



# Vessels of Mercy

**PROJECT MEXICO  
& St. Innocent Orphanage**



ANNUAL REPORT 2021 - 2022



22

Homes Built

401

Volunteers

12,480

Volunteer Hours

17

Trained  
Interns





# LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

To My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In this 2021-2022 Annual Report, you will read stories from our dedicated staff that will exemplify their continued commitment to give our children of St. Innocent Orphanage a brighter future.

Your generous financial support has allowed our organization to continue to grow this beautiful ministry. Several years ago, an idea for a male missionary/intern dormitory was proposed. At the time we weren't in a position to make that idea a reality. I am happy to announce that this fall we will complete the construction of a 7-unit housing complex to house long-term missionaries, volunteers, and the seasonal interns who help us throughout the year. We have been in need of this housing for some time, and it is nearly complete because of your support.

We welcomed four new boys at St. Innocent Orphanage. They will grow in their faith, education and also benefit from a secure home. As you know, the need for what we do is great.

This year I traveled to Mexico City with Father Nicholas where we met with Metropolitan Ignacio of the Antiochian Orthodox Church of Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. Metropolitan Ignacio is the bishop who has allowed us to provide the fruits of our ministry to our community and staff. Metropolitan Ignacio assigned the newly ordained Father Alejandro, and Deacon Demetrios Swanson to the ministry to aid in our growth. This pair of clergymen have many years of experience supporting the ministry and are a welcome and needed addition to Project Mexico and St. Innocent Orphanage.

I am thankful that even during tough times love shines through and can be seen in the faces, smiles and laughter of the boys, volunteers, and staff.

I spoke with Mark Fridell, our newest board member. During our discussion we talked about pickleball, one of the world's fastest growing sports. He is going to investigate this idea for us and whether it is feasible for us to have a pickleball court for the boys, staff, and volunteers at Project Mexico. At Project Mexico, ideas can become reality.

God Bless you all.


Sincerely,



Dennis J. Awad, *Chairman*

::: MEMORY ETERNAL :::

**DR. FRED MILKIE**



On Sept. 11, 2022 Dr. Milkie fell asleep in the Lord. He was a seasoned elder of our ministry and we are forever grateful for his years of service. Coming from St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles, Dr. Milkie served as a Project Mexico board member for more than two decades. He will be missed!

## BOARD MEMBERS

Dennis Awad  
*Chairman*

Paul Kinan  
*Co-Vice Chairman*

Serge Anderson  
*Co-Vice Chairman*

Tom Singleton  
*Treasurer*

Rami Yanni  
*Secretary*

Connie Contes  
*Officer*

Danny Andrews  
*Officer*

Dr. Julie Papatheofanis  
*Officer*

Dr. Michael Couris  
*Officer*

Earl Winter  
*Officer*

George Alex  
*Officer*

Greg Lowe  
*Officer*

Mark Fridell  
*Officer*

Mike Mantos  
*Officer*

Nicole Pentheroudakis  
*Officer*

In Loving Memory of  
Dr. Fred Milkie  
1935 - 2022

## STAFF MEMBERS

Fr. Nicholas Andruchow  
Fr. Alejandro Sosa Aguilar  
Fr. Philip Armstrong  
Dn. Demetrios Swanson  
Sophia Swanson  
Alma Soto  
Boone Jenkins  
Charlie Boardman  
David Sanchez  
Eliseo Moreno Garcia  
Estela Garcia Alvarez  
Eugenio Villa Martinez  
Francisco Carranza Reyes  
Gabriel Fahling  
Guillermo Moreno Luque  
Ilia & Lena Anosov  
Irene Sanchez Pacheco  
Leonardo Valenzuela  
Lidia Moreno Garcia  
Lila Younes  
Luke Andruchow  
Manuel Dominguez  
María Moreno Garcia  
Martha Maciel Oros  
Nayeli Valencia  
Noelle Robaidek  
Patricia Otañez Silva  
Rosa Carmina Sillas  
Shane Roeschlein  
Sharon Maatsch  
Tanya Garrison  
Ulises Mital Aguilar

## OCMC RESIDENTS

Pres. Merilynn Andruchow  
Anna Cunningham  
Felicia Heise  
Justin Frigerio  
Shannon Todd

# TEARS TO TALENTS

by Fr. Nicholas L. Andruchow, *Executive Director & Priest*

LEADING PROJECT MEXICO AS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR has been a true blessing. We have changed the lives of so many children. Thousands of believers have been able to put their Christian faith into practice. Hundreds of young adults have given their summers to participate as interns at Project Mexico and blossomed as true followers of Christ. More than four hundred homes have been built for Mexican families in Northern Baja, Mexico.

