



Karitas Foundation

“Building Bridges, Celebrating Community”

www.karitasfoundation.org



Fundación
Comunidad



I awoke this morning humming a tune and then seeing its title: **Magical Mystery Tour**. I could hear Paul and John singing it. I even made out a lyric or two: “and that’s an invitation . . . to make a reservation.” Then something connected. *The Story of Karitas in Cuernavaca* could aptly be titled a *magical mystery tour!* **Magical** in that something wonderful, delightful and engaging; something unexpected, even unbelievable, as if emerging out from fairy dust; as if the gifts of some positive magical spell, things often “appearing out of nowhere” have unfolded. **Mystery** in that there is awe in it, more than a touch of “impossibility,” as if written by some mysterious and unknown writer, an invisible stage manager handling logistics, a deft director at work . . . an aura of “illogic” to it . . . indeed, a hint of a divine hand, a gift of grace. **Tour** in that it all seemed to emerge, en route, “building it as we go,” “walking by faith not sight” to use a biblical phrase, a companionship on the way, a faithful pilgrimage. You’ll find the word “somehow” on every page, in the telling of every story, a yielding that the “magic” and “mystery” everywhere at work.

This newsletter is an “invitation for a reservation” on a “magical mystery tour.” Hop aboard. See the sites. Meet the people. Delight in the bright and animated looks on their faces. Marvel at what they are doing. Notice the rich spirit of cooperation. Hear their excitement as they share what’s happened in the last year. Be inspired by their dreams for the year ahead. Watch for the quiet and subtle role Karitas plays as we work *with* not *for* the people. Join the people, and the Karitas team, in awesome and heartfelt gratitude and celebration.

Howard Friend

A TALE OF TWO WORDS

Enter the contest!

Somehow a Spanish social scientist, a Mexican social worker and a North American project coordinator hooked up. Juan Manuel, Karitas’ social worker, went to a conference in Spain and “just happened” to meet Javier Encina. Juan Manuel “just happened” to meet Erik, the project coordinator, at a social gathering. “The rest is history” as they say – another magical and mysterious story!

Javier, a veteran community organizer and a scholar, has been evolving a “new approach” to community empowerment in Spain, complete with nine principles. Juan Manuel in that “chance meeting” described Karitas’ work in Cuernavaca. Javier’s eyes lit up, “You’re *doing* what I’m *talking* about. Javier may move to Cuernavaca!

The first of the two words is a simple preposition – *WITH* (*not FOR*). There’s a typical pattern in the work of community organizers: clipboard in hand, conduct interviews; craft a community analysis, itemizing the problems; devise solutions, and then institute them. There . . . done! That’s working *FOR* – the community largely passive, with little voice or engagement, recipients not partners, their resistance and resentment understandable. Javier’s approach and ours changes the preposition – working *WITH*, a new pattern: enter the community quietly and gently; ask a lot of questions; focus on “possibilities” rather than “problems;” listen to the people’s stories; regard them as peers, per chance partners; invite them to reflect on the life of their community; to name their wishes for their futures; and to welcome coalitions that address issues and claim possibilities; our role to encourage and support, but not lead or manage, these naturally emerging strategies.

The second word is more complicated – *ILLUSIONISM* – and here’s the contest. If it is negative to be “disillusioned,” then it must be positive to be “illusioned.” In English, no; but in Spanish, yes – “illusioned” a positive word. A book is being written about our work (okay, we’re bragging . . . but we’re excited) with the goal of distribution to every professor of Social Work and every organization that works with communities *in all of Mexico!* The contest? When the book is translated into English, what word do we use for “illusionism”? If “illusionism” were a cake (or a ceviche or a soup), what would be its ingredients? Here’s our list to date: hope, empowerment, expectancy, anticipation, energy, inspiration, confidence, animation, optimism. A full course Mexican feast for four to whoever finds a single word to in-gather those elements.

