
THE GOOD NEWS OF CRISTO REY

Milagros

April 2003

La Gran Familia

The love continues to spread! Two stories of new friends...

By Becky McClure

After many months of absence from the dusty town of Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, I drove up to the orphanage one chilly evening in February and saw through the window a beautiful yellow room glowing with smiling faces enjoying a delicious supper at the dining tables. As I entered, I smiled at old friends and was introduced to new ones. Gloria was cooking in the kitchen with her daughter, Diana, age 15, and Diana's friend, Minerva. You may remember from the previous newsletter that Gloria, her son, Carlos Mario, age 5, and her daughter, Diana, began to help with the orphanage after the tragic death of her husband and thirteen-year-old son in a car accident.



Gloria presents Angelito – 20 months old

Amidst the children's faces, I noticed a tiny one and Goretty exclaimed, "Becky, look, it's Angelito! He's been with us for fifteen days." Angelito was dressed in a plaid collared shirt tucked into khaki pants and eating with a fork at the table with the "big boys." Goretty told me that his mother had abandoned him at the local welfare office and La Gran Familia was contacted to offer the child refuge. Seeing Angel's beautiful face, my eyes filled with tears knowing how abundantly love heals. The rest of the evening the house buzzed with homework, prayers, television and baths before bed. Watching the children play who once were left alone in dark places hungry and frightened at night, I wished that everyone could see firsthand the impact of their love and support. As Father Greg used to say, "thank you so much for all that you do" and, as for our newest member of the family, "Welcome, precious Angel!"

News from Cuauhtemoc

A report from Glenn Polhemus...

CRISTO REY FUNDING

\$1,000 a month is spent on providing funding to sustain Cristo Rey Anglican church in Cuauhtemoc. Fr. Ernest Buchanan is currently serving as head of this congregation and you may read his report on page 5 for further details of his work with this community.

OPERATING AN ORPHANAGE

Approx. \$4,000 a month is spent on sustaining the ministry of La Gran Familia. The ministry is also supported in other ways by the local community. There is an anonymous group of wives of local businessmen who check with director, Goretty Lerma, monthly to assess physical needs of this growing family. Daily donations of milk, honey, tortillas and, most recently, an *entire side of beef* are provided by various individuals and businesses. Also, a local psychologist donates time weekly to work with everyone, including Gloria and Goretty. My son, Garrett, participated in one of the psychologist's weekly visits. He led the group through a contemplative meditation exercise while reading a series of positive self-esteem messages. This psychologist also works with the kids individually as needed.

DONOR CHALLENGE

La Gran Familia would like to purchase the three vacant lots adjacent to the orphanage. \$12,000 is needed and Fr. Russell Fisher from St. John's, Brownwood promises that their church will donate one dollar for every two dollars donated up to \$4,000. Please mark your donation for land purchase is you wish to participate in this challenge. †

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Paco and his brother, Alfredo

By Becky McClure

A story of survival

I am not quite sure how to introduce you to Paco and Alfredo, but I will start by telling you that Goretty found them in jail four weeks ago. Paco is eleven years old and his brother, Alfredo, is five. They were incarcerated in an adult jail for stealing and were left alone to negotiate this world by their drug addicted mother.

As I observed them interacting with La Gran Familia, I noticed that they behaved as if they were just slightly out of place...jockeying for attention, somewhat rough around the edges, quick to be frustrated with the rules of communal living even to the point of throwing hard well-aimed punches. However, I did notice that both of them existed among the group with a certain intelligence. They studied the dynamics of the group. Both children have expressions that one can read easily. Goretty and Gloria direct them firmly in the ways of living with La Gran Familia. I marveled at Goretty's strength and willingness to mold new persons into this amazing family. Paco and Alfredo both have a light complexion and dimples when they smile. Alfredo cries often and moves to an isolated spot when he encounters difficulty. Paco checks with his brother and then moves on, continuing the work of getting to know his new family.

My first close interaction with Paco came when our mission group of 47 folks from San Angelo, Abilene, Amarillo, and North Carolina initiated an art project. A few of us gathered eight of the children and asked them to think of their dreams, hopes and prayers for their neighborhood, Cuauhtemoc and the rest of the world. Next, they were to illustrate those thoughts with paint on small white squares. Eventually, these paintings would be culled and chosen to be large outdoor paintings to share with the community. To my surprise, it was like a gathering of fine race horses intent on their purpose. We, the experienced artists, gave little instruction as these children confidently poured out their souls on to the paper. I quickly realized that three pieces of paper would not do for each child. My mother began to cut additional squares...not only were their artistic talents sure, but they had many prayers and hopes to express. No child was concerned with the work of another and each painted a stream of thoughts.

