

When I Met Jesus & JESUS (continued from page 7)

So, what was the cost of missions for me? \$500 for a ticket? A week of time lost? Are you kidding me?

On February 1<sup>st</sup> I asked Juan to stop by my house with a calling card. He thought I wanted to call Anastasis to get updates of the ministry. I had someone else to call in mind. After a nice dinner, with the crackling of the wood burning stove near by, I presented him with the phone number that Jesus had given me. "Do you remember him?" I asked. Of course he did. Juan started dialing the long set of numbers. "This number is invalid." Again and again, the recorded message played back and the call would not go through. "Let's give it one last try." Patiently, we punched in each number. After a momentary pause, I heard it, ringing.

Did we have the right number? Would anyone pick up? Was he really out of prison? Can the Gospel really work to change the hearts of even just a few of these kids? Just one of these kids?

All I can say is that we are in touch with Jesus and we continue to encourage him through emails. He has made contact with Juan's church, Anastasis church in Mexico City. A quick update as of Easter (2007), the prison population has increased to over 650. The director's mother has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. The Anastasis prison ministry team was invited to the Director's home to pray for her mother. The prison director has also been receiving death threats by inmates that have been released, specifically, those inmates who were involved with the riot last year. Please keep this ministry in your prayers.

Dios Te Bendiga ! (God Bless You)

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

If you missed the Mexico presentation and would like to hear the testimonies of Patrick, Daniel, Juan, & Chris and see the slideshow, feel free to pick up a copy of the January 15th Missions Presentation CD at the rear table of the Church.



Today's Christian Music

Please call the Church office for more events and times 914-631-6372 or visit www.fbctarrytown.com

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# The Bright and Morning Star

"All the Good News That's Fit to Print"

Volume XV, No. 1

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, TARRYTOWN, NY

Spring 2007

## Under Construction

by Pastor Torrey Robinson

If you stop to notice what is taking place at First Baptist Church these days the progress is apparent. This issue of the Bright and Morningstar concerns God's special building project. Though the building is a long way from completion the signs of progress are worth celebrating.

As many of you know, I have been part of the building committee at FBC for a long time. And our fellowship hall project is now well underway. But even more significant than the thrilling transformation taking place in the fellowship hall is a very different kind of building project. This building is not made up of wood or stone yet it is the essence of what our church is all about.

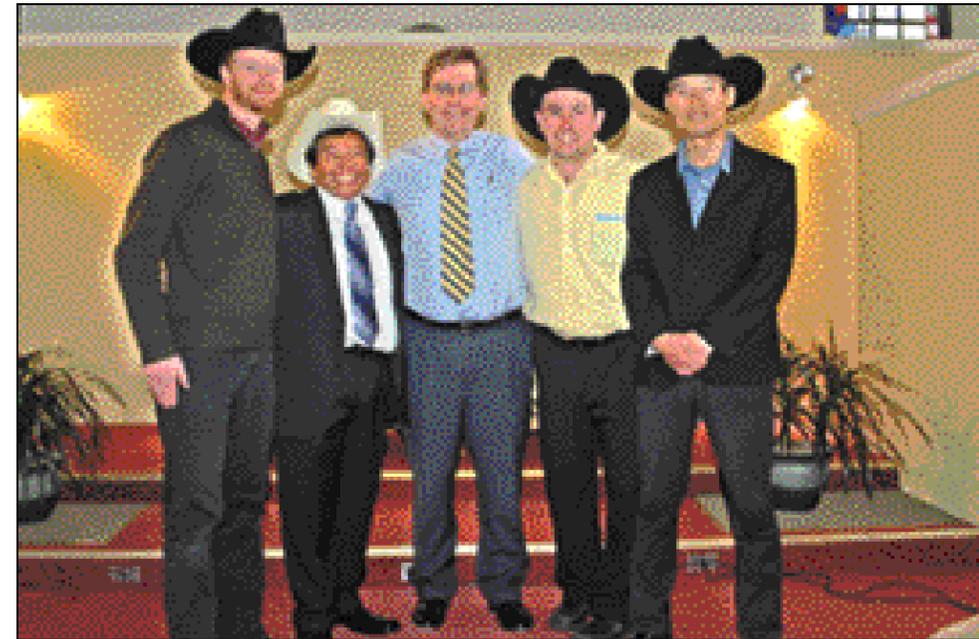
Back in December, a group of four men gave up time with family and friends during the Christmas season to do some significant building. They didn't wear hard hats, they wore cowboy hats. Their project did not involve our church building though they were very much involved with building the Church. Their work was done in a prison in Mexico among young people who spoke Spanish, yet we here in New York had a part in what they accomplished.

