



# PROJECT MEXICO & St. Innocent Orphanage



*Building hope for boys without families & families without homes*

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

 P.O. Box 8210, Pasadena, CA 91109

 (619) 426-4610



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# Leap of Faith

## A Message From The Executive Director

Growing up in Worcester, MA taught me what is needed to live a successful life. As a young boy we would play football without equipment, just a ball and a lot of scratches and bruises. I learned quickly that the person who is the fastest and strongest off the line has the greatest advantage. This applies directly to our lives in Christ as we struggle on a daily basis. Starting the first moments of the day with Jesus on our lips lets us leap from our beds in faith in God. We spring from the darkness of sleep to face the challenges of the day with Christ in our hearts. After 25 years serving the Church, I have learned that starting the day with Creed makes the demons of the world tremble. Yes, every morning I read the Nicæan/Constantinople Creed to give me strength and a swift call to action to face whatever the world brings me. Leading Project Mexico as the Executive Director I am faced with constant challenges and diversity but in Faith I have the upper hand and leap to serve Jesus overcoming the darkness.

Leading does not mean you know exactly how to get to where you need to go. God is challenging us to grow the Church in Tijuana. Just miles from the American border, the Mexican people are thirsting for the Truth and yearning to feel Jesus' loving presence. As a result, we have

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## GIFTS & SWAG

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**T**his Spring, I was blessed with the opportunity to join the Project Mexico organization as a member of their long-term staff. At face value, that might sound like a trivial matter, but in all truthfulness, it's a miracle, since just a year ago I wasn't aware Project Mexico existed.

Last December, while searching for summer internships, I recalled a comment a friend had made about ministry work. Without a name to search for, I searched until I discovered Project Mexico's website. I promptly filled out an application for a summer-long internship, unrelated to my field of study, on the opposite side of the continent in a foreign country.

Project Mexico asked me to come for the spring break build, and then to stay on as an intern for the summer. At last, I found myself boarding a one-way flight to Tijuana, Mexico. God works in mysterious ways, and "in a general sense, the Orthodox Church considers everything which is in and of the Church as sacramental or mystical." It is all a great mystery which our simple minds will never be able to fully comprehend; thus, man was made to have faith in God.

Genuine faith is not a blind leap in the dark but rather confidence in the goodness and power of God, or the existential everyday trust in the promises and gifts of God. He is "the Way, the Truth and the Life."

What else do we require?

Personally, I know I have been blessed greatly. The seasons between homebuilding feels very different and beautiful in a peaceful way. I've been working with our homebuilding coordinator, interviewing

families and learning the life stories of the people we serve. I've also been working with the children of St. Innocent Orphanage, who force me to examine my shortcomings and to grow. Most importantly, I've been given the opportunity to live and work with people who desire to serve Christ.

**“What is ‘experience’ in spiritual life, dearest Father?”**

**“A comb that you acquire when you go bald.”**

**“So, isn't it useless?”**

**“No, because you can then use it to comb the hair of others!”**

**~ Saint Porphyrios'  
Testimony of Metropolitan  
Neophytos Morfou**

With God's help, let us walk by faith, in humility and in gratitude. Let us not bury and hide our talents, but "whatever we do, do it all for the glory of God." Let us expose our darkness to the light of Christian truth, "for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord." Amen. ✕

# GROWTH THROUGH FAITH

*I arrived at St. Innocent Orphanage when I was 12 years old. Being the only girl at an all-boys orphanage, it was a hard adjustment. I didn't really trust anyone so I acted out and was constantly in trouble.*

Things changed when I met the people who would eventually become my godparents, Dean and Dina Gakos. They showed me unconditional love from our very first interaction. Without knowing anything about me, they loved me and thought the best of me. They told me they were grateful to God for bringing me to the ranch and allowing us to meet. No one had ever made me feel so important or special and my tough façade began to fade.

At the time, I had beliefs that contradicted the Orthodox faith. I did not want to be Orthodox because I didn't understand the doctrine. Dean and Dina would talk with me about the faith and told me that God loved me so much. What really struck me, though, was the way they interacted with everyone around them. Their actions spoke louder than words could. Through acts of kindness, love, gentleness, sympathy and humility, they showed me what it meant to truly be an Orthodox Christian. Their Christ like example inspired me to be better. I was drawn to Orthodoxy and wanted to live my faith just like they did.