Despite the abundant grace of the ministry, I would be remiss in failing to mention the struggles and the many tears. During my twelve-year tenure I have witnessed financial turmoil and substandard living conditions. Third World poverty is very sobering and can fill one with deep sadness. I want to share my experience with you to encourage Christ-like strength so the tears can be turned into talents and put to use for the Lord's labor.

Every year our family grows. More boys join us at St. Innocent Orphanage and are given a better opportunity to improve their lives. Children arrive at St Innocent after having been rescued from the streets, the prostitution industry and drug cartels. The initial impression of those who arrive at the Ranch is to experience their new home as a type of "Disneyland". They are given their own rooms, means to study and pursue higher education, and 16 acres to roam and enjoy their childhood. I have seen that it makes them wide-eyed and grateful to receive such blessings.

For this reason, many of the boys come to us begging for acceptance. Four years ago, a pair of brothers were interviewed to join the St. Innocent family. The older brother just kept crying saying "all we want to do is to be able to go to school." His sincere tears were nothing but a call to action. Thank God we were able to receive them both! Now they are enrolled in high school fulltime. But the biggest accomplishment was when I discovered one of the brothers reading *Lives of the Saints* by himself before going to bed. God gave him the gift to be raised in a good home at the St. Innocent Orphanage, and he made the most of that gift by learning how God works through His holy ones.

Glory be to God, this summer we completed our 400th home. When I was a Greek Orthodox priest in Flagstaff, Arizona, my community led mission teams for nine years. I have witnessed countless families receive homes and have their lives transformed. To the average American perspective, these families receive nothing more than a 12ft. by 26ft. shack without running water, electricity or plumbing. But to the recipients of these homes, they have been given the opportunity to rise from the cycle of poverty. The tears of gratitude flow knowing that they can sleep peacefully and safely in a house that they own.

Inevitably, the families capitalize on their new gift by installing plumbing, hanging lamps and planting flowerbeds. The emotions can be overwhelming and the transformation is undeniable. The tears have led to something greater. Christ has worked in their lives and the world is redeemed. This is the work of the Church and with joy Project Mexico celebrates another year of blessings being faithful servants of our Lord's love.



63

School  
Buddies

146

Pantry Partner  
Boxes

221

Faithful  
Friends

66

Santa's Helpers  
(2021)







THE CLASS OF 2022



# THE NEW NORMAL

by Noelle Robaidek, *Education Coordinator*

EVERY SUMMER AT ST. INNOCENT ORPHANAGE there is a “graduation week” and as our boys get older, we are blessed to celebrate many graduates each year. This summer, graduation week turned into “graduation months” because there were so many accomplishments to celebrate. There is a plethora of minor details that go into each boy’s graduation celebration; obtaining the cap and gown, ¡Felicitaciones! card signing, celebration dinner reservations, and lastly but most importantly, making sure everyone knows where to go and what time to arrive.

Often these technicalities can distract me from the significance of these moments of achievement for the young men and for us as an orphanage. After the busyness of the months dies down, I am overwhelmed with gratitude that we have accomplished so much. Graduation for any level of school is a notable achievement for any child or young adult in Northern Baja, Mexico.

“ I CAN’T BELIEVE  
I DID IT.”

Aaron, a recent middle school graduate, remarked at his graduation ceremony, “I can’t believe I did it.” Before joining us at the orphanage, Aaron didn’t attend school and instead worked to support his family. Aaron never expected to graduate middle school. Being able to share in his joy and accomplishment was such a blessing.

Because of the economic deficiencies of the community in Northern Baja, finishing high school is rare for many young people and pursuing higher education is not the norm. At St. Innocent we work diligently to provide our boys with an encouraging and supportive environment as well as the resources to continue their education. To accomplish this goal, we enroll our boys in local private schools where the pursuit of higher education is prioritized by the teachers and staff.