Jesus said, "I will build my Church." This special issue

of the Bright and Morningstar Newsletter demonstrates that Jesus is building His Church in and through us. You can see this for yourself as you read what God did through four men from First Baptist Church in a prison in Mexico. Their

was not construction with stone and wood but rather hearts transformed by God's Spirit. The Mexico mission project helped to build Christ's Church outside Mexico City yet this work was an extension of our shared ministry here in Tarrytown.

Even more than the exciting transformation you can now see taking place in the fellowship hall, this newsletter is tangible evidence that Jesus



Pastor Torrey (ctr.) stands with the Mexico mission team: (L-R) Patrick, Juan, Chris & Daniel

is using us to build His Church around the world as well as here in Westchester. As you read about what God accomplished back in December, remember the work is still not complete. God has much more work He wants to do in and through us.★

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## Why Did I Go To Mexico?

by Chris Herrmann

**Reason #1:** Juan asked me to go – and after listening to his stories of previous trips – it was apparent that there is a true need for people, for anyone really, to share God’s message with those kids in the prison in Toluca. I have a testimony, nothing too extraordinary really – but I’m usually ready, willing, & able to share it. All of us should have some kind of testimony – all of us should have a good idea of how God has changed our lives. In *1 Peter, 3:15* it says, *Always be prepared to give an answer, to everyone who asks you to give the reason, for the hope that you have.*

I know that different testimonies, impact different people, in different ways. I’ve experienced this as both a person that has given testimony and also as one who has received testimony. I didn’t go to Mexico to preach – most people know that I’m certainly not a preacher. I went down simply to share a message, my testimony, with a bunch of kids in a prison. All I did was share with the kids how the Gospel message changed my life and how it can change their lives as well. I couldn’t think of a better place than a prison at Christmastime to share the Gospel message of hope & forgiveness. A special thank you to our friend Juan, for inviting us to go...and another thank you to my small groups for giving me the funds needed to go.

**Reason #2:** I know that around 75% of Christians accept Christ before they reach the age of 21 – so while it is important for us to share Christ with everyone, in every age group, I know that the youth have always been an especially fertile Missions field.

**Reason #3:** Fellowship. Not only would I get to spend more time with Juan, Daniel, & Patrick – my friends from FBC Tarrytown. But I would also have an opportunity to work and serve with others from Anastasis Baptist Church. I’ve always considered it a privilege to serve alongside others who believe and serve the same God that we have here at FBC Tarrytown. I always walk away from Missions trips with so much learned from the others we work & serve with – I learned much from the Toluca team from Anastasis Baptist Church and I am thankful to God for the new friends I have made.

**Reason #4:** While many of my church family tolerate me on Sunday mornings and also in small groups, my wife Maria has to live with me 365 days a year. What better Christmas gift to give my beautiful, caring, and patient wife Maria - than a 1 week vaca-

tion from me. Thank you for your support baby !!

**Reason #5:** ME ! Selfishly speaking, I always get so much more out of whatever I am involved in, whether it is ministry, missions, or small groups. Whatever effort or time I put in, God always seems to multiply the blessings out. This has ALWAYS been my experience.

**So, what was our Daily schedule like.** Everyday - up at 5am, or whatever time the crazy rooster woke us up. I was always thankful for the nice hot shower and a glass of ice cold coca-cola.....and we were out of the house by 6am. The drive to Toluca in the morning wasn’t half as bad as the return trip home. In the morning, it typically took us 90 minutes to get from Mexico City to Toluca. We ate breakfast every morning at a little restaurant named ‘VIPS’, which was like a Denny’s or an IHOP – VIPS also had the nicest bathroom in Toluca.

