

Mission Trip Impact - **ALMS** by Bobbi Kinne

Several weeks before our trip, Family Missions Company sent two young men to St. Mary's for an orientation meeting. They told us about the work we'd be doing, the little town where we would be working and the people we'd be meeting. Among other questions, we asked how much money we would need. The missionaries suggested a few things we might want to spend money on—a meal during our day in the nearby big city, maybe soda & snacks at the corner store in General Cepeda — then, almost as an afterthought, they mentioned we might want to bring some money for alms. They explained that sometimes people come to the door and ask for help, usually with medical issues. FMC has a little infirmary, but often money is needed for medication, doctor visits and surgeries. When someone asks for help, the FMC missionaries simply make an announcement to whoever is in the mission house at the moment, explain the situation and the cost and ask if anyone has any alms to give. The young men didn't emphasize alms at all. I suppose they were so accustomed to the situation, that they didn't realize that we didn't understand how significant alms were. I've dealt with St. Mary's Lenten alms over the years—diapers, detergent, pasta, canned fruit, peanut butter, tuna, money for the mission trips or SVDP, etc., etc but I've always been one step removed from the person who received them. It's really different when you stand face-to-face with someone who so desperately needs something that we take for granted.

We arrived at the mission house, which had been closed for several weeks, about 11pm on a Saturday. By Sunday morning word had spread that the missionaries had returned and people started coming. They knocked on the door, sick children in their arms, other children hiding behind them, prescriptions in hand, looks of hope and fear on their faces. All day long they sat patiently waiting—3 or 4 little families in the shade of the mission house courtyard, more waiting in line outside the door in the hot sun. As quickly as they could Sheila or Alyse, FMC missionaries, would talk to them. If FMC's supply of over-the-counter meds was not up to the task, Sheila or Alyse would come to the visiting missionaries (us) and tell us their story. *"This woman's husband has gone to Monterrey looking for work. She hasn't heard from him in two weeks and now their child has a upper respiratory infection and needs an antibiotic. Does anyone have any alms they can give?"* Or *"This woman is 6 months pregnant and she's having some complications and needs to see a specialist. She doesn't have enough money for an appointment. Does anybody have any alms they can give?"* Or *"This man broke his arm working and there's no such thing as Worker's Comp in Mexico. If he doesn't get it surgically set he'll never be able to use it again and he'll have a hard time earning money for his family. Does anybody have any alms they can give?"* The endless line of people who needed help was hard to believe. It became a bit mind-numbing after while. It became a bit dis-heartening too. We weren't going to be able to help them all. We, the visiting missionaries, reached into our pockets and purses. American dollars were not useful in the small town. How soon we could get somewhere to exchange them for pesos? On Thursday we went to a large town nearby to go to mass at the cathedral, pick up some supplies for the mission house and visit the bazaar. At a bank, we seriously annoyed the teller by insisting on 20 & 50 peso bills (about \$1.80 & \$4.20 US) in exchange for our America money. He wanted to give us big bills so that he wouldn't have to count them all out. We wanted small bills so that we could have alms for everyone who knocked. At the bazaar our group bought very few souvenirs. We had a better use for our money.

I worked with Sheila and Alyse for the whole week whereas the rest of our group rotated through the construction tasks. I saw *all* the people who came, heard *all* of the stories. The alms requests had a big impact on me. What will happen to that little girl with the tumor? What about that newborn infant with pneumonia? What about that 14 year old girl whose parents abandoned her? I don't know the end of any of their stories, but I know there are millions of people in similar, desperate situations throughout the world. I'd like the parish to know that the student missionaries responded generously to the alms requests—the parish can be proud of them. Most came back home with empty pockets. Some didn't have enough cash for the dollar menu at the fast-food joint where we had lunch on the drive home. And some of the money raised and donated for the trip went to alms.

I ask everyone who reads this to pray for alms, to pray for people in need, for parents who are frightened for their children's health and future, for generous hearts and a fair sharing of the world's resources, and for missionaries.



Sarah Rings entertains two little ones whose parents are waiting to talk to Sheila.