Now, let me tell you about Paco. Paco painted many squares. One was a scrumptious page of stripes of color. After this

painting session, I interviewed the artists to document their prayers verbatim. Paco, one would assume from the short fuse I had witnessed and his difficult life would surely paint about anger and darkness, but as I looked at the glorious strips of color, he told me that he prayed for a life full of colors and not a life of just one color but many. He also painted a man holding the world in his hands. I was certain this was about world peace or God holding the world in his hands, but, no, Paco told me that he prayed for more sports in the world so that people would have good things to do!

And listen to my next encounter with Paco. After the mission group returned for home, I stayed at La Gran Familia another week. The busyness and excitement of the previous week was gone and the house returned its daily routine with chores, many mouths to feed, baths on chilly nights, etc.

One night, I was wandering around looking for something to do that might help Goretty and I decided to organize the many books that have been donated. I was curious to check out the inventory and make mental notes of what sort of books the house may be lacking. St. Catherine's Guild from Emmanuel, San Angelo donated many books to start their children's library last year so I hoped to return to them with a report. Anyway, it was a giant chore...there are hundreds of books and I was wishing for the Dewey Decimal System when Paco showed up and enthusiastically offered to help me. I explained that I was stacking books into early reading, storybooks, science, travel, history, novels, etc. Well, Paco's eyes lit up and he went to work!

I kid you not, this kid who has lived in the house only three weeks was familiar with nearly half the books on their shelves. He kept shouting out, "Oh, have you read this book! It is very interesting. Let me tell you about it..." and then, he would tell me the story. At first I assumed he was telling me of the pictures as if he had skimmed the pages, until he recounted The Hobbit by Tolkien!!! This eleven year old child who has been raising his five year old brother because of their drug addicted mother and has just been rescued from jail for stealing has read The Hobbit in his short three weeks at La Gran Familia. I descended to the first floor to express my amazement to Goretty and she said, "Yes, it is almost a problem. Paco wants to take four or five books to bed with him every night and I tell him to just take one." I advised Goretty that it would probably be better to give Paco unlimited access to the books.

I would like to close this story with a story that my sister shared with me before we left for Cuauhtemoc. Susan and her husband, Craig, once left their secure jobs to work for a homeless shelter in New York. She said that they proudly packed their things to head out and share all of the strength and stability they possessed. However, upon arrival they looked into the faces of the children and, to their surprise, saw towers of strength, people who had survived unimaginable trials. Susan shared with me that she fell on her knees in prayer..."God, what do I have to give? I am only a whisper of a human being in comparison to these children." God grant us the strength and courage to love.

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A CINDERELLA NIGHT FOR ALL

At the time of the death of her father and brother, Diana, was planning a glorious fiesta to celebrate her fifteenth birthday. After the devastation of their loss, Gloria, Diana and Carlos Mario cancelled their quinceañera plans. They each had serious physical challenges to overcome. Carlos Mario faced learning to walk again and Diana's left arm carries a thick 12 inch scar to remind her of the desperate attempts to salvage use of her limb. Anyway, with the help of La Gran Familia over one year after their loss and the miraculous healing of wounds, the entire family celebrated the gift of life at Diana's quinceañera. The evening began with a birthday church service at Cristo Rey and followed with the glorious traditional quinceañera ball.

Adding to the enchantment of the occasion, the young men of La Gran Familia were Diana's gracious courtiers for the evening. Tears rolled down my cheeks when I entered the ballroom and saw Jesus, Javi and Meny handsomely greeting the many guests in their tuxedos.

For those of you who are just hearing of this ministry, these three brothers were among the first recipients of the "Cristo Rey Baths" by the newly formed Cristo Rey church in Cuauhtemoc in 1996. The women who had become the vestry of the church asked what a church was supposed to do and Greg Spinks' answer was, "You tell me what the people in this neighborhood need." The women replied that the local children needed bathing. Jesus, Javi and Meny were suffering from malnutrition, eating out of trashcans, and filthy with matted hair and lice. They were bathed by the women of the church twice a week and provided with daily rations of food. Later, they were removed from custody of their alcoholic father due to further evidence of neglect by the social service agency and La Gran Familia was there to welcome them.