Alejandro graduated from Hellenic College this year and his brothers at St. Innocent now have a first-hand example of the paths that are available to them if they commit to their studies. The completion of middle school, high school, and even university has become the “new normal” for them. With God’s mercy and all your support, I have seen the results of establishing this “new normal.”

Anselmo is entering his junior year studying for a degree in Nutrition. Angel Brian is entering his sophomore year, studying for a degree in Psychology. Three more boys will be starting their University studies this fall and I am grateful and proud of each of them as they continue to learn and strive to give back to our community.

This year during our graduation celebration, I overheard many conversations among the boys looking forward to their own graduations. It brings me joy to hear these sentiments, especially from the younger boys who truly look to their older brothers as role models. There is a tangible, noticeable change in what they expect from themselves and what they feel is attainable. This IS the new normal.



HCHC CLASS OF 2022





In closing, I would ask that you keep St. Innocent Orphanage in your prayers as we explore the possibility of expanding our ministry in adding an Early Childhood Program. This new initiative would care for children 0-5 years old. The boys we care for currently enter our program having suffered abuse, neglect and other difficulties. They often come to us developmentally delayed in education and may struggle to form relationships due to neglect. We would like to open our door to young children in order to provide them with quality care during those formative years and provide them with a loving home.

With God's grace and the support of our greater Project Mexico community, we will continue to make a positive impact on the young lives entrusted to our care.



Sustain the ongoing ministry of St. Innocent Orphanage by becoming a faithful friend. Join today at [projectmexico.org/faithful-friends](http://projectmexico.org/faithful-friends)

2022

**PADRE'S FIG JAM**

MADE IN MEXICO

Fig Jam cultivated from our home grown fig trees. NOW Available!

*Made with* FROM PROJECT MEXICO & ST. INNOCENT ORPHANAGE







# RE-BUILDING HOMEBUILDING

by Anna Cunningham, *Work Trip Coordinator*

WE DID IT! AFTER TWO LONG YEARS OF HIBERNATION, HOMEBUILDING WAS REVIVED, re-built, and lives on. Many aspects of our ministry we took for granted were restored, rebuilt, and re-taught. Thank God our community came through and got us to the finish line. A bounty of tools were donated, along with all of our lunches for the summer and many other ranch supplies. An entirely new generation of interns took the leap of faith to spend their summer building homes with us and they did a wonderful job learning the ropes.

This summer we celebrated the construction of our 400th home in Project Mexico's history. Not only did we construct 20 new homes for 20 beautiful families with volunteers from parishes around the United States, we also built homes for the families who had been accepted in 2020 and put on hold as a result of the pandemic.

One of the most beautiful parts of Homebuilding is that it cannot be done by one person alone. In order to thrive, an entire community of God-loving people must come together and work towards a common goal. It is truly humbling to see what this organization has been able to accomplish and how much it has been able to grow despite everything that we have been through. I pray that through God's will, it continues to grow and thrive as we will see another 400 homes built!