After our breakfast, we would spend a little time next door in the Wal-Mart, gathering whatever supplies we needed for the day. The typical supplies usually included bottled water/soda, candy, and other little ‘goodies’ for the kids and the guards.

We would arrive at the prison by 9am – after that, we would talk to the different groups of kids throughout the prison. The kids were divided into 3 groups or sections; the general population section was the largest – it had approximately 350 boys and contained all of the boys who were ‘con-

victed’ for some type of crime. The ‘blue section’ contained about 175 boys – the boys in the blue section were either ‘awaiting trial’ or ‘awaiting sentencing’. Sentences for all of the kids ranged from a few weeks to 3 years maximum. The last section we visited was the girls section – at the time, there were approximately 30 girls inside the girls section of the prison.

Typically, we would leave the prison between 4:00pm – 5:00pm. After we left the prison, we would make our way to the local market in Toluca, where we would walk around, eat, and unwind a little bit (see pictures of the mysterious food & great fellowship that we had at the market). Our time at the Toluca market provided many valuable lessons about Mexican culture – and I must admit, it was always a little funny to watch Daniel suffer a little in the car ride home as a result of some unknown food or drink that he had consumed at the market that day. After the market, we would head back to Juan’s place in Mexico City. Traffic

(continued on page 3)



The Prison Ministry Team from Anastasis Church in Mexico City and FBC Tarrytown.

## When I Met Jesus & JESUS on the Same Day

by Daniel Kang

For the journey ahead, Jennifer had made a small care package for me to take to Mexico. It had 3 items in it. Beef Jerky and Ranchers Candy, my two favorite travel snacks, and a Spanish/English Bible. For the past 6 years of our marriage, Jennifer had urged me to consider a foreign missions trip. My excuses were always similar, need to work hard to save up for a wedding, we’ve just married, just started teaching a new class, just moved to a new house, just started a new project... I knew with the expectant baby, I would have yet another great excuse. Or at least I thought I did. In the end, I had to ask myself the question, “What is the cost of missions?”

If you have heard our Missions Presentation last month, you already know the personal struggles I had in making a decision to go to Mexico, and also know how the Gospel created a burden in me to listen to His calling. I could no longer deny the grace of Christ in my life.

In our presentation, we talked about how we met Jesus there at the Prison. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” *Matthew 25:35-36.*

When we held the hand of a prisoner, we were holding Jesus hands, when we prayed with a child, we were praying with Jesus, when we ate with the poor, we were eating with Jesus. This is such a compelling reason for anyone with a heart of the Gospel to at least once in their life time consider being involved in a prison ministry. Jesus says, of all the places that he can be, he is there in the midst of the poor, the sick and the imprisoned. “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” *Matthew 25:40.* So we met Jesus there. In fact, I met Jesus there twice that day. Jesus & JESUS.

When I was surrounded by a group of kids in the Blue Section (it’s helpful to have heard our presentation about this incident) the biggest kid who lead the group, whom later I found out was 18 years old, convicted of rape, well, his first name happened to be Jesus! So, doubly true to the Gospel, Jesus met me there both spiritually and literally. Jesus walked right up to me, both in spirit and in flesh, Jesus lifted me up in prayer while JESUS listened to the prayers that were being lifted! How awesome that experience was for me.

The very last minutes before leaving the prison on that final day was spent talking with my friend Jesus. He had shown a genuine interest in seeking a relationship with JESUS. His final request to me was a set of numbers on a piece of paper. “Would you keep in touch with me?” I took his number, and also gave him mine on a little notebook he carried in his pocket. “You said you’ll be out by February, well, I will call you from New York. I promise.”

Next to my telephone number on this notebook, he wrote,

“Daniel – a good friend.”

The weather was just perfect that day. The sun was strikingly intense, yet cool, and sky so blue you had to look twice to make sure it wasn’t painted on. Even the stench of urine that had bothered me for the past several days didn’t seem to irritate me at that moment. I was relieved that the 4 days of our visit was coming to a close, yet saddened by the endings of so many wholehearted relationships we had just begun to build. What more can I offer them? I was all the more glad that the local church and the faithful volunteers would continue the work to bring Glory to God and His Kingdom. I told Jesus to please look up Anastasis Baptist when he gets out of Prison. We were now seconds away from walking through the metal gates which separated the Blue Section from the rest. I thought well, more than likely I would never see these kids again in my life time. Even if I were to come back to this prison, the last thing I would wish for is that the same kids would still be here, or worst yet, have been arrested and sent back to prison.



