

PROJECT MEXICO & St. Innocent Orphanage



Gap-Year Intern Info Packet

Please read information thoroughly before completing application

Project Mexico's Mission and Goals

Project Mexico has three goals. First, we follow in Christ's footsteps of service by seeking out those who are impoverished & in need of shelter and providing them with safe and secure homes to call their own. We know that when we do so, we are serving Christ Himself and therefore meeting Him in the least of these, His brethren, (Matthew 25:40). Second, we desire to share our Father's love for us through providing loving parental care to his children in need by caring & nurturing the boys of St. Innocent Orphanage. Encountering Him in this way when we are disconnected from our daily busyness and distractions can help our souls awaken to the voice of the Shepherd who calls us to deepen ourselves in our spiritual walk that we may be "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man (Eph 3:16). Third, we recognize the importance of leading and training the next generations of Orthodox leaders, and thus, we provide internship, gap year and short-term mission trip opportunities for those who have been called. We have been blessed to see Orthodox Christians from all over the United States and many foreign countries come to do God's work here in Mexico. In turn, many have been touched by God's love and presence and encouraged to grow deeper in their relationship with Him.

Our nonprofit was founded with our first project of building homes for those in need. Many families in Tijuana live in great financial need, often resulting in families fashioning shelter out of materials such as tarps, garage doors, scrap plywood and shipping pallets. This is a hard way to live, especially during the spring rainy season, when dirt floors can quickly turn into mud or rivers and roofs often leak. Since our home building program began, over 400 homes have been constructed for these families. Our homes are small, but they provide sturdy shelter with a locking door and protection from the elements. Our next goal is to capitalize on our thirty years of home building experience to expand our service building projects across the United States, and to other locations around the world.

Our next ministry started when we established the first orphanage for teenage boys in Tijuana and have now expanded to include boys of younger ages. Unlike many other orphanages in Mexico, which often care for children for periods of time when their family is financially unable to provide for them, St. Innocent Orphanage is home only to boys who are truly orphaned, meaning that their parents died, they were removed from their home by social services, or they ran away from home due to abuse. Without a program dedicated to providing for these boys, our boys would likely be involved in some of the worst aspects of Tijuana's society including child prostitution and trafficking, theft, drug abuse, and illegal border crossing. At St. Innocent's, boys know that they have a permanent home; they are cared for until they finish high school or higher education. We seek to provide a place of healing, vocational and spiritual training, and lots of love.

Our last ministry focuses on the internal growth of those who are Orthodox Christians. We believe that it is our duty as servants of God to keep our next generation youths both well-trained and well-versed in Orthodoxy in order to lead future generations beyond. Our vision is to provide a learning laboratory to promote service learning & teaching in the Orthodox Way.

Internship Opportunities

To apply to the gap-year internship program it is helpful if you have participated in at least one prior home building trip or been to St. Innocent Orphanage as a visitor or volunteer.

What to Expect

As in any ministry, our work in Mexico is tremendously challenging and often very difficult. Along with that challenge, however, comes great reward for the right person. It is an opportunity to put your faith into action and to experience God at work in and through you. The blessings are countless!

This type of work, however, is not for everyone. Project Mexico & St. Innocent Orphanage ministers in a third-world, cross-cultural, missionary setting. Coming to serve with us is not the equivalent of a vacation, a school semester abroad or a spiritual retreat at a monastery. The hours can be long, the work is hard and dirty, the culture is very different, the accommodations are very basic, and language barriers can be frustrating.

Serving as a Project Mexico Intern requires tremendous sacrifice and a willingness to serve selflessly. In becoming an intern, you are becoming a missionary of the Church and a representative of the ministry of Project Mexico & St. Innocent Orphanage. You are becoming a role model for the boys of St. Innocent Orphanage and for all other Orthodox Christians who come to volunteer at Project Mexico. You will be in a position to affect many other people's lives. Because of this, you will be expected to maintain certain standards, not only in your work, but also in your spiritual life and personal conduct.

