

Christmas in the colonias remains inspiring, humbling, and filled with the spirit and true meaning of Christmas.

As a result of the generosity of supporters, we were able to send several children to the large hospitals in Monterrey where they received medical care ranging from surgery to chemotherapy. Juan Pedro was so happy to have his prosthetic leg modified. (He experienced a growth spurt since the beginning of school and the leg no longer fit). There is probably only one thing worse than seeing your child in the hospital receiving surgery or cancer treatment and that is not being able to see your child receive the urgent care. The families and Paper Houses Across the Border thank the families that helped us at Christmas.



Paper Houses also was able to sponsor six Christmas parties for the children of the poor and we provided gifts, sweets and Christmas decorations. We also provided gifts of food to over one hundred families.

I visited the Emmaus shelter for immigrants and provided clothing, food and other items to the 112-men at the shelter. Most of these men were arrested in Arizona, flown to Del Rio and then deported to Acuña. Several have families that are U.S. citizens that remain in the United States. Some were taken to the USA when they were children and lived in the U.S. for 20-years. All were returned to Mexico with only the clothes on their backs. They can only remain at the shelter for 3-days. Most end up sleeping in back alleys and in doorways. Although many will be eligible for a free bus ticket back to their village, there is a three week wait for these tickets because of the large number of deportees in Acuña. Paper Houses does not support illegal immigration and we actively discourage people considering such a trip. However, these returning people have nothing. They are hungry, thirsty, in need of clothing – they are a living example of the Christian Beatitudes. Their personal stories are stunning.

Walking the dirt streets of the colonias as Christmas draws near is always a thoughtful experience. So many of the working poor have nothing. Although many of the cardboard houses are gone, the small cinder-block houses built by the families are pitiful. No heat, no water, no electricity and little furniture are the common situation. Those living in the houses built by construction companies are perfect examples of why I must walk door to door to understand the poor. House payments are payroll deducted, so there is no such thing as waiting an extra week to make a payment. These families purchase only a few dollars of groceries each week. Yet, amidst this poverty I constantly see happy people. They remain hopeful. They believe that the New Year will be better. They focus on every blessing. Their biggest joy is the joy of their children. Family and friends are the source of their happiness.

Playing with the children was a source of my happiness. The children are so happy to receive even the smallest gift. As one little girl unwrapped a doll I purchased for a dollar, her eyes grew wide. Her mother said that this was the first Christmas gift she received, although she is four years old. She said, "We try to give each child an orange or maybe a piece of used clothing we purchase on the street. We don't have money for toys."



Although only a few homes had Christmas decorations, everywhere I stopped there was the spirit of Christmas. I had tins of homemade Christmas cookies that I baked just before my trip. Sharing these with families gathered around a stove or even a camp-fire was better than the finest party I ever attended.

It was cold when I left Acuña. Although I was tired, there was no danger of falling asleep while driving home. I was charged with so many thoughts and experiences that the return trip home went by very quickly. I am a lucky man to be the delivery boy for so many generous people.

*Merry Christmas*