## THANK YOU TO THE 2022 VOLUNTEER GROUPS!

- |   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| Annunciation GOC<br>Fairlawn, OH                              | Prohet Elias GOC<br>San Bernardino, CA               | Ss. Joachim & Anna<br>AOC, Goldendale, WA       | St. Paul AOC<br>Mill Creek, WA                                      |
| Annunciation GOC<br>Lancaster, PA                             | Resurrection GOC<br>Castro Valley, CA                | St. John the Baptist<br>GOC Anaheim, CA         | St. Paul AOC<br>Brier, WA   |
| Annunciation GOC<br>Sacramento, CA                            | St. Andrew AOC<br>Arlington, WA                      | St. John the Baptist<br>GOC, Portland, Oregon   | Ss. Peter & Paul GOC<br>Glenview, IL                                |
| Assumption GOC<br>Scottsdale, AZ                              | St. Andrew's OCA<br>Delta, CO                        | St. John's AOC<br>Memphis, TN                   | St. Sophia GOC<br>Elgin, IL   |
| Crossroad<br>Brookline, MA                                    | St. Basil GOC<br>Stockton, CA                        | St. John the<br>Wonderworker OCA<br>Atlanta, GA | St. Sophia, Ss. Faith,<br>Hope, Agapi GOC<br>Valley Forge, PA       |
| Dallas Young Adults /<br>Holy Trinity GOC<br>Dallas, Texas    | St. Basil the Great OCA<br>Castle Hayne, NC          | St. Justin Martyr OCA<br>Jacksonville, FL       | St. Spyridon GOC<br>Loveland, CO                                    |
| Hellenic College Holy<br>Cross Seminary, GOC<br>Brookline, MA | St. Catherine GOC<br>Greenwood Village, CO           | St. Mary's AOC<br>Chambersburg, PA              | St. Tikhon Seminary<br>& Monastery OCA<br>South Canaan, PA          |
| Holy Ascension OCA<br>Albion, MI                              | Ss. Constantine &<br>Helen Church GOC<br>Webster, MA | St. Nicholas Cathedral<br>AOC, Los Angeles, CA  | St. Thomas AOC<br>Snohomish, WA                                     |
| Holy Theophany OCA<br>Colorado Springs, CO                    | Ss. Constantine &<br>Helen GOC<br>Wauwatosa, WI      | St. Nicholas GOC<br>Portsmouth, NH              | St. Vincent of Lerins<br>AOC, Saskatoon,<br>Saskatchewan,<br>Canada |
| Holy Trinity Holy<br>Cross Cathedral GOC<br>Birmingham, AL    | St. Elizabeth OCA<br>Poulsbo, WA                     | St. Nicholas GOC<br>Troy, MI                    |   |
|   |  | St. Nicholas GOC<br>Virginia Beach, VA          |   |



# THE HOPE GOD BUILDS IN US

by Faeli Heise, OCMC missionary

THIS SUMMER I BADE FAREWELL TO PROJECT MEXICO and St. Innocent Orphanage in preparation for my return to the United States to pursue my education at Hellenic College. It is overwhelming to finish the pages of such a significant chapter of my life and to begin anew. My experience brought an appreciable life change and now warrants a degree of reflection. I am shocked at just how quickly two years passed working in this ministry.

In preparation of writing this piece, I returned to the journal I kept during my first year at St. Innocent Orphanage. In reading, I was transported back to the lockdown and peak pandemic times. I felt disoriented settling into a new job, new culture, and a new language. Countless emotions and scenarios rushed back. Our organization has experienced great challenges and countless unknowns over the past couple of years. In each journal entry, I processed those challenges—personal, organizational, and global—with a sense of hope that God would do exactly what He has done and set our feet firmly on solid ground. There was always hope and it was justly warranted because we have truly emerged from the uncertainty of 2020-2021.

The last few months here I've watched hundreds of volunteers flow in and out from our gates, building hope for unhoused families in this community. Dozens of families have witnessed the blessing of their new home. God has truly led us out of the wilderness. Project Mexico once again functions at its fullest capacity in the way that it has always meant to operate as a ministry performing works of mercy. It is true, we are building hope for boys without families and for families without homes. We are capable of this undertaking because God builds hope within each of us through every peak and valley, struggle and victory. The hope of the Resurrection has the power to sustain us through all things.



You can still catch new episodes of **Stories of Hope** podcast with Faeli Heise on your favorite podcasting service.



# YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK

## YEAR END NET ASSETS

**\$1.7M**

2021

**\$2.89M**

2022

## 2022 YEAR END ANNUAL MATCHING GRANT GOAL

**\$400,000**

by December 31, 2022

St. Innocent Orphanage **46%**

Project Mexico **23%**

### FUNCTIONAL EXPENSE ALLOCATIONS

Fundraising **12%**

General Admin **19%**

## DONATIONS & REVENUES

**\$2.5M**

General Contributions

**\$279K**

Homebuilding

**\$96K**

In Kind

**\$133K**

Other Income

## EXPENSES

**\$748K**

St. Innocent Orphanage

**\$371K**

Project Mexico

**\$315K**

General Admin

**\$203K**

Fundraising





# 2022 INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

by Presbytera Marilyn Andruchow, *Project Mexico Intern Coordinator*

IN SUMMER 2022, 17 MEN AND WOMEN, AGES 18-22 FROM 10 DIFFERENT AMERICAN states (and one High School graduate from the Orphanage) came together to serve at Project Mexico and St. Innocent Orphanage. Each arrived with varying backgrounds, cultures, interests, personalities, gifts, strengths and focuses in life with the one main common thread that bonded them together as one big family: the Orthodox Christian faith. Project Mexico interns play a vital role in our summer homebuilding program.