Some members of the Anastasis Baptist Church

Patrick, Chris, Juan and I had all regrouped by this time and now getting ready to leave the Blue Section. We had given away all the candies, all the bibles, all the tracks.

Juan said his goodbyes to everyone and just as we were walking out, Juan said that he was disappointed to hear that my friend Jesus had request a bible but didn’t get one. We didn’t have enough funds to bring as many bibles as we wanted. Patrick pointed at my plastic bag, which I carried almost everywhere I went. With his still thick accent he said, “Daniel, don’t you have a bible in there?”

In my little bag, along with an almost empty water bottle and my daily trash, I had the Spanish/English Bible which Jen had stuck in my care package when I was leaving New York. This would be perfect for Jesus! I called out to Juan and said, “I have one! This is it!”

I walked back to Jesus and presented him with a gift. He knew that this was my personal bible and he hesitated accepting it. I insisted. It was perfect for him. After all, God had planned this – my defining moment! My encounter with Jesus & JESUS. The last bible that remained, the last bible that was given out, was the Spanish/English bible to my good friend Jesus whom I met in Mexico. This was the bible which Jen had slipped in to my care package encouraging me to go on although she was pregnant and would be home alone. This was the bible which Jen had for so many years hoped and prayed that I would listen to God’s calling and experience the joy of foreign missions. This was in fact the bible which she had received many, many years ago, when she had served the Lord on a missions trip to Mexico. It had made a full circle. The bible had finally found its way back home, and here, it would do it’s finest job in nurturing and transforming this young slave of sin into a child of the God of Universe.

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The Bright and Morning Star is seeking contributions for the next issue on any topics of interest which glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. Please send articles to: The Bright and Morning Star Newsletter at the address above.

**The Greatest Gift** *(continued from page 5)*

not get to see is what we've come to understand as Solitary Confinement. They tell us there is no one there at the time of our visit.

So after 2 security check points, a body search and 3 locked gates, we arrive in the Blue Section. We were able to visit the blue section all four days while we were there and in that short period of time, we presented them with 5 gospel messages and personal testimonies.

Here is one of those messages which I had the privilege of translated in to Spanish for the 175 prisoners.

The message started by asking the kids several questions, and with each right answer, there was a small candy prize. The final question, and a difficult one at that was, "Does anyone know what country Patrick is from?"

We would give hints and eventually one of the kids would answer, Germany. All the candies that were brought out were given away by this time and only 1 prize remained. One gift, a huge box, covered in Christmas wrapping paper, with a beautiful bow on top. All the kids were eager to know what was inside, and who would get it. Now, the message started.

We'd like to tell you why we came.

We left our families for 1 week.

We left our jobs.

We gave up our vacations.

We left our friends.

We left our countries,

Because there is something we want to give you.

It is a gift.

(With great effort and strength, two of us would move the gift closer to the kids.)

It is inside here!

Some of you are here because you stole something.

You wanted that thing so much that you took it from someone.

You wanted it so much that you were willing to take the risk and you got caught. You might think this is the worst thing that has ever happened.

"I never want to be in prison again."

"When I get out I'm going to start a new life."

"I am going to make lots of money so that I can get the things I want."

Before you came to this place, you had things but now they are all taken away from you.

Your possessions are taken away.

Your family is away.

Your freedom is taken away.

They took everything from you.

All you have left is a few sets of clothes.

And now you are thinking,

"When I get out, I'm going to make sure that no one can take my things away from me."

But don't you see, even when you are out of prison everything will be taken away again!

Your possessions,

Your families,

Your freedom,

Even your life,

Everything will be taken away.

Nothing will last.

The candy some of you received will last a few minutes.

When you get out and make a lot of money, that may last a few years.

When you get out, you will see your families again, but they will not last.

Nothing will last.

Everything will be taken away from you again and again and again.

What if I told you that there is something that no one can take away from you?