LA ESTACIÓN

Somehow a North American father, a mother in a Cuernavaca squatters' community and a tennis group got connected. Magical. Mysterious. Unlikely. Beautiful. Tim and his family, part of a Family Mission Trip, visited the "house" of Maria – "house" in parentheses, because it was a haphazard tangle of bed springs, throwaway scraps of wood, oil-impregnated corrugated cardboard held together by bailing wire – and heard her story. That was twelve years ago. Tim got curious about a shock of rope tied to the leg of a bed and hesitantly asked. Maria just as hesitantly answered, "Sometimes I get a day's work ironing or cleaning. The older kids are off at school but Manuel, he's four, is at home. I leave him water and food, but I tie his ankle to the rope." Tim's head dropped as tears coursed down his cheeks. "My heart had been aching for several days, started to crack yesterday and then broke open and got claimed this morning," he shared. "With what I now know I must do something."

Even before he returned home, he began a letter to the dozen guys in his tennis group. The pre-school in the community seemed a place to start. "We need \$15,000," he wrote, "and we need it as soon as possible." The checks came in and unused rooms in the school were refurbished so enrollment could increase from 80 to 110 and a playground with baths was built. Two years later the tennis group led the way toward building a \$25,000 two-classroom, two bath addition. Enrollment went to 150.

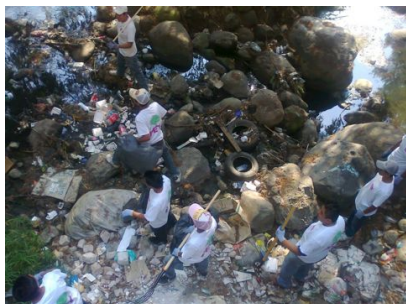
An abandoned building across the walkway was cleaned out, a kitchen cobbled together with discarded but still serviceable equipment, kid-sized tables and chairs gathered from here and there and a breakfast program

started – mothers in teams of four going to market at 5 am to purchase food for a hearty breakfast: eggs, meat and potatoes. Feeding 75, then 100, then 150 kids each day! Truly multi-purpose. And that cramped yet oddly cozy space bustled all day with activity: nutrition and child-reading classes, after-school tutoring grade school kids, workshops on crafts to generate some extra family income,



or simply a safe place for mothers to gather and dads to get encouragement. The tennis group raised \$28,000 this year!

But this is a year of celebration – the dedication of the new community center. Hear the raucous, joyous sound of the Mariachis; watch the kids laughing and dancing; see the broad smiles on the adults gathered, swaying with the music; smell the feast simmering on the grille; feel the gentle cascade of holy water blessing the building . . . and you. "Now that we have this spacious new building, just wait and see the things we are going to be able to do," exclaims Bernadina. "And our terrace, benches and gardens is the only gathering place in the community," Irma chimes in.



ECOMUNITARIA

The uncertainty of government policies can make some projects difficult. This community recycling project, continues to navigate these waters. The project continues to grow, now ten collection centers, plus they

keep expanding the materials they can process -- continued income for many families. A new mayor takes office in January and there are rumors. They've been through this before, it's always a surprise.

ALEM



Somehow Lalo and Erik met, a fascinating and unlikely story in itself, and then they hooked up with Mayra and an “impossible dream” came into focus.

Only compelling

vision and dogged persistence keep them meeting for five years. “See,” Lalo says, his voice and gait affected by his Muscular Dystrophy, “I told you we could do it!” “Truth be told, I sometimes lost heart and was ready to quit,” Mayra admits. *Magical. Mysterious. Extraordinary.*

A wheelchair circle formed, young men and women ready to shed dependency, determined to move past

doubts about their intrinsic abilities – renting a cramped workspace, assembling an array of well-worn but still serviceable equipment, they were soon ready to re-furbish wheelchairs. With training made available by time donated by skilled craftsmen, Rosie became a master welder, Liliana a professional painter, Mario an expert upholsterer, and Alex a fine machinist. *Somehow some funds materialized and a perfectly located, perfectly designed location became available. ALEM has its own home! Magical? Mysterious?* Each year they come closer and closer to self-support. They have diversified their range of services. And they have become like family.



