

Teens Make a Compassionate Impact
By Frank K. Meyer
and Pastor Ric Lehman

In partnership with The Church at the Santa Barbara Theater and CompassioNet Impact, 45 teenagers from Vineyard Churches in the United States recently served local churches and the poor and disenfranchised in Banderas Bay. These teams proved that many teenagers are compassionate and giving.

The Church at the Santa Barbara hosted these teams from Kansas City, Missouri and Fort Collins, Colorado. Some slept on church floors, others spread out in local homes. Part of their time in Puerto Vallarta was spent serving local churches by leading Vacation Bible Schools in San Vicente, Nayarit and Ixtapa. They also visited the orphanage, Casa Hogar, and served water and Popsicles to children living outside and workers at the local dump. They served part of their time with CompassioNet Impact, a nonprofit group whose vision is to give the poor and disenfranchised the opportunity to change their circumstances through small business loans, home improvement loans and English classes. They finished a beauty salon built for a single mom to work out of her home and started a new home for an elderly couple.

My wife and I hosted ½ of a team from Fort Collins, Colorado in our home in Conchas Chinas, Casa Pacifica. We had 5 of the adult leaders and 5 teenagers, all 13 years old, all the males on this Jr. High-aged team. On two occasions, the women and the girls, eight of them, joined the male half of the team to feast on chicken and fixings and frolic in our pool. This is my perspective as a host of this team's journey.

The group arrived on Saturday late afternoon, and settled in quickly. About an hour later, Pastor Ric brought the female half of the team, the local staff, and enough food to feed twice as many, and we all indulged ourselves. The teens were hungry after a full day of traveling, but looking back, it seems like they were always hungry! Of course, after the feast was over, they all hit the pool.

The next morning being Sunday, everyone was up, fed and ready to leave for worship services at the Santa Barbara Theater by 9 am. Pastor Ric starts his Sunday Worship Service promptly at 9:30 am. After the church services were over, the team headed over to Pastor Ric and Joy's house for hamburgers on the grill and some playtime on Playa los Camarones. The rest of the afternoon and evening was spent on practicing dramas and songs in Spanish, teachings, prayer,

and other preparations necessary for the upcoming outreaches. Of course there was the mandatory experiencing of the Malecon Walk on Sunday evening along with its fireworks display.

Monday was a day off for the support staff who had already put in over ten straight days with earlier teams so this team spent some time experiencing Sayulita Life. Some learned to surf, some shopped, some body surfed or boogie boarded, but all ate fresh fish tacos and fajitas and had a good time far from the Rocky Mountains back home.

The day of rest was certainly appreciated because early on Tuesday morning after a team meeting and prayer for the day, the teens attacked large holes with shovels and picks, built rebar pillars, and mixed concrete by hand for the foundation and structural supports of a new home for a 70-year-old couple who care for their 9-year-old grandson. The teens raised enough money for their mission trip and \$100 more each for the materials necessary for their service.

Wednesday morning the team converged on Casa Hogar to spend some time playing with the children there. The team took fresh fruit, soccer balls, bubbles, Frisbees, and other assorted toys to leave with the children. They thoroughly enjoyed loving the children, and obviously the little ones enjoyed the attention they received. After eating a sack lunch, the team bought Popsicles and over 10 cases of liter bottles of water out of their own money and headed out to the city dump where they passed out water and popsicles to all who were working there separating the garbage looking for anything to re-cycle or sell, in order to feed their families. Any time of year, but especially in the summertime, this is a real stinking job.

All day Thursday was spent cleaning up a vacant house and lot in Ixtapa which was kindly donated for use as the Vacation Bible School headquarters. The teens again bought all the supplies and tools for the cleanup along with all the supplies and materials for the VBS, which included, besides the teaching materials, tarps for shade and swimming pools for playtime. By Thursday late afternoon, everything was ready for the classes to begin the next morning.

On Friday, their last work day here, the team helped teach the 45 children in attendance about Jesus through songs, crafts, games and, of course, hands on love and compassion. At the beginning of the day, the Mexican children were a little shy and reserved, but by the end of the session, they were all over their American counterparts, hugging and kissing them goodbye with tears in their eyes.

On Saturday they were up early again to pack, eat, debrief and go to the airport for their flight to Denver, Colorado. Unfortunately, one of the girls lost her passport and ended up staying with Pastor Ric and Joy an extra ten days.

Before they left Casa Pacifica, I asked the boys what they thought about their time in Puerto Vallarta. Jacob Dietrich said, “The trip was awesome. Being out at the City Dump really opened my eyes and gave me a whole different perspective after seeing how these people live. What they have to do to survive. Another highlight for me was Vacation Bible School on Friday. Being accepted and hugged by these children was an experience I won’t soon forget.”

Brandon Krebs was quick to agree with Jacob. He added, “For me it was great to be with those children at Casa Hogar. They seemed to really like to have us there with them.”

The other 3 boys, Michael Winner, Caden Duve’, and Eric Sutherland all agreed that experiencing life in the poorer colonias of Puerto Vallarta changed their outlook on many things in life. When asked if they would like to return to work here again, they all shouted, “You bet!”

Maybe more importantly though is how the locals felt about these Christian teenagers being in Puerto Vallarta. The pastors that these teens worked with unanimously gave invitations for them to return. CompassioNet Impact and the Church at the Santa Barbara have also invited them back. But maybe it was Ramon, the grandfather, who said it best: As he watched these young volunteers work on his home, he kept repeating, “I can’t believe this is happening.” Believe it Ramon because just like for your home, a foundation has been laid, you will see them again!

This is the day the Lord has made, rejoice and be glad in it 😊