



# Karitas

*“Building Bridges, Celebrating Community”*

[www.karitasfoundation.org](http://www.karitasfoundation.org)

## RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE / DREAMING THE FUTURE

Dear Partners in Compassion,

When the pandemic hit, as dramatically in Mexico as here in the States, indeed around the world, it seemed impossible for Karitas and our staff to predict the course of the months ahead. It seemed easy to be discouraged. Each of our projects was flourishing at that time. It seemed a banner year lay ahead. Then the pre-school and feeding program in La Estación had to close, as did the ALEM shop. Schools closed and with safety protocols in place, how would the Education Initiative continue? Optimism and hope was hard to come by.

Fast forward eight months and join us in being *filled* with optimism and hope! These are creative, resilient and determined people. Right now, at year’s end, there is so much to report about sustaining those existing projects and the birthing of new ones. Is there space enough to share that good news and profile what is emerging? Ironically, there has not been a year in memory where fresh, bold trajectories and momentum forward have emerged.

We are excited and humbled by all this. That mystical, miraculous, magical energy that has always animated our work is alive and well. When Michelangelo was asked how he was inspired to sculpt the statue of David said, “It must be the work of the Spirits.” Seems so!

With delight and the wonder of surprise,

Howard



### **FROM FOOD BASKETS TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY** Changing lives in the present . . . transforming lives in the future

Give a family a fish . . . you feed them for a day

Solidarity and the desire to help other people is what keeps the communities Karitas serves united in the face of this challenging pandemic reality they are experiencing. Many people have been affected by financial crisis and unemployment due to the health crisis. Therefore, in coordination with local Rotary clubs and other civil organizations, Karitas continues to deliver hearty food baskets with a variety of food products to families in need in the State of Morelos. We have taken this sharing solidarity and support to the following communities in Morelos: Emiliano Zapata, Xoxocotla, Tlaltizapan, Tepoztlán, Ocuituco, La Estacion and more. We deliver weekly food baskets to 200 families, \$4.00/basket, \$800/week, \$3200/month. Over 4,000 in all! Karitas has guaranteed support for the next six months!

see **TEACH A FAMILY TO FISH** on page 3



The cafeteria we support, a colorful oasis

## RESILIENTE

### Another partnership with inspiring results

Migrant day laborers come from rural mountain communities in Guerrero into Morelos (where Karitas is located), many indigenous, some speaking very little Spanish. They come seeking work on farms, and also fleeing violence. They typically stay here for six months, but fear going back, staying here looking for other work, staying for the other six months. We do not help them financially, but do subsidize a developing Resiliente colorful cafeteria, an oasis, at the warehouse-like structure converted into their dwelling.

A personal note from Erik: What an incredible visit to Resiliente! I met Marco, immediately feeling his depth and quality of commitment. And Dayana, who I knew was a pillar of steadfast and solid strength. I had read about the Resiliente collective, and was immediately impressed by their commitment, passion and vision. But actually going to the project, seeing people's faces, hearing their voices and feeling their presence changes everything – that wonderful and amazing sensation of awe.

No better word than “resilience” to capture what I witnessed today, people coming together in a common struggle to move forward and create a more comfortable existence. The power and joy of togetherness despite the difficult conditions. In our seeking to build a more beautiful, just and sustainable world, Resiliente is an inspiration. I am so honored, as Karitas’ coordinator, to be part of this. Thank you Resilience! Thank you Karitas’ supporters.



This is where they live



## ALEM

### Weathering the Pandemic . . . Full Speed Ahead

If only you could visit the ALEM shop (some of you reading this have). Everyone who visits is touched and inspired, brimming with wonder and appreciation, overwhelmed by each team member, their camaraderie and mutual affection. And their professional skills.