At the start of the ball, Diana's new family from La Gran Familia took their places in the glamorous dance salon to celebrate this rite of passage with style. Lino, Pablo, Arcilio, Jesus, and Juan were among the young gentlemen who waltzed with young women dressed in pink satin. Beautiful Mexican traditions like exchanging the shoes of a girl for the shoes of a young lady were observed and the evening was magical. Our mission group of 47 felt privileged to be able to attend.

The next morning I needed a companion to drive with me to Juarez. The oldest boy, Pablo, age 16, accompanied me. I picked Pablo up early in the morning at the barely painted, humble property that his very large family calls home. When we began to talk about the quinceañera, he beamed with delight. He said, "I never knew that I could dance. When they asked if I would dance in the quinceañera, I said...what? I don't know how to dance, but they taught us and in one night I found out that I can dance and I can dance well!" *Halleluiah!* *Bv Beckv McClure*



Wesley Fletcher, Youth Director of St. Francis Church, led her first Mexico Mission Trip to Chihuahua in March. A group of fourteen were assisted by Harold Mueller to work a few days at Santiago Apostol, Helmut Schreiber's church in Chihuahua and then they led a one day kite workshop at La Gran Familia in Cuauhtémoc. There also presented special gifts. For, example, a boy named Justin gave the kids a collection of some of his favorite books as a child that he had found and purchased in Spanish. *Gracias!*

ST. JOHN'S WYOMING KIDS

RAISE MONEY FOR LA GRAN FAMILIA KIDS

Last Fall, November 17, the Gospel lesson was Matthew 25:14-30, the parable of the talents. It was also First Communion Sunday at St. John's. Fr. Lin Knight gave each of the new communicants a \$5 bill, with the challenge to use it as seed money to raise funds for the kids in Cuauhtemoc. With a little help from parents, several of the boys got busy in the kitchen making and selling cupcakes, pumpkin raisin nut bread and barbeque sauce. Other projects included making and selling soap, clearing leaves with a leaf blower, shoveling snow, and making Christmas cards from blank cards. These junior entrepreneurs raised \$186 for the kids at La Gran Familia. †

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

The paintings produced by the kids of La Gran Familia are going to become part of a fundraising effort. Look for an announcement about printed notecards in the near future!

THANK YOU, ASHEVILLE SCHOOL

Sarah McClure, San Angelo, Tx. invited friends from Asheville, North Carolina to join a mission trip sponsored by Emmanuel and Good Shepherd churches in San Angelo and Heavenly Rest Church, Abilene, Tx. A group of seven went the distance to spend their Spring Break in Chihuahua. Good friends were made and beautiful gifts like comfy pajama pants were brought to La Gran Familia. These kids also outfitted Diana with a portable CD player and cool American music for her quiceañera...*que padrisimo! Gracias!*

Operating an Orphanage

A little goes a very long way in Cuauhtemoc

By Glenn Polhemus

Since the La Gran Familia began, I have often been amazed at how economical it is to care for children in Mexico. I have served on the board of a children's home in the US and have spent time studying the cost of childcare. The average cost for a child in the US who uses the public school system is \$100 per day. The home on whose board I served provided a cottage family environment and their cost was about \$200 per child per day.

La Gran Familia provides care for 21 children and has a budget of less than \$60,000 (US dollars) per year. This is a daily cost of \$7.83 per child per day. For that, the children receive food, lodging, clothes, medical care, education, tutoring, psychological treatment, and lots and lots of baseball, love and pizza! La Gran Familia is an absolute Godsend for the children who live there. Thank God that the dollars go so far in the care of the children in Cuauhtemoc because the need is so great.

By the way, the operating funds for this project are not commingled in any way with funds in the Anglican Diocese of Northern Mexico.

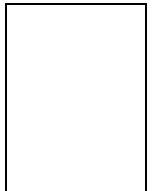
Newsletter comments or questions may be sent to: Becky McClure at bggs@aol.com

THE GOOD NEWS CONTINUES...

"THANK GOD FOR ALL THAT YOU
DO" SALUTATION TO ALL FROM
FATHER GREG SPINKS

SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL WHO HELP MAKE THE
MINISTRIES OF CRISTO REY AND LA GRAN
FAMILIA A REALITY. YOU ARE TRULY
CHANGING LIVES. MAY WE CONTINUE TO
FIND WAYS TO HELP.

Iglesia Anglicana Cristo Rey
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