

KeizerCommunity

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Student ministry spends week in Mexico

BY LAUREN MURPHY
Of the Keizertimes

After 20 hours of driving, two border check points and what felt like a thousand bathroom breaks, we finally made it. The Overflow Student Ministries short-term mission team was in Mexico's San Quintín, Baja California.

Our hosts, Mike Fink and his family, the founders of Go Missions to Mexico, welcomed us when we arrived; we got our dorm assignments, unpacked the trailer and got ready for the best part of the day, dinner.

After dinner we had an orientation about basic do's and don'ts: do burn everything that's not food scraps or metal, don't flush the toilet paper.

The first full day that we were there we had two more orientations: one about the culture and another about the rules of ministry. We met the church we'd be serving with, Capilla Calvario (Calvary Chapel) and joined them for their service.

It was a particularly tender moment; two years ago our youth group took a team down to San Quintín; they helped build the building the church meets in for service. There were a lot of tears and excitement walking into the service.

Everyday at least two of our team members would give their testimonies which were translated into Spanish; either at Vacation Bible School (VBS) or during the church service. Myself and Isabel Lopez, an incoming senior at McNary High School, were the first of our team to give our testimonies on Sun-



Members of Salem Evangelical's Overflow Student Ministries break for a photo between teaching VBS classes and helping build a new church.

day morning before the congregation.

"While I was giving my testimony I was nervous. In my soul I knew that what I was saying was going to touch the hearts of some people, maybe only a few, so I wanted for my words to do it justice," Isabel said. "The beautiful thing is they were God's words through me. Nonetheless it was the nervousness you have when you

know with absolute certainty that you are doing something right. Something you are meant to do."

We blitzed the community after service to invite the neighborhood to the VBS.

The second full day was when we started work. Our group of 25 was split in two; half of us stayed at the church to help build their multipurpose rooms and the other half evangelized in the neighbor-

hoods.

Despite the fact that I go to Salem Evangelical Church, evangelism was definitely a challenge. Throw in the language barrier and I was way out of my depth.

Thankfully between our guide's broken English, our broken Spanish and the grace of God we were able to communicate.

One of the coolest parts was when we'd pray for the community members. One of the leaders in our evangelism team, Jon Troncoso, is fluent in Spanish.

"God understands all the languages," he would say. "But I'll translate what they say so

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you can understand, too."

Our teams switched every other day so that each group did two days of evangelism and two days of work.

The next day my team stayed at the church to work. The church had hired contractors and they taught us how to mix cement and plaster walls.

The head pastor of the church taught us how to finish the walls. After the cement was mostly dry, we'd take a damp sponge and rub the sand off the wall, which would smooth out any cracks or bumps in the wall.

Each team would do their assigned task until about noon when we'd break for lunch. Some of the women in the church made lunch for us

and the other workers; which was the closest to heaven I've ever been.

In our cultural orientation, they told us everything in Mexico has a low level of chaos, which is exactly how VBS felt. During the week, the number of students grew from 20 to 100 kids.

We taught VBS students after lunch. That was the one place that didn't feel new or different; whether you're in America or Mexico kids want to play with you because you're older, which automatically makes you cool.

"The best part for me was there was this little boy who didn't want to go down the slide, despite not speaking any Spanish I was able to encourage him and by the end he was flying down that thing," said Sarah Zemanek said, a recent high school graduate and team member.

Mia Troncoso, a team member who gave her testimony on the church service on Wednesday night said, "I've never shared my testimony in front of that many people before. It was definitely nerve wracking, but once I took a deep breath and thought about what I was doing there

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