It has, of course, one of those unique, likely and grace-filled birthing stories. Lalo was born with cerebral palsy. So he was carried each morning to sit on the door step. A priest came to visit. “Why are you sitting there, young man?” he asked. “Don’t you see I have cerebral palsy?” he replied. “That’s not what I asked,” said the priest. “I asked why you are sitting there.” The priest reached down, picked him up, steadied him, and they slowly began to walk together.” Lalo became an activist for the disabled. Years later he met Mayra with whom he shared a dream. Assisting people with “different abilities” as they came to name themselves, gain mobility. Talk about patience! Erik made a threesome and they chatted and prayed for three years! Long pregnancy, finally birth: ALEM.

Eleven years ago they wheeled into a circle, slipped to the floor, a broken wheelchair in the center. A technician showed them how to dismantle the wheelchair, each placing the parts in coffee cups. Then he taught them to re-assemble the chair. The first wheelchair the team repaired! Just the beginning. First a hundred, then 500, then a thousand. Last year 3,000. An average chair requires \$20 in parts: \$20,000 per thousand chairs, \$60,000 for 3,000.

Covid had interrupted their practice of “taking it on the road” to towns and cities in Mexico, where they’d often repair 150 chairs in a visit. Undaunted, they used ALEM truck, picked up and brought the wheelchairs to the shop, and after their repair, returning them to their town.

Right in the midst of the pandemic two remarkable opportunities arose: one we had been working on for a while, the other somewhat unexpected. Rotary International provided a \$75,000 grant to double our work team of technicians with disabilities, plus tooling, so that we can also double the population we serve by working in Mexico City and its surrounding area. Manuals are being written, instruction videos filmed, and the team is being prepared to be trainers of the Mexico City team. And, second, the Arizona Rotary District 5495 donated 150 wheelchairs and other devices. An immense opportunity to serve our community and offer options to those whose wheelchair is unrepairable.

[www.alem.org.mx](http://www.alem.org.mx)

View our documentary GIFTS OF PARTNERSHIP on [www.karitasfoundation.org](http://www.karitasfoundation.org)

## Teach a family to fish . . . you feed them for a lifetime



### La Estación THE MYSTERY, MAGIC AND MIRACLES ROLL ON...

We call it the “sowing / reaping paradox. Imagine you plant over here but the crop begins to grow over there. Call it chance . . . coincidence . . . the unexpected . . . serendipity . . . maybe providence. The saga of our relationship to La Estación narrates that story.

Years ago, trying to contact a monastery, we somehow dialed Ray Plankey and that got us connected to his retreat center, CCIDD. And that made all the difference. We began to bring mission delegations, the first working as a team to build or re-build homes in La Estación. A later team, moved by the struggle of a mother and her three kids, “adopted” a pre-school, raising funds to provide a playground and equipment along with two restrooms. A still later team refurbished classrooms, then raised funds for two new ones. A yet later team helped the community refurbish an abandoned building, equip a kitchen, buy tables and chairs and the program that feeds 150 kids a hearty breakfast daily. More recently a two-story Community Center, funded by memorial gifts honoring departed family members, operating 24/7 serving the community.

Not all surprises are grace-filled: the pandemic is devastating. But the community and our staff rose to the occasion. While the pre-school and feeding program had to stop for a time, the food distribution project made sure each student’s families had adequate diets. Perhaps looking backward on this remarkable story is stirring commitment and momentum to move forward.

This metaphor to “teach a man to fish” resonates with most of us, but Karitas’ experience and success in Mexico has been to discover what the communities already know how to do, determine what might be missing, discover what has been blocking things from changing and therefore unleashing the potential. Our work around COVID relief is no different. The virus made us realize how precarious and insufficient all our institutions are from the health infrastructure to the dependency of local economies. We who are better off are challenged to step up to the plate, to reach out to the margins to help those at a greater risk. We have distributed thousands of food baskets as an emergency survival measure and an expression of human solidarity. Today we ask ourselves how can we collectively mend our broken system; how can we help generate vibrant, sustainable, self-sufficient and fulfilling local households and communities?

Karitas and Fundación Comunidad have worked with several community groups with local development projects that offer tested experiences, methodologies and systems for progressing towards this goal of self-sufficiency and food sovereignty. Helping communities become vibrant and self-sufficient, they can engage the world from a place of well-being and dignity, therefore achieving healthier and more equitable relationships. We hope we can generate financial support for these communities and their dreams. They are simply remarkable people.