Spending a gap year with Project Mexico can be a wonderful experience and for many; it is a milestone in their Christian life. It provides an opportunity to be immersed in the faith with other Orthodox Christians while experiencing a different culture and serving Christ and His church in a very tangible way.

As an intern, you will continue to experience these things, but in the context of a more normal, daily schedule with all its ups and downs. Serving as a volunteer for a week is often a powerfully positive experience where it is easy to overlook the difficult things - because you know you'll be going home in a few days.

Serving as an intern for a longer period of time is a different kind of experience. Suddenly, things that you viewed as quaint or interesting (like dirt roads and eating beans) become frustrating. Acceptance, patience and flexibility become key to endure some of the challenges you will face. Immersed in a different cultural environment, you will have to adapt to challenges within a cultural context that might be unfamiliar to you and this will require you to adapt your expectations.

All of these experiences can be very positive and lead to tremendous personal growth, but they will not be easy.

You will be serving as an intern in a mission setting. Most homebuilding week-long groups are composed of Orthodox people, many of whom have been Orthodox their entire lives and come from families that have been Orthodox for generations. They have had the incredible blessing of growing up in an Orthodox church with a full-time priest, Sunday School programs, youth activities, etc. Many week-long groups also are blessed to have a priest come along as a member of their group and minister to the spiritual needs of the group on a daily basis.

However, St. Innocent Orphanage is a mission parish. Until 20 years ago, an Orthodox parish never existed in this part of the world and none of the Mexicans in the area were Orthodox. The Mexican Orthodox community at St. Innocent Orphanage is growing in its faith and practice. However, it is always necessary to remember that it is a mission setting and some adjustments must be made accordingly.

Thus, interns are called upon to maintain an attitude of service and humility. As guests in a foreign country and ambassadors for Christ, it is essential that they conduct themselves with the attitude of a servant - that of regarding others' needs as more important than their own. It is often said, "even the best-laid plans go awry." This is never truer than when one is in a third-world country. Mexico is not the United States, and oftentimes things do not run as smoothly as we expect or hope. Therefore, throughout their internship, interns will need to maintain:

- a positive attitude
- a desire to serve in whatever way is needed
- an ongoing willingness to be flexible
- a desire to grow in Christ-like love

As an intern, you will leave Project Mexico with strong leadership skills, an enhanced work ethic, a greater appreciation for life, a better understanding of the faith and perhaps most importantly, make lifelong friends in the process.

The Gap Year Intern Role

The gap-year intern role is, first and foremost, a leadership role. The scope of an intern's role is diverse. Depending on ability, personal preference, and need, each intern will find themselves filling an important role in facilitating all that goes on at Project Mexico. This can include caring for the boys, being in charge of agriculture, socializing with group members, cleaning up different areas of the Ranch, plastering a home with stucco, and more. Each intern will be required to fulfill any and all tasks that come up throughout their stay.

Spanish Fluency - Your range of possible involvements will depend heavily on your level of Spanish - the more you can speak, the more you'll be able to do and the more quickly you'll adjust. It is extremely helpful to have at least a survival-level ability in Spanish. Once accepted, interns will be expected to work on their Spanish skills leading up to the summer.

Personal Conduct - As an intern, you will be required to sign a document agreeing to strict regulations regarding curfew, smoking, alcohol and drug use, weapons, dress code, dating, etc. Failure to follow these regulations is grounds for immediate dismissal.

Supervision - The Intern Program coordinator will oversee training and supervising the conduct of all interns in Mexico. Support and mentorship will continue throughout your stay by the Intern Program Coordinator, but it takes a team effort to support each other's wellbeing in all aspects: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Each person's participation is required to maintain a spiritually healthy environment within the intern community. Our hope is that each person matures in their faith during their tenure.

Apply at: <https://www.projectmexico.org/internships>