

## **Day 1 - 12/27**

From the moment I left Oklahoma City on Friday night, I knew God was going to do great things on this trip. Early on in the adventure, God proved to us that He was in control of it all and that we should fully rely on Him. Our van lost control on an icy highway outside of Ruidoso, New Mexico sending us barreling into a guard rail and without headlights to go any further. To be honest, it was a difficult way to begin a trip that I was already anxious about. But, God had other plans for us in Mexico and needed us there. This incident happened about four o'clock on Saturday morning.

By 2:30 on Saturday afternoon, I was sitting in a van waiting to cross the border. I noticed many people walking up and down between the cars, buses, and vans selling food, jewelry, begging, and washing windows. I had read about this sort of lifestyle and witness it at the very beginning. People have to create ways to make money to support their families. The Mexican people want to work, yet there are not enough employment opportunities for them. In Oklahoma City, I see maybe one or two people on a street corner holding signs and asking for money, but in Mexico they worked for what they were given and there were many of them.

After safely crossing the border, we finally made it to Chihuahua around eight o'clock that evening. We had traveled for twenty four hours straight and we exhausted. But, as tired as our bodies were, we were anxious to get started with whatever needed to be done. That evening, at dinner, we enjoyed a delicious Mexican meal and a drink that I would describe close to kool-aid. Water was never served at dinner. It is difficult to ensure pure drinking water, therefore alternatives are served. How different that concept

is in the states. Water is the easy and accessible drink, while others are more costly and not as often ordered.

After dinner we were graciously welcomed by the District Superintendent and the local pastors of Chihuahua. The team that I joined with was assigned to Adonai Iglesia. Our pastor was Jose De La Rosa. He spoke about the need he had and how we could help him and his church. It was clear that He was passionate about the Lord. He continually told us how blessed he was to have us, yet we were the ones blessed to have them. There were many lessons that could be learned from the people of Chihuahua and we were about to find out.

## **Day 2 - 12/28**

The next morning we awoke to a Sunday morning in Chihuahua. The streets were quieter than the night before and I was able to see our surrounding much better in the daylight. There was a lot of trash blowing up and down the sidewalks, catching on odd objects and trees, but not much different than it would look in downtown Los Angeles. That morning, I realized how much I take water for granted. I had to use bottled water to rinse my toothbrush as well as to drink. And much to my surprise, we were not even able to flush toilet paper down the toilet. The things that we might not consider a luxury in America became a definite luxury in Mexico.

You could tell that many of us had preconceived ideas about the churches in our heads by our choice of clothing. I lucked out by wearing tennis shoes with my jean skirt. Others were not so lucky. Some of the women wore shorter skirts and very high heels. We assume that most churches are like ours; A nice building with an organized parking

lot in front and greeters at the door handing our bulletins. Adonai Iglesia was different. There was no parking lot, only an unpaved alley way that did not pull right up to the front door of the church. We had to climb very steep concrete steps on the side of a mountain and then walk a sandy and rugged path a few steps down to the church. On the right side of the path were, what looked like, piles of useless scrap material that were houses of the local people and on the left was a very busy railroad.

As we entered the church, there were about ten people of the congregation already seated. The inside was only one large room with half concrete floor, half dirt floor, concrete walls, visible wires, and white lawn chairs for the congregation to sit on. There were no bathrooms and no heat other than the small space heater at the front of the building. At the front they had a single white board with updates about the church on it, a wire podium, and a single speaker with microphones plugged into it. This was a much different setting than most anyone back home has ever seen in a church. And it kind of makes you think. We continually try to make things bigger and better and more technologically savvy, but are they really necessary? Many might think that it is, yet the members of Adonai proved otherwise.

The language barrier at the beginning of the week proved to be very frightening for me! I was nervous and didn't say much to them on that first day. But, I knew I was going to need to face my fear and fast.

After the service we returned to the hotel. Before dinner, we took a trip down to the Soriana, the local supermarket. What I noticed time and time again, was that grocery shopping was a family event. The entire family would shop together. At home, I am usually the only one in my family to do the grocery shopping and know that rarely do I

ever see an entire family shopping together. In Mexico they would shop with many kids, grandparents, and other family members. This demonstrated a strong bond between them all. They made decisions together. They listened to each other. Now, I understand that this is not how everyone shops in Mexico, but it looked like a high percentage, in fact, did shop as a unit.

For dessert that evening, I was able to experience the delight of a churro. What an amazing dessert. I vowed that the churro I ate would not be my last while I was in Mexico. Along with the Churro, I also tried some hot Atole. Atole was a nutty, warm, milk drink with seasonings that were unfamiliar to me. It was different than anything I had tried thus far.