Inside this box is something so valuable, that people in the past have died so that we could bring it to you today.

Is it so valuable that we left our countries and our families to bring it to you today.

Let me open it. (The box is opened.)

What do you see?

Nothing? NOTHING!

Just an empty box?

Let me tell you the greatest treasure,

The most precious gift that we have brought.

**It is Faith in Jesus.**

Many people don't believe in Jesus because he cannot be seen.

Many people say because he cannot be touched he does not exist.

Many people say only poor and uneducated people believe in God.

Many people say only weak people believe in God.

We are here to tell you, Jesus is real.

Even though you cannot see him or touch him, he is real.

Has anyone been to Germany? Has anyone touched Germany?

But you believe Germany is real.

You have not seen it or touched it, but you believe.

And we have Patrick here from Germany who also tells us that it is real. Patrick is a testimony to the realness of Germany.

This is the very reason why God sent us here.

God sent us here to be a testimony about the realness of Jesus to you.

We believe in Jesus because We've heard the testimony of other Christians. We've carefully investigated what they've told us and believe that it is true.

And now we are here to tell you this is the greatest gift that anyone can have.

If you take it, your life will change.

And if you take it, your life will have meaning.

If you take this -

Even if everything else is taken away from you, you will be rich.

And this is the only thing that no one will be able to take away from you.

The gift of faith in Jesus.

Would you like to take this gift?

This message was followed by Patrick sharing what it means to receive Jesus as Savior. For the several days we returned, we shared the Gospel, prayed with them and challenged them to see the realness of Jesus as testified in the Holy Bible. We left assuring them that the local church, Anastasis Baptist, would visit them often to show them how to know this God, who saves. ★

**Why Did I Go To Mexico?** *(continued from page 2)*

on the way home was always horrible – and consistent - it usually would take us between 2 ? and 3 hours to get home. 5 hours a day in a 4-door stick shift Nissan Sentra with a trunk we couldn't open...it really made me miss my overcrowded NYC subways.

Every Missions trip I've been on – God has always seems to have made some sort of 'divine appointments' for me. I call them

my 'defining

moments', since

they usually are

the things that

really make a

lasting impres-

sion on me.

These defining

moments usual-

ly embody the

overall mission

for each trip.

Sometimes they

are funny,

sometimes they

are sad. I never

know what they

are or when they

will occur, but I

have learned to

always keep an

eye out for them.

For me, I had two

defining moments

on our trip to

Toluca.

The first defining moment was our first day of ministry in the prison. Having no idea what to expect, I was anticipating the worst, and praying for the best. I was pleased to see that the kids were relatively attentive and interested in our presentations. Juan translated for all of us – I introduced our team and shared my testimony, Daniel and Patrick shared their stories as well. And then it happened – I asked if there were any kids who wanted to accept Christ – and there were hands going up everywhere – it seemed as if more than half the kids wanted to make a decision to accept Christ that day. What a blessing to be a part of this evangelism !! What a blessing to see the power of God working thru each of us !! Seeing all of those kid's hands go up was truly a 'defining moment'.

Defining moment #2 happened in the middle of the week.

We split up into two teams, Juan & Daniel went to hang out with

the boys in the Blue section. Patrick, Aurora (our English trans-

lator), and I went to the General Population section. We spoke to

the kids for a little while and then we had some time afterwards

to just 'hang out' and fellowship with the kids. Patrick talked to

smaller groups of kids – I 'schooled' the kids a little in how we

play hoops (basketball) in 'da' boogie down Bronx'. After some

time, our translator Aurora said that one of the kids wanted to

speak to me on the side. I could tell just by looking at him, he

was very sad.

The boy's name was Angel – he was 16 years old and he

shared with me that he has been in prison for almost a year, after

being arrested & convicted for robbery. He wanted me to pray

for him – but not because he was in prison. He wanted prayer

because he just found out that his mother had passed away.

Apparently, his Mom passed away three weeks before, but for

some reason, he only received the sad news that day. He wanted

me to pray for him, and for the rest of his family.

