

Looking Through The “Eyeglasses” of Love

A story published in The Central Virginian following the Mission Trip in 1993

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Norma was among hundreds of children and adults to receive free eye exams and glasses in a portable clinic set up in churches in Pachuca, Mexico. The Louisa Lions, and the Richmond Eye Bank, generously donated used eye glasses to volunteer Partnership Mission medical teams. The teams were fielded by Goshen Baptist Association under the leadership of Tommy Dickens of Mineral.

Southern Baptist missionaries in Mexico sent out a plea for help. The poverty in the mountainous regions is great. The average income in the area is less than \$3,000 per year. People just can not afford medical care, much less eyeglasses. Virginia Baptists responded by organizing teams, churches in Mexico to work with, and providing training.

Charlie Waller of Bumpass went on a team in August that had an ophthalmologist and a pediatrician. He was surprised at how many patients were diagnosed with diabetes during the week. They were then referred to a local doctor to treat them. More than 700 patients were seen that week by the doctors.

Jeannie Bennett of Louisa went on a team in July. During that week the most common eye problems were irritation due to the wind blowing the sandy soil into eyes and sun damage. A

number of sunglasses were distributed along with eye drops to soothe the pain. Around 200 eyeglasses were dispensed that week.

A lot of preparation time had to be put in before the volunteers even set foot in Mexico. They went through a three-hour orientation in which they were given their specific assignment, information about passports and going through customs, told what to expect, what was expected of them, what to take with them (personal and work related), cultural tips of what to do or what not to do, and met their teammates for the first time. This time was to make the time in Mexico go more smoothly and efficiently and to make the volunteers feel more comfortable.

Many other volunteers were preparing also. They washed the approximately 2,300 donated glasses and packed them in zipper bags. Next the glasses were sent to Jennifer Ornduff of Boswells Tavern, Barbara Dunaway of Unionville, and Dr. Russell Beattie’s office in Mineral to have all the lens’ prescriptions read.

The glasses were recorded, organized, and packed into hard suitcases by yet another two teams of a dozen volunteers each. The doctors that were on the teams also collected prescription drugs to dispense as needed.

Four medical teams went to Mexico in 1993 organized by Goshen Baptist Association. Goshen is made up of 40 Southern Baptist Churches in Louisa, eastern Orange, lower Spotsylvania, and parts of Goochland and Fluvanna Counties. Although Goshen was the organizer not all members of teams were from Goshen churches. Many were dedicated members of other local denominations, from other parts of Virginia, and some as far away as Texas.

In April a team of four went to Mexico including a doctor who specializes in family practice medicine.

In July a team of nine went including an ophthalmologist. Also on the team were Jennie Bennett of Louisa, Barbara Page of Troy, William and Virginia "Tootie" (a dental assistant) Hughes of Gordonsville.

In August two teams went. One with Dr. Linda Abbey (family practice) from Richmond, and seven other volunteers. The second team was equipped with a pediatrician, an ophthalmologist, and eight more including Charlie Waller, pastor of Fork Baptist Church in Bumpass, Bob and Shirley Foster of Mineral, Joyce Hawk of Gum Spring, and Melva Rowe of Blue Ridge Shores. Each team had an interpreter.

The teams were met by Dr. Ervin Hastey and his wife Ruth, who are retired missionaries of the Southern Baptist Foreign Missionary Board that served in Mexico 25 years then hired by Virginia Baptists to coordinate the Partnership Missions efforts in Mexico and Costa Rica. The teams then had a field orientation where they

learned more specifics on customs and culture of the area, where they were to lodge, and where they would eat (and what not to eat).

The Sunday School rooms in the Mexican churches were turned into well organized clinics within a few minutes. Portable instruments were all they had for the examinations. A screwdriver and water that had to be heated and reheated were all one team had to fit the glasses.

Many Mexican youth and adults were eager to help in any way they could. All were grateful for the glasses, medicine, and attention that was given them.

While the people waited to see a doctor, team members handed out power band bracelets with an explanation written in Spanish. The power band bracelets were made of colored beads and leather cord and used to explain the plan of salvation. Some handed out papers to color, tracts, gave their testimony through the interpreter, played with the children outside, or made power bands.

Teammates with no experience in the medical field worked alongside the doctors and nurses providing valuable assistance by asking the patient symptoms, filling out charts, fitting glasses, and working with the ones in the waiting area.

Going home and leaving all their new friends was considered the hardest part of the trip for many.

