



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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Standing On Their Shoulders



Fr. Roberto Corral, O.P.

Dear Mission Friends:

I am writing to you from our mission parish in Mexicali, *Santa María de Guadalupe*, having arrived here at the end of September 2022. This is my first time serving as a missionary, and it has already been a great learning experience for me. Though both of my parents were born in Mexico, I was born and raised in the United States, so I am learning a lot about Mexican culture from my Dominican brothers here and from the people of the parish. I have been ministering to Latinos in Spanish throughout all my 40+ years as a Dominican, but I am still not fluent, so it can be frustrating not to understand parts of conversations, especially the joking and friendly teasing that Latinos so often use when talking to each other. But I have always found them to be patient with those of us who do not speak flawless Spanish, and our parishioners here in Mexicali are no exception.



Below, Frs. David Bello, Vincent Foerstler, and Tom Kraft, missionaries at our 2nd mission in Mexicali, early 2000s.



One of the most humbling and inspiring aspects I have come to appreciate since being here is that I am standing on the shoulders of all those Dominican missionaries who have served here before me. I am amazed at the dedication and perseverance of the two friars with whom I currently live: Fr. David Bello, O.P., who, except for a few short stints when he was on other assignments, has been pastor here since this parish was founded in 1995; and Fr. Bart de la Torre, O.P., who has served here continuously since 2006. Both men have remained here in spite of serious health issues and frequent shortages of friars to assist them with all their various, often strenuous ministries.

Above, our current team: Fr. David, Sr. Olivia, Fr. Roberto, Sr. Catalina, Fr. Bart, and Sr. Raquel.

Fr. Martin Walsh, O.P. also served here joyfully for many years, returning in between other assignments whenever possible. He was reassigned to St. Dominic Parish in San Francisco just last June, but he left a lasting impact on this parish and on the Diocese of Mexicali in general. Parishioners and staff, Dominican Sisters of Christian Doctrine, diocesan priests, neighbors, school children, etc. all still remember him fondly, as they do other legendary Dominicans—Frs. Vincent Foerstler, Paul Scanlon, Tom Kraft, Miguel Rolland, Joseph Barranger and all who served here and at our previous Mexicali parish in the 1970s and 80s a few miles away.

A basic priority of our parish is to reach out to those in need. At every Sunday Mass, we collect from those who are able to give and we distribute food, clothing, and supply stipends to needy families and individuals, Catholic or not.



Above, Fr. Bart distributing donated clothes to congregants at the open-aired Villa Zapata chapel. Top middle, parishioners distributing baked goods at migrant shelter.



Home visits and a monthly food subsidy are provided for the elderly, sick, poor, and abandoned of the parish, providing what they cannot access on their own.

We currently have a great team working here, including our Dominican Sisters of Christian Doctrine with whom I have worked in Phoenix, Antioch, and Los Angeles. The Sisters collaborated with our friars to put on a parish retreat at the end of March that was very successful, with over 50 people attending. They also teach our children in catechism classes, including how to pray the Missionary Rosary, which consists of a different-colored decade representing each of the following five areas of the world: red for the Americas (North, Central, and South), green for Africa, white for Europe, blue for Oceania, and yellow for Asia.

An ever-growing and ever-changing ministry is focused on migrants, dealing with their immediate needs and desperation resulting from deportations and the demands of coyotes. We guide them to local shelters where they have access to temporary housing, food and clothing, showers and laundry facilities; and counseling regarding the latest regulations, reunion with their families, and safe travel.



Indeed I am also standing on the shoulders of all our missionaries who have served in other places and times: I feel a kindred spirit with and am inspired by our Fr. Tim Conlan, who has been serving tirelessly and alone in Guatemala for more than 25 years; Fr. Kieran Healy and Br. Daniel Thomas, who served in Kenya in the 1990s and 2000s; the friars who began our Province's missionary efforts in Chiapas, Mexico in the 1960s; and Fr. Leo Hofstee, who ministered with such courage to lepers in the Philippines from the 1940s to the 1980s. Given this great tradition of missionary work by our Western Dominican friars, I am humbled to be a part of it.

Top right, children saying the Mission Rosary. Just above, Fr. Bart with First Communicants and their families.

Below, Frs. David and Roberto with little Dominican saints after All Saints Day Mass.

I am truly blessed to be able to now count myself as contributing to such an impressive tradition of missionaries, and I hope I can do my part to serve God's people here in Mexicali and wherever else the Lord takes me in the years to come. Thanks to all of you readers for your generous support and prayers for our missionary work.

May the Lord bless each of you,
Fr. Roberto Corral, O.P.



Mexicali: The Back Story

~Lesley Warnshuis

In 1978, Frs. Paul Scanlon and Martin Walsh, O.P., representatives of our Province, came to an agreement with the bishop of the Diocese of Mexicali for our friars to take over a parish from the Mexican Dominicans and serve there as missionaries, which we did, for over a decade. When the parish neighborhood, however, had become middle class—almost gentrified, with paved roads and rebuilt houses—we felt our ministries were no longer necessary and we left the area.

But just three years later, the bishop of Mexicali invited us to return to establish a parish in the newly-inhabited settlement on the far eastern outskirts of the diocese where the poor had been forced to move. Extending about 30 miles along the U.S./Mexican border, the area was now crowded with shacks and small, destitute farms, some locations still without electricity even today! There was certainly no Catholic presence in the area.