You see, Angel's dad left home when he was just a few years

old - so Angel's family consisted of him, his Mother, his younger

sister, and his grandmother. With his Mom's passing, this left

Angel 'in charge' of the family. It was a sad story – a very, very

sad story. But I was glad that God gave me an appointment with



**Juan & Paul organizing Bibles, tracts, clothes & candy for the kids.**

Angel that day, to listen to his story, to give him a shoulder to cry on, and to pray for him and encourage him. I asked Aurora what we could do for him – she suggested a phone card.

The next day, I made it a priority to purchase a phone card at the WalMart for Angel. Visitations and phone cards are the only way that the kids can communicate with their family members. I only had one other chance to see Angel before we left that week,

and that was my other defining moment – because Angel had a great big smile on his face – no, he wasn't happy to see me or the snickers bar I had for him, it was because he hadn't spoken to his sister and grandmother since his Mom passed away, and that phone card simply allowed him an opportunity to reconnect with his family. Phone card for Angel = \$10, seeing Angel's smile after he spoke to his sister & grandmother, priceless !



**Enjoying some home cooked food with Juan's family in Mexico City.**

Last but not least – a funny story. As many of my family and friends know, I suffer from many "yet to be discovered" food allergies. Don't get me wrong - I like all kinds of meats, most flavors of Slurpee from 7-11, and almost anything that is deep-fried. However, I am not too fond of the vegetables – especially the green, red, orange, and yellow ones.

While at Juan's house, I remember seeing a nice big piece

of meat sitting on the kitchen table one early morning – yum,

yum I thought !! Dinner !! I immediately thought to myself -

Juan's mom was going to prepare us a nice Mexican meat dish

for dinner that night. But the meat was just sitting out on the

table, uncovered, in an aluminum tray. So when I saw Juan's

Mom, I said "Mami – the meat needs to go into the refrigerator"

– she just looked at me and smiled... So we left for the prison

and when we arrived back home at 9pm – the meat was still sit-

ting on the kitchen counter – uncovered, in an aluminum tray.

So I said to Juan's Mom again, "Mami – the meat needs to go

into the refrigerator". She just looked at me again and smiled...

When I went to bed at midnight, meat was still out. Next morn-

ing, meat was still out – got home the next night from the prison,

meat still out on the table, uncovered, in its aluminum tray. For

three days AND three nights, that meat was just left sitting out

on the counter. And then one night, while eating one of the

many delicious dishes Juan's family prepared for us – I looked

at Juan's mom and she just smiled and said, 'buena carne'?

(good meat?). Good meat indeed !!

Thank you again to our FBC family for all of your prayers

and all of your support before, during, and after our trip to

Toluca. This Missions trip wouldn't have been a success without

your support. Gloria a Dios !! ★

## We Came, We Saw, We Conquered...

by Patrick Mueller

We arrived at least an hour earlier at the prison than the church bus which had all of the volunteers involved in the prison ministry (the singers and the band). Thus we decided to make our way into the prison on our own, in order to make the best of our ministry time. A guard checked us very thoroughly and we passed thru a metal detector (which was never plugged in). No backpacks, no bags, no water, but we were allowed to take our bibles; obviously the guards do not know that this is the most powerful sword in the world.

We have passed thru main gate, but it was only the first layer of security, we have not reached the core area yet. We continued through gates surrounded by high fences, passed the office building of the Director, through a second security checkpoint, where we had to go through another identification/sign-in again.

We made our way thru several more security checkpoints and into the "Blue section", the final destination for our first round of ministry. The kids in the Blue section were waiting for processing and their trials, which would take place inside the prison. The kid's trials are conducted by a "Prison Board" and

the prison Director. At the time we came, the kids were busy in the huge courtyard of the section. We intended to set ourselves up at one end of the courtyard and have the group of about 150-200 kids sit on the ground facing us, so that we could start with our talks.

Before we could arrange ourselves, our translator started talking to the kids and getting them to sit down. In a matter of a minute or two, we were surrounded by all of the kids with our backs to the wall. I didn't think this was the best situation to find yourself in, while in prison with a bunch of people you never met before. However they sat down in front of us, those in the back were standing and waiting for us to start.

The original plan for the presentations was, that we have three separated parts (Chris, Daniel, and I) which we would hold at the three different sections of the prison simultaneously, but in the end, they combined the three of us into individual sessions. It was great to see how our Father was working and preparing three different presentations from three different persons.