### **Day 3 - 12/29**

Our first day at our church site. I was excited, yet nervous about how this day was going to go. My duty for the week was to become Cometa the clown. What a fun, yet scary task; Scary in the sense that I have never had experience as a clown. But, who would have guessed that I actually had a bit of talent as a clown. I guess that was due to my ability to be goofy without feeling embarrassed. The kids loved it! And I LOVED them! From the first moment I met them and played with them, I knew that it was going to be hard to leave them. They loved the candy and stickers that we handed out to them. We played all morning into the afternoon. There even came a point where it was only the kids and I. I unfortunately had no idea what they were saying to me. It was extremely hard having the language barrier. I wished so bad that I could have spoken more with them. But, during that moment, there was a little boy who actually knew English. He was

ten and his name was Jose. His family lived in New Mexico and He was in Chihuahua visiting His extended family. He was a blessing to have at that moment. A few minutes into playing a soccer game, Jose came up to me with his cousins, Bere and Susanna. Bere asked me if I was a Christian. And I responded “yes”. Jose then explained to me that he and his cousins were Christians too. Their parents were pastors in New Mexico and also in Chihuahua. What a joyful experience to share so early on with those kids! Much to my surprise, the kids basically roamed around all day once the VBS ended. No one went home for lunch which made me feel guilty for breaking for lunch. But, they stayed with us for most of the day and we played.

The pastor’s wife, Maria, and a few other women of the church fixed lunch for our team. They waited till everyone got to eat before any of the local church family ate anything. It was delicious. We had bean, rice, and tortillas. We ate in their parsonage which made me think of the parsonage of my pastor. They barely had working water, had one bedroom for five kids, one bathroom which had a wooden door that could barely be even called a door, and a partially constructed shower. This hurt my heart. The people in Chihuahua have barely anything in their homes and yet we have too much in ours, but think it is not enough.

The first day was an extremely draining day! I was confronted with the many things I take for granted and the luxuries I have at home. By the end of the day, I wished that I would have brought more for the people of Chihuahua. I felt selfish for not bringing all that I could. They had needs that I would have never thought of had I not seen them with my own eyes.

#### **Day 4 - 12/30**

Today was the second day that I got to “clown” around. We saw kids that we had met from the previous day and also new faces that had heard about VBS from the day before. Along with VBS and construction that our team was doing on this day, we also had the medical team with us. Space was limited, so we had to get creative about where everyone would be stationed. But, even though it was a bit cramped for the day, it didn’t bother the local people. They came seeking help and our medical team did all in their power to do what was necessary.

During VBS, we handed out beanie babies to all of the kids. Surprisingly we found two different kinds of attitudes when handing out the gifts to the kids. The first attitude was of gratitude. They were thankful for anything that they received. Yet, the second attitude was of discontent, much like a spoiled child in America that received a play station two instead of a play station three for Christmas. Some of the kids wanted to trade and didn’t like what they were given. I was a bit confused by this sort of attitude. Was it because they never received anything that they wanted and felt that we were people who wanted to accommodate their desire? Or was it a sort of attitude that they had been raised with in their family? Whatever caused this sort of reaction, I was not sure. But, either way, I was happy to give what we could to them.

For lunch, much to my taste bud surprise, we had spicy pork rinds. I wasn’t quite sure what it was by looking at it, but once I tasted it, I knew. It was way too hot for my mild likings. I tried my hardest to eat it, but unfortunately had to pass on that part of the meal. They asked me why I wasn’t eating it, which made me cringe. I hate to refuse their food! But, it made me choke due to its heat so I just told them that I was not able to

handle spicy food. They graciously gave me extra beans and noodles and understood my non ability to eat a spicy meal.

That evening, we went out to see the center of Chihuahua. I had never seen so many street vendors in one place before. There were tables set up with jewelry, bracelets, clothes, food, pictures with Santa, purses, and many, many more homemade products. Most of the people were kinds, knowing by our looks that we were not local people. Yet, we occasionally ran into the ones that were not so keen on our presence. One man in particular seemed as though he was ready to take out his aggression on us physically so we quickly turned in the opposite direction. But, most were very kind and helpful when we needed help while shopping. What I noticed time after time, was the fact that children could be seen working everywhere. Education seemed to be put on the backburner while money became first priority. Kids sat on the street corners, alone, playing accordions, dancing, and begging for money. Some sat at food stands and worked the money part of the booth while their parents cooked behind them. This is a much different lifestyle than I am use to in America. I could never imagine any of the children I know going and sitting on a street corner in downtown Oklahoma City and working for change. The priority is to keep kids in school. Kids, by choice, will drop out of school in the states while children in Chihuahua would give anything to be in school. There are laws even stated that kids are not to be working until a proper age in America. But, what are families to do in Mexico? They cannot afford to put their children in school all day and make enough money on their own to live off of. How can this change? What could ever turn this way of life around?

