. Look in the mirror and what do you see? Do you see someone who has a smile on your face, even when you are tired? Listen to your own voice. Have you been laughing and singing and enjoying yourself while working in the hot sun? Where were you during meal time? Did you eat with the Mexican families or did you sit with others from your group? Every moment of every day, we are being witnesses through our behavior. Were you a witness to the love of Jesus?

Dr. Larry Hogan
Thursday evening

Congratulations to all of you for participating in this mission trip to Mexico. What an honor and privilege it is to demonstrate the love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to others by service to them in his name. The experience of my first mission trip changed my life forever. It made it much clearer to me how Jesus really wanted me to behave towards others. It also deeply reinforced my faith. I believe you all are now at a point in this experience where you can begin to reflect on how this may change you. You have settled in, worked hard, gotten somewhat used to the heat and perhaps are even getting a little less shocked by the poverty and deprivation you have seen. You have been taken out of your comfort zone – to your own Judea or Samaria. Now it is time to begin to think about how all of this will change you. And you will be changed. So, what will you personally do to make sure you never forget how this experience has made you feel?

Think about how you have felt working with one another and interacting with the people you are serving. I believe strongly we are closest to the Holy Spirit within us during that time of shared service. Can you replicate that feeling when you return home to busy schedules, your families and all the distractions present in our society? I believe you can. I challenge you to bring that desire to serve others with Christ’s love to all your personal interactions. Wouldn’t our world be a better place if all of us who are Christians behaved in this way? Think about it.

Yours in Christ,

Dr. Chris Aul
Friday morning

By now your group is tired and getting ready to go home. I am sure that you have gotten a lot more out of the trip than you have given and that is usually the way it is – at least based on my 14 trips to Haiti.

You have learned that the people are different than you and speak a different language but are internally basically the same. They need love and friendship just as we all do and are more than willing to extend that to all willing to do the same. Hopefully they have been able to see a little of Jesus in your faces and actions as you have helped them to reach for a better life.

Christ came into this world to help the needy and give them love and a sense of belonging. Your efforts in Mexico to help them rise out of the poverty they experience every day shows a love to them that they rarely see, especially from people that are so much better off than they are. Your generosity and willingness to go to Mexico will do more to advance the kingdom of God than you can ever imagine. The people you have worked with and befriended will remember you and your kindness long after you back home. They are not used to the people with wealth taking time to assist those in the lower levels of society. What you have done is far more than build a house. You have let the people know that there are other Christians like them willing to help pull them up rather than push them down.

I have often heard that there are needy in our own backyards and that is true... but when we step out of our comfort zone into a totally different country and culture we are given the opportunity to see what real poverty with no government assistance is all about. Here in the States there are so many government programs that feed, clothe, house, and work with the poor; whereas, in countries such as Mexico and Haiti there is no government support of any kind. The poor are on their own to find the necessities of life. You have been given the opportunity to see the poorest of the poor who have nowhere to turn for assistance. They are like the lepers of Christ’s time – abandoned to take care of themselves and shunned by the rest of the population.

I hope your time in this world has made you appreciate the blessings God has given you and increased your willingness to help those less fortunate because they are just like you on the inside.

Tad Prewitt
Friday evening

“Why go to the ends of the earth when there is so much need at home?” I’ve heard that criticism for years whenever the time and expense of sending members of the church to faraway places is discussed. I suppose it would be cheaper to write the check and stay at home.

Perhaps Jesus was wise enough to know that there’s more to becoming a witness than simply writing a check. Being a missionary isn’t only about changing other people. It’s about changing us. When Peter the apostle is prompted by the Holy Spirit in chapter 10 of the Book of Acts to go to the home of Cornelius, the gentile Roman soldier, he doesn’t see the point. Cornelius and his kind are unclean pagans, surely of little interest to God and less interest to Peter. Why leave Jewish Jerusalem when there is so much to be done?

Still, against his better judgment he packs up and goes to distant Caesarea with some strangers. What he finds when he gets there is a man he had written off, clearly ready, willing, and able to hear what God has to say. God is at work in places and in people Peter couldn’t even imagine. He comes to this life-altering discovery:

*I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.*  
*(Acts 10:34-35)*

Sometimes we have to go far away so we can come home a different person. We leave to evangelize others only to discover that God is evangelizing us. Perhaps you went on this journey to build a house for a stranger only to find you are coming home with new eyes for your hometown and a deeper comprehension of how much God loves people in this world who we don’t often give a second thought.

How has this trip changed you? Like Peter, what do you realize that you didn’t before? Don’t miss the opportunity to answer these questions for yourself. That’s how we become Christ’s witnesses.

Dr. Mike Garrett
First Presbyterian Church
Let the stamps pictured in this devotional guide you to the history, culture, and people of Mexico.