And so it was in October of 1995 that Fr. David Bello, O.P., who was alone in raising his hand for this challenge, left for Mexicali to establish a new mission of our Province, the parish of *Santa Maria de Guadalupe*, and our friars have been preaching the Word of God and building community there ever since.

Our efforts at first were to concentrate on establishing the parish, and with the help and enthusiasm of the parishioners, we were able, over time, to construct a parish church and four small churches, a catechesis center and a priests' house.



Photos on pages 3-4 are from Mexicali and other border towns, depicting adult migrants and their children who have tried one of the various ways to cross into the U.S. (Note the baby in the suitcase.)

But just over the border from Mexicali is Calexico, one of 25 official U.S. border crossing stations, and so upon arrival, we were confronted with an area that was being besieged by daily throngs of destitute migrant families in limbo, greatly exacerbating the area's already crushing poverty and inundated services.

There have long existed international laws upholding people's basic human right to migrate. But the immigrants' road was never perfectly smooth or free of obstacles, and particularly at the Mexican-U.S. border, it has often been fraught with dead ends or a cruel, inescapable loop of hope and defeat that has rarely let up. Economic hardship, government corruption, and violence have increased exponentially in recent years, and today that increasingly dangerous road is also increasingly crowded because migrants come from intolerable living conditions that warrant the risk, no matter the cost.

Some come from the north after being forced from their homes or workplaces in the U.S., arrested as undocumented migrants, deposited at the border by patrol buses, broke and desperate with nowhere to go. The biggest source of income for the cartels, after drug sales, comes from the extortion of such undocumented migrants—first kidnapping then raping or torturing them, and eventually demanding ransom from relatives.

Many more come from the Northern Triangle in the south (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador), having made the arduous journey on foot or by buses or crowded tops of freight trains, compelled to flee their homes and the extreme and entrenched poverty with its inevitable corollaries of extortion, violence, gangs, and drug and sex traffickers.

Some follow the rules, hoping to seek asylum and start a new life in the U.S., only to be turned away at the border. Others are hoping to cross unseen and illegally. They have sold their land and everything they have to pay coyotes anywhere from \$1,000.00 (more than most of them make in a year of hard work) to \$12,000.00 per person to smuggle their families into the U.S. Those parents who can't come up with enough money for the whole family send their children with coyotes, unaccompanied, in spite of the manifest dangers, but prices for children are rising fast as coyotes see the parents' growing desperation. And then the children are often stranded or abused and at grave risk for human trafficking.

San Pedro Sula in Honduras has been termed "the most violent city in the world." Honduras and El Salvador are home to two notoriously violent street gangs—



MS-13 and M-18, who fight over territory and drug trafficking routes. These armed criminal gangs regularly extort from 70% of businesses, and youths between the vulnerable ages of 12 and 16 are being forcibly recruited into such gangs at threat of death. And some police officers and security forces are on the cartels' payroll and just look the other way, so there is no reliable safety net.

The immigration crisis has become another one of those issues to which many of us have become desensitized, hearing about it on the news all day and repeatedly seeing the same videos of crowding at the crossing station or climbing the wall or wading in the river. Regardless of where the migrants come from or how they got there or even why, we must stop and truly hear and see and reflect upon their shared plights. **They have all made the conscious but heartbreaking and surely frightening decision to abandon the life they know along with their homes and meager but cherished possessions to travel any way they can to an unseen, unknown, unpredictable life, but one that has to be better than the one they left.** Can you just stop for a moment and imagine getting to that point and having to do what they're doing?

The immigration debate is not black and white—open borders vs. zero tolerance. Such life and death issues are necessarily messy and complicated, dynamic and nuanced. Moreover, many politicians and journalists manipulate the truth. Their views on immigration, for example, have less to do with the plight of migrants than ensuring that someone is re-elected or someone else is not. We deserve truthful, objective reporting so that we can educate ourselves. We need to ask harder questions, listen more attentively, research more broadly, think more critically. Indeed, rather than being a political issue, immigration is a humanitarian one, and it should have an effect on us all.

The ministries at our parish in Mexicali have never been limited to just our parishioners.



In fact, it is our parishioners, poor themselves, who, with our backing and your generosity, gather and distribute food, clothing, and supplies to those even less fortunate. We also donate regularly to migrant shelters and provide daily transportation there to those wandering and vulnerable, not knowing what to do next.

“For in the final analysis...we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.” ~JFK

Upcoming Mission Appeals

Due to unexpected health concerns of our director Fr. Jordan Bradshaw, O.P., the following priests have stepped up to cover for him as listed, and we are very grateful:

- June 3-4: St. Maria Goretti, Elk Grove, *Fr. Carl Schlichte*
- June 3-4: St. Louis Bertrand, Oakland, *Fr. Michael Fones*
- June 10-11: St. Dominic, Benicia, *Fr. Martin Walsh*
- July 15-16: St. Dominic, San Francisco, *Fr. Martin Walsh*
- Aug. 5-6: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Rowland Heights, *Fr. Tim Conlan*
- Aug. 19-20: St. Teresa of Avila, Carson City, *Fr. Tim Conlan*
- Aug. 26-27: Corpus Christi, Carson City, *Fr. Michael Fones*

More to come!