### Putting Wheels Under the Dreams / Soil Under the Roots

That’s what Karitas loves to do! Rubber to meet the road. Dreams becoming reality. Seeking food sovereignty, sustainability and empowerment demands creativity and hard work. It’s hard to know where to begin.

A project called “Acciona” in a small rural village, Nopalera that was hit hard by the earthquake 3 years ago. The project provides seed money for home chicken coops for raising hens to harvest eggs – 32 families (173 people) now have eggs for self-consumption and sale.

A horticulturist is teaching raised-bed high-yield gardening and composting project that works with the communities through the elementary school, food for families and profit from food sales. The first garden was at Caminando Unidos two years ago. We are betting on this becoming contagious too!

The Yankuik community center in the indigenous village of Xoxocotla has been an important partner of ours for years, a partnership that became particularly important after the earthquake, but again becomes an essential partner as an example of resilience and solidarity. And they are amazing ambassadors of our common methodology to other communities at this time of need.



## AN EDUCATION INITIATIVE

### And Eight are in University

Yuri is nineteen. She is a student studying psychology at the university! Why an exclamation point? Because if seven years ago you would have told Yuri or her family that, they would have looked, at the least, quizzical. Maybe even laughed. Yuri, just like about every 12 year-old in the community, indeed in many parts of the country, was ready to quit school and begin to sell Chiclets or wash windshields at a stop light. Yuri was in the first cohort of twenty students in the Education Initiative. Prompted by parents who had said that if their children did not go further in school, their futures would be the same struggling reality as their families. After some research and planning a comprehensive curriculum, to include students, their families and their neighborhoods and finding donors to support the first three cycle, we launched. Would it work? Our third three-year group began this September and, in light of extraordinary outcomes over the first six years, we have expanded to thirty students. Last February Betsy and Howard visited a gathering of participants over those six years. “Such energy and vitality, so bright and articulate, so respectful and affectionate with each other, it took our breath away and brought tears to our eyes.”



### Some other Dreams to mention

- A third rainwater harvest and purification project in Ocutituco in northeastern Morelos is in process.
- Ulab (Theory U) project being designed for Axochiapan in the far southeastern corner of Morelos. It is a project in collaboration with the Minneapolis Community Foundation (a city that has as many people in it from Axochiapan as those that live in Axochiapan itself)
- We started a Ulab process in Guatemala with Mayan indigenous communities to help identify and articulate their vision and strategies
- We shared and contributed to the — InterBe Journey 2020 online workshop — in conjunction with the Pachamama Alliance Iberoamerican community; “reconnecting, healing and manifesting dreams for the world”
- Participation in Comunalia, the Council of Community Foundations of Mexico
- We are facilitating the logistics for bringing two fire trucks donated by the city of Minneapolis
- Census, reception and assistance for wheelchairs for kids with cerebral palsy donated by Hope Haven West
- Assistance for the process designing and implementing an environmental education and sustainability project for elementary schools together with a local Rotary Club
- Community empowerment skill training for a Rotaract club (club of young Rotarians) in Chilpancingo, Guerrero.



Dear Partners in Action,

The popular communities in Latin America live in a web of interbeing and solidarity that is desperately needed everywhere in today’s world. The present disruption is a sign of a paradigm shift unfolding, an awakening. In our efforts we give importance to helping communities find their own goals and solutions, with impressive results, we are also learning and finding life through them. There is a deep wisdom in the materially poor and indigenous communities that holds the key to solving some of our planet’s most pressing issues: Environmental degradation, social decay, loneliness, and disconnection.

I am deeply honored to be used as a channel for the better future that wants to be born, and I am grateful to all of you, our supporters, that make it possible. I reaffirm my commitment and dedication to this task.

*Erik Friend*

## BECOME A FINANCIAL PARTNER

Open our website: [karitasfoundation.org](http://karitasfoundation.org) and click the Donate button. You can donate by PayPal or credit card. Send a check to Karitas, 1275 Rose Lane, Berwyn, PA 19312

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