By the end of the first presentation, actually before it was over, a huge number of kids already responded to the question "Do you want Jesus Christ to come into your life and change it?" with a loud "Si!" (yes!). This was amazing and unexpected. You surely pray before an event like this and ask

for fruit and people who would turn to Christ to be saved and then you are overwhelmed and surprised when the Father, in his love, opens the hearts of more than a few people. This experience was like a kick start into our week of prison ministry.

Afterwards, we had further opportunities to see kids come to Christ, be saved and renewed. One of them was a teenage girl, Olga, and the day after she made her decision to trust in Jesus, we saw her again. You could tell by her eyes that she was a new person, but not only her eyes, no her whole face was changed. On the last day, a boy made his way through the group, stepped up to me and asked for prayer; he wanted the translator and me to pray for him right there and then.

Honestly I did not understand whether he wanted to make a first time decision for Christ or whether he wanted to rededicate his life to Christ. I was touched by his boldness to step out of his peer group and come forward for prayer.

We prayed for him while all the others were still standing around us watching. After we prayed, this young man did not leave my side. He made himself the guard for the goodies (candy, clothing, tracts) provided by Anastasis Church, which were stored in bags next to us. If the goodies were left

unattended, the kids would have taken all of them.

In addition to handing out 'goodies', we were able to hand out several bibles which we had brought from New York. Anastasis Church had also purchased 350 bibles for the kids. Bibles are in continuous demand and we were surprised to see kids walking around the prison with them during the day. We left with some sadness, because we did not have enough Bibles to give to the kids.

We were confident that the knowledge and confidence that there is a group of people (the Anastasis Prison Ministry team) who love the Lord Jesus and are dedicated to serving the kids in prison and are going to follow up with them.

I ask that you pray for these kids, especially for those who do not know Jesus Christ yet. Please pray that there might be a late harvest flowing from the ministry that we completed that week. Please pray for those who already love the Lord Jesus and for those who just started to trust in Him, that the army of the enemy cannot destroy the seed, the fruit, and the harvest. I too often forget and do not pay attention to this reality, until I am caught up in 'the fight'. The enemy came to destroy and steal, he does not want any seed to strike root and to grow, but Jesus is greater! He was victorious on the cross and He is the Lord of Hosts, He is our shield, He is the vine, in Him we can grow. Gloria a Dios !! (Glory to God!)★



The sleeping quarters for the prisoners

## "The Greatest Gift"

by Juan Carlos Garcia & Daniel Kang

How do you get to the Blue Section of Toluca Prison? For four mornings, we arrived at a small town in the City of Toluca. The town is Zinacantan. The mission field, the Quinta Del Bosque Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. A juvenile prison. Each day, we witnessed God giving us unprecedented access to bring the good news to the 600 or so kids who were incarcerated. So, how did we get to the Blue Section and what did we share with them? Aren't you curious?

The prison rests along a two lane highway. Dust ruffles as each car precariously pass by the 14 foot high prison walls. 2 small rundown sheds across the street that sell drinks and homemade sandwiches - small gifts which staff and visitors buy to bring into the prison - are about the only indication as to where the main entrance is located. The front entrance is small. There are no signs or an outstanding structure. Just a steel door with a small peep hole. We bang on the door and a guard slides the metal bracket open, asking our purpose of visit. We announce that we are missionaries from New York, working with the local church, Anastasis (Resurrection) Baptist. With the door still shut, the guard confers with the prison director or the social worker to approve our entrance.

Our wait is typically between 10 and 30 minutes. The front entrance is the most difficult place to get through.

Either the social worker isn't there to approve us, or the guards have changed during the morning, so even though we have prior approval, no one at the gate knows of our coming. So we wait, but inevitably each morning they let us in.

Once through the metal door, we walk through what appears to be a non-functioning metal detector. We come to a guard station. We show our photo ID and sign in. Each person is directed to a small cubicle for a pat-down. Any weapons? Only Bibles, candy, and water. They open the bottles to make sure it is water. We are asked to take our neckties off, and our belts. The metal buckle can be a formidable weapon. Any other bags, cameras, electronics are left in a locker. Chris cries that he can't take his camera with him. Patrick forgets to put his sunscreen lotion so again he'll be baking in the full blaze of the Mexican sun. Daniel is just glad that he's able to keep his non-metal belt on, otherwise his pants would fall off.