These interns are often the first people a new homebuilding volunteer will see when they arrive. Understand that interns are the vanguard of Project Mexico and the selfless stewards of our thirty-year legacy of performing acts of mercy. Interns train extensively in advance of our seasonal influx of volunteers. Interns begin their days with morning prayers, followed by quiet time and breakfast. Then they prepare for the homebuilding work site, pack the trucks, lead the "hype circle," and caravan with volunteers to the site. Once on the site, interns lead small projects, showing the volunteers how to accomplish various tasks and objectives, making sure everything is flowing smoothly as they work side-by-side. Evening activity includes washing up, dinner and prayers. The Interns pray Small Compline together in the Chapel, ask for forgiveness from each other and retire for the night.

I have been blessed with meeting and leading these young adults. I witness their transformation as they struggle in humility to grow closer to God while being plugged into the sacramental life of the church and serving others. Of course, Project Mexico intern life is balanced with fellowship, surfing, baking, singing, reading, working, hanging out at the beach, dancing, playing sports, sunrise hikes, goofing around and playing games.

In the tumultuous world that we live in, generous young people like our Project Mexico interns prove that the Holy Spirit is very much alive in this world and working through men and women to serve, extol the virtues of love, compassion and hope to the world. Our interns bring light to our volunteers, the families we serve, the boys of St Innocent Orphanage and in the process, build and strengthen one another as they strive to grow closer to our Lord.

"THIS WAS THE BEST SUMMER OF MY LIFE! I'VE GROWN AS A PERSON AND GROWN CLOSER TO GOD."

## INTERNS

- Adrian Flores Ortiz
- Daniel Kroll
- Duncan Young
- Elias Fox
- Elisabeth Blaine
- Elizabeth Young
- Elise Buschbacher
- Eliza Corder
- Julianna Frigerio
- Margarita Mavroeidi
- Nathan Liu
- Niko Deffigos
- Noah Heise
- Noah Shackelford
- Qaedan Kerr
- Rea Fox
- Sophia Jewett



Experience service work while living in a community of daily prayer and immersion in the Orthodox faith! Apply by December 31st to become a summer intern at [projectmexico.org/internships](https://projectmexico.org/internships)



JOIN US IN 2023!

## HOMEBUILDING DATES

Week 1: May 30 – June 5

Week 2: June 8 – 14

Week 3: June 20 – 26

Week 4: June 30 – July 6

Week 5: July 11 – 17

Week 6: July 20 – 26

Week 7: August 1 – 7

Week 8: August 11 – 17

SIGN UP TODAY

[projectmexico.org/  
homebuilding](http://projectmexico.org/homebuilding)



# A WORD FROM DEACON DEMETRIOS SWANSON

ON THE LAST NIGHT OF EVERY BUILD WEEK for the last few years we have prayed the Akathist of Thanksgiving from which I took the beautiful verses on the left. As I begin to reflect on my first month of settling in at Casa Hogar San Inocencio, this Akathist keeps ringing in my heart.

Glory to God.

I am the deacon here at "the ranch" and have been given the blessing to do this by our beloved hierarchs. It is my joy to lead the local Orthodox community, boys at the ranch, staff, volunteers, and the growing number of parishioners at our small Iglesia Ortodoxa de San Inocencio. I work alongside many others, and I especially want to mention our wonderful Father Alejandro Sosa who has an inspiring energy to grow the Church in Northern Baja. In everything, I act with the blessing of our Executive Director Fr. Nicholas Andruchow who knows this community and place better than anyone and who has given me an immense amount of trust to continue the work of Christ. For that I'm so grateful.

Pray for us. Glory to God, from age to age.

Glory to Thee for every happening,  
Every condition Thy providence has put me in.

Glory to Thee for Thy mercies, seen and unseen.

Glory to Thee through every sigh of my sorrow.

Glory to Thee for every step of my life's journey.

For every moment of glory,  
Glory to Thee, O God, from age to age.

– AKATHIST OF THANKSGIVING

