

Canadians help out in Mexico

This past July, a group of girls from a Canadian university residence joined some Mexican students to participate in an international development project in Mexico. Fonteneige, a Montreal residence hall entrusted to Opus Dei, has organized international development projects such as this for over fifteen years.

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The Mexico 2004 project lasted two weeks, the first of which was spent in the Sierra de Querétaro. The girls built ovens and took part in other social development initiatives in the mountain communities. During the second week, the girls taught catechism classes and organized a day camp and clothing bazaars for the children of Toxshi and Boxshi.

Sze Wan Sit, a medical student at McGill University, originally from Hong Kong, has been in Canada with her family for a number of years. One day she was invited to *Fonteneige*, and enjoyed the pleasant atmosphere. Though she was not baptized, she took the opportunity to find out more about the Catholic faith and took part in some of the talks offered at the center. She did plenty of reading and had lots of questions, but after much reflection ended up being baptized at St. Ambrose parish last February. At

Fonteneige she met Melina Daher, an engineering student at Concordia University, Marie Bergeron, a speech therapy student at the University of Montreal, Catherine Gay and Renée Landry, both teachers in local schools in Montreal. With the help of some contacts they had in Mexico, they put together a plan to do something for the poorer children of Mexico.

Melina tells of her impressions: "When we spoke about the possibility of getting involved in a social work initiative, I thought, 'Me? Go on a humanitarian project?' Well, I thought a little bit more about it and said to myself: 'Why not!' This is how it all started, and it ended up being an unforgettable experience! I had the great opportunity along with five other Canadian girls to participate in this Mexico project for two weeks. Joining a group of Mexicans helped us easily integrate and better understand their culture.

The people we were helping were full of generosity, happiness mixed with modesty. Some may say that such projects are useless as you gain more than what you give. Well, I sure can disagree, as much as this project was rewarding I can say we were also able to give something. We helped materially but most importantly we wanted to give them love, faith, pride and some spiritual guidance. We were able to get to know them individually and share our thoughts. At least they know that people in Canada are praying for them and I know our prayers will make a difference."

Sze Wan too was thrilled about the experience: "The project of Mexico has helped me to understand that helping other people brings us joy and happiness. We worked in extremely poor villages, helping them materially by renovating churches and making stoves out of

sand, earth, and water. We also helped them spiritually by giving catechism classes. The people over there are extremely generous, friendly, peaceful and happy even though they don't have many possessions. They treat each other with great respect. They have a lot of faith. It was all very beautiful and it has encouraged me to deepen my faith too. I have truly seen that we are all children of God and we are all one big family helping each other out."

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