The *highlight of this year* was a surprise. Their old lift van was ready to breathe its last. Quietly, unknown to the ALEM team, a generous donor had agreed to underwrite the purchase, rehabilitation and transport of a like-new lift van. Close your eyes use your imagination: see the sleek new van shimmering in the sunlight, festooned with a huge red bow, parked outside the gate. Watch the ALEM team, their wheelchairs lined up like the starting gate of the Kentucky Derby, waiting for the signal to go. Join their broad smiles of surprise and elation as they raced out of the gate and saw the van for the first time. *They said it was magic!*

We already know a *highlight of the year ahead* – and they can’t wait! Through a partnership of Rotary Clubs in suburban Philadelphia, and Clubs in Cuernavaca, and the participation of Rotary International, an \$18,000 grant will underwrite the creation of a Wheelchair Repair Service. Everybody wins. There is a desperate need for affordable wheelchair repair throughout Cuernavaca (100’s of wheelchairs, needing minor but too-expensive repairs, are rusting in back yards). With funds to buy parts in quantity and special equipment, they can offer repair at affordable prices and increase their own productivity. This grant will fund the repair of 500 wheelchairs at an average of \$25 each.

OCOTEPEC



Ocotepec is an indigenous community known for its independent thinking and resistance to consumerism. They have their own community police and still govern in a traditional town meeting style. But in this age of drug and gang related violence it is easy to get distracted from other community projects and wishes. Some of our team have been working on an “Oral History” process to help motivate people to keep doing what works best and innovate about new possibilities.

EL TEXTCAL

Somehow . . . a multi-national corporate CEO, those students from the technical university, an old and weathered fourth generation resident of the community and our social worker, Juan Manual hooked up. Magical. Mysterious. Unlikely. Beautiful.

"When you walk into the parking lot of your apartment building and all of sudden you see yourself in a community movie being projected on a screen, it's a neat feeling. And then when I see and remember the good, and fun, stuff we've done, it makes us want to do more," Miguel explains. The team, now including a couple of new students from the polytechnic university across the street, Alejandro and Ana Karen, had been filming the activities blossoming in the community and had interviewed some of the players. Javier, "el Toto," also joined the team; an inhabitant of the squatter's settlement, La Estación, he got interested in what else we were doing and has been a key promoter of our work with first hand experience of what can be done when a community works together. "So why not produce a movie we can take back to the community?" I can't remember who actually verbalized. The response just seemed to emerge from the team.

So what are some of those activities? The recycling continues to grow. When we think of the motivation for recycling, we mostly we think of caring for our environment, but in the case of this area in Mexico we had recognized that there could be a economical benefit in lower income communities that the can save on the cost of trash removal and sell the recyclables. But we hadn't realized that



the activity would become an opportunity for conviviality among neighbors. On Monday nights neighbors come out to see if there

might be something interesting, some people even set their trash up for display, so others can see if there's something they can use.

A couple of women have come together to do some gardening, with all kinds of unique ideas. First it was the flower and medicinal herb garden in the community. Mexico has a deep tradition of plant medicine that differs from region to region. And they love to explain what they are for and how they can be used. Finally they ended up making little flags of recycled milk containers so that others will know as well. Then they got talking to the indigenous communal authorities in charge of the state park next door and now they offer small plots for vegetable gardening, which they work on together. And it is fascinating to mention that people from this community, like these women, had traditionally been at odds with the communal authorities due to an old inherited political dispute. Now, they are participating together in many activities.

If the present is an unfolding of dreams, so who knows what dreams for the future will come to life. The momentum is accelerating. The community believes in each other and the future they are creating and claiming. The Karitas team is there to walk with them.

A WONDERFUL CHALLENGE TO RISE TO

- * Karitas' presence in Cuernavaca has passed a "tipping point" and it's about trust. Building trust-based partnerships, is a slow, tedious process. But, we have succeeded! We are widely viewed as compassionate, trustworthy and committed,
- * That yields boundless opportunities to serve: (colon, not comma) potential new projects and expansion of current ones, all poised to have extraordinary impact on countless lives. If someone wrote a check for a million dollars, we could put every dollar toward effective, life-transforming projects . . . immediately!

Like little waves circling from a stone tossed into a pond – each successive wave is significantly wider and larger than the one before, as each wave had been before that. Karitas began like the splash of a single stone over the two decades ago, its first ripples small and modest. But this year's wave is substantially larger than those earliest ones, even dramatically larger than that of just a year ago! To carry this work to its fullest potential, a larger wave yet, we need a 15% increase in donor income. Rise to our challenge.

We want to connect with you in every way possible. Wander our website: review our mission and vision statements, meet our board, watch an extraordinary photo essay about ALEM, and explore opening each project site in turn. We can provide our IRS tax exempt certificate, a copy of our 990 charitable organization filing in Pennsylvania. Or, give Howard Friend a call.

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