By the end of this evening, I finally felt a sense of comfort being in Mexico. I didn't feel uneasiness about being in a new country. I was beginning to fall in love with the people and their country.

### **Day 5 - 12/31**

Today, VBS had a different structure to it. Instead of our team leading all the songs and puppets, we had the local women of the church lead the children. They had been attending the past couple of days and watching. We later found out that they were Sunday School teachers and really wanted to be involved. So, we took a step back and allowed them to teach for the day. What a new sense of unity among us all. I continued my clown duty for the day and was thrilled when one of the little girls of the church, Celeste, volunteered to be my little clown buddy. We put makeup on her and dressed her in a clown suite and let her jump around and have fun with us and the kids. It was funny to watch the kids as they paid way more attention to the teachers than they ever paid to us. You could tell that they had established their authority.

Due to the New Years Eve service that evening, we left early and went back to the hotel to prepare. We dressed up and prepared a piñata for the kids. We quickly learned that there is a certain way to stuff a piñata. We stuffed it and took it to the service, but only after one hit from a young girl, it fell. The pastor kindly told us to just bring them the next piñata on Friday and they would be happy to stuff it for us. Stuffing a piñata is definitely harder than it looks! But, the New Year's eve celebration was one to remember. We sat and listened to beautiful songs, watched a great skit put on by the teens of the church, and listened to a sermon taught by the pastor's son, Alfredo. Afterward, we

ate a wonderful meal together. They asked that we all be seated first and they would serve us. We danced, sang music together in both Spanish and English, and fellowshiped with one another. One little girl, who seemed to connect with me in a special way, introduced me to her mother, Margarit. It was interesting to try and communicate, but we both did our best and bonded. She said that she was a local children's pastor at another church and was a clown there. It was a wonderful experience.

One thing, that was a bit funny to me, was the fact that this was the first time anyone had seen me without my clown outfit and at first didn't recognize who I was. Once they found out that I was "Cometa" they couldn't believe it. They also were crazy about my bright blond hair. Everyone wanted a picture with me. It was then explained to me that blond hair was thought of, in Mexico, as very beautiful and rare. I would even get stopped in the town center and asked about my hair by the women of Chihuahua. They constantly would ask me if it was natural which I then had to timidly respond with a "no".

## **Day 6 - 12/1**

Happy New Year! For our New Years festivities, all of the churches and commission teams went to a local park to fellowship with one another. It was a bit awkward having the language barrier, but we all seem to have a very fun time. The kids got to hit another piñata and we played sword drills with the people of our church. One thing I did though seemed to make the experienced team members nervous. I allowed the kids to take pictures and videos with my camera. One team member said she couldn't believe I trusted them enough and that I had a lot of faith in them to run off with it. This

was a thought that never even crossed my mind. Luckily, their intentions were honest and I got some of my best videos and pictures from allowing them this privilege.

We played from about noon till five o' clock that evening and really just enjoyed each other's company. By the end of that day together, many of us wanted to continue to be with them. So once we got back to the hotel, we met up with our local church members in the center and enjoyed more time together. One of the members knew a bit of English and wanted us to teach him other words. It was fun to share our languages back and forth. I learned more about the Spanish language in one week than I ever learned in school.

### **Day 7 - 12/2**

This morning, I couldn't believe that it would be the last morning with the church. It was a difficult day. We all knew what was going to happen at the end of the day and seemed to try and avoid the thought until the very last moment. These people had become like family to us in such a short amount of time. We handed out many toys and gifts to the kids which seemed like Christmas to them. Their pockets were filled with toys and pencils when they left. But, they didn't want to see us go. Bere, a little girl from Chihuahua, took me by the hand and led me up the hill to walk with her. We could not speak much to each other, but we could just be enjoying the last moments with each other. We walked on the railroad, hopping from one end to the other, as other kids began to join us. Then we just sat and played by their house. This was the most fun I had had all week. Just sitting with the kids and listening to them talk and have fun and being content with life. They didn't need all of the luxuries that our children seem to need to have fun.

They led simple lives and got to enjoy family bonds amongst each other; something that we seem to lack in this day in age.

Tears began to flow heavily as we all loaded up for the last time. Tight hugs were given along with blessings and thanks. They had impacted our lives, just as we had impacted theirs. But, what I found to be a comfort was the fact that even though we were leaving, I felt that this little church was going to thrive and survive. They had a wonderful, strong church core, and people who believed firmly in Christ Jesus. This church knew what it meant to be a church and by our one week of door to door evangelism we hope that it allows them to grow and prosper. What a joy to have met our brothers and sisters in Christ that live in Chihuahua.

### **Day 8 - 12/3**

I will never forget the people of Chihuahua and will be anxious for a day when I can return to see them again. And if it not be in Chihuahua, I pray that it will be in heaven.