We walk by several office buildings small and frugal, yet colorfully painted. Outdated desktop computers along with manual typewriters are seen through the windows. Paper is scarce. The staff has to get permission and receive just the amount of paper they need each time they use the copy machine.

We greet the social worker who is happy to see us each morning (We are raising funds to get her a new computer.) Then through a small but nicely maintained garden, we come to a building. Another security checkpoint. This appears to be the guard's

headquarters. Several desks and a TV for those on break. The guards don't have a uniform, they are just required to wear black pants and black sweatshirts. In the center of the room is stairs that lead to the second level, which then extends to a series of catwalks and rooftops that give access to the watch towers. The prison guards in the watch towers carry rifles. The standing order is shoot-to-kill anyone who crosses over the initial 18 foot chain-link fence. If you do make it over the 18 foot fence, there is another 18 foot cinder block wall, and in some places there is a third wall to escape. They tell us that no one's even attempted to escape...

After we sign in at the second security checkpoint, we walk through a long corridor which connects all the sections of the

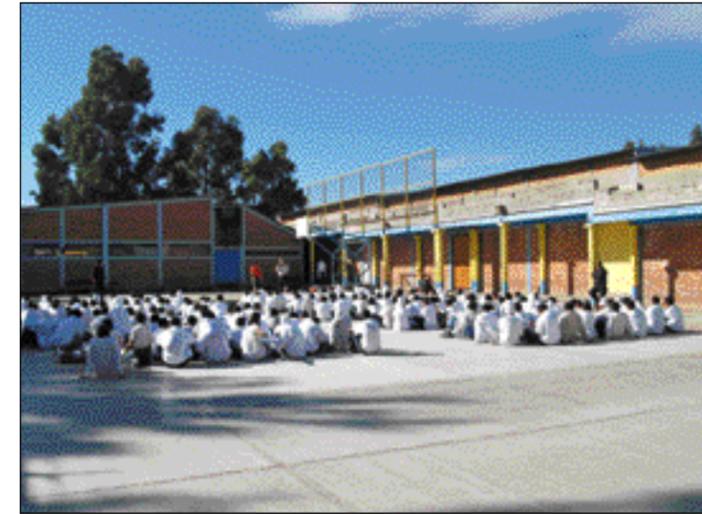
prison. We come to a large metal gate, a guard waits by a table. We tell him our intentions and our destination. He opens the metal gate. The gates are locked using very heavy-duty key padlocks. We walk down a bit again, passing the dining hall to our right. Workers, the model prisoners are able to work in the kitchen, extend their arms through the barred windows to greet us as we pass by. We come to another metal door which a guard opens from the inside. We pass a small pavilion, used on visiting days when families come to eat and spend a few hours with their kids. We are told only a handful of parents come to visit. We did notice on our

last day, which happened to be a visiting day, about a dozen families that had come to see their children. Out of the 600 kids incarcerated, only a dozen families visited during Christmas week. There are no tables or chairs in this area. Families basically spread open a blanket on the concrete floor and eat on the ground. Depending on the direction of the wind, the stench of the nearby bathroom is awfully strong.

Just pass the family area is another pad locked metal gate, a third one, which again a guard opens producing a key from his pocket. We enter through. The stench of urine is very strong as we walk through the darkened corridor, and finally step out onto a large concrete courtyard. This is the Blue Section, housing 175 inmates awaiting their trial. The blue section acts as a holding area for newly incarcerated kids.

Once the kids receive their sentence, they move in to the Population Section where they serve time (or are free from prison). The Female Section is on the other side of the complex with about 30 girls. The 'Special Section' where they have a dozen kids, small in frame and light in complexion set aside so that they don't get abused by the bigger inmates. Another section is what we've come to call "the Maximum Security" section. About 8 kids in total, who've caused fights or rebelled against the guards. They are isolated from the general population day and night for the term of their punishment. The only section we did

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Juan and Daniel sharing the gospel with the kids in the prison.