The years passed and I graduated from the university and became a teacher. The moment came when I had

to leave the ranch and start my life. As I set out to be independent, there began to grow in me a feeling of fear, insecurity and instability. I was scared that I would no longer be a part of the ranch family and I didn't know where I belonged. But people reached out to me and I was reminded that as Orthodox Christians we are truly all family in Christ. I found security and stability in my faith and by attending services of the church.

I will forever be grateful to my godparents whose love and example has made such a difference in my life and has brought me to my faith. Now as godmother to a 12-year-old boy at the orphanage myself, I strive to live up to their example and be for him what they were for me. I hope my godson, in moments of hardship will be able to make leaps of faith, as I have, knowing that Christ and his church will always be there to catch him.

Just one or two people showing Christ's love through their example can make all the difference. We are called to reflect Christ in our actions and words and although it seems impossible at times, we never know how blindly showing others love will touch their hearts, help them through hardship or bring them to Christ. ✕



# LESSONS IN FAITH

I LOVE MEETING THE FAMILIES WE BUILD HOMES FOR. *They have so much joy in them, it's infectious. After these meetings, I leave with a feeling of fullness, my own renewed joy for life. And part of that often comes from an inspiring, but difficult, lesson they teach me without meaning to.*

*We recently conducted an interview for a single mother, Rosa (named changed for privacy), who is hoping we can build a house for her and her four kids. They really need it. Their house is made of wood scraps and tarps pieced together, and the dirt floors are eroding down the mountain. No electricity, no running water. But Rosa was, of course, grateful as could be. The smile never left her face, and she never uttered a word of complaint. Speaking with her was delightful.*

*At the end of every interview, we ask to see around the family's house. It helps give us a sense of their situation. She didn't hesitate to hop up and show us every nook and cranny, and we soon arrived at her bedroom door, which had a padlock on it since they have no front door to lock. She called to her daughter for the key, but the daughter approached, blushing, and admitted that she had lost the key! They giggled about the situation for about five seconds; then, without the slightest hesitation whatsoever, Rosa picked up a large rock*



*and started bashing the padlock with it. I was so stunned that I barely managed a few garbled words about how that wouldn't be necessary before she had already broken the padlock off. I felt awful—even more so when I saw what was inside: just a mattress and some clothes on the floor.*

*This really affected me. I find it incredible how easily she parted with that padlock, because I know for a fact that I could never have done that. I would have scolded my daughter for her carelessness, then searched for as long as it took to find the key. Anything to avoid a trip to Home Depot and \$10 on a new padlock. I probably would have done it resentfully, too, pondering why I had been cursed with so many irresponsible people in my life. But, Rosa, who can barely afford to put food on the table thought nothing of it.*

*What's more, she found joy in the moment.*

*It's funny; I moved to Mexico thinking to change lives, but so many of these families already have a joy that surpasses anything material. I think God's little joke on me was that I came here thinking to spread Christianity, while he actually sent me here to learn it. So, Glory to Him who brings low our pride and brings joy to the lowly in the midst of their sufferings! ✕*

## **Leap of Faith.** *continued from page 1*

been charged to open an infant orphanage to care for children from birth to four years of age. As well, the local community has grown so much that a church needs to be built off the grounds of the ranch property. Both endeavors have been thoroughly considered and we have a clear path forward, but there still is so many unanswered questions that can only be addressed once we take the first steps. This is faith. This is leaping up to be challenged not knowing how all the problems will be solved but with the solid hope that ALL the problems will be overcome. Jesus Christ's Church will grow, caring for the suffering, bringing encouragement to all.



I have said many times that taking care of children who have been orphaned is the "toughest job you will ever love." Yes, I love my work and it is very difficult. We are charged to excel and care for boys with so many physical and spiritual wounds. Leaping to face the challenges is essential. But I do not face it alone. I labor with Jesus in my heart. My springboard is the Holy Spirit being filled with God's Grace, and I am filled with Faith that I can do it. My

leap of faith is the fact that I leap with Jesus holding my hand and this comfort allows me to persevere.

Recently one of our boys shared with me that the St. Innocent Orphanage only became his home after much tragedy. Until he was six he lived in the Tijuana prison because the Mexican law several decades ago allowed an incarcerated woman to keep her children with her even if that meant the young child would have to share a home (jail) with thieves, murderers and criminals. This story I share not to paint a picture of pity but rather remind us of the difficulties we have to overcome in order to bring hope and rescue the distressed. The Orthodox Church has risen to the occasion for over 35 years in Tijuana. Jesus is holding our hands and we leap with faith having the strength to change the world into a better place.

In Christ,

*Fr. Nicholas L. Andruchow*

Fr. Nicholas L. Andruchow, Executive Director & Priest