On April 2-3, 2009, a group of 14 people1 (6 adults, 8 teens) from Kootenai Community Church joined AMF missionaries, Bruce and Lynda Morock, for a 9-day short-term missions trip to Dr. Arroyo, Mexico. We arrived home safely on April 11. I have separated the record of our daily activities from my own observations.

During those nine days we conducted a Vacation Bible School in a small Mexican village, participated in four different worship services in four different churches, finished a work project for an area pastor, and we passed out tracts and did street evangelism.

After my own brief contribution to this article, I am pleased to offer the remainder of this space to others on the team to share their experiences with you.

Jim Osman

One thing I was vexed by was the complete lack of resources that pastors had for their study and sermon preparation. I asked Ranulfo, the local church-planting pastor that we were ministering with, about some of his study resources. He had no commentaries or even a study Bible to work with. He had a basic Bible dictionary and a Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words. A good Bible study resource for a Mexican pastor can cost as much as three days' salary! Consequently, pastors are left with minimal resources and they are unable to enjoy the depth in Bible study which we so often take for granted.

I was also impressed by the faithfulness of these men amid poverty and adversity. A couple of the pastors that I met shepherd churches of only a dozen people. We were in one church which consisted of about 50 people. These men labor hard to teach and shepherd their people, oftentimes not seeing a lot of fruit from their labors. They are faithful.

Lastly I was impressed by the simplicity of faith witnessed among the Mexican believers. Simple songs, often played with simple (or no) instruments. They didn't have hymnals, overheads, or a video presentation! How could they do this week after week?! Yet their worship was vibrant, joyful, and authentic.

One note of frustration, and this is more humorous than serious: they had no concept of how to keep time. I continued to be driven by the timepiece on my wrist, always evaluating whether we were “on time” or “late.” The Mexicans in that area don't understand such things. More than once I asked, “What time do we start?” only to be told, “When everyone shows up.”

Taryn Osman

I feel so blessed that I was able to go on the mission trip to Mexico. I had so much fun handing out tracts and it was cool to see the little kids running to show their parents what we had given them. It was neat walking around the plaza and marketplace and seeing the people reading the tracts. Sometimes we would have people coming and asking us for more. The trip really encouraged me and made me want to share my faith with people here in Sandpoint as well. My favorite thing about the trip was handing out the tracts and sharing the Gospel. It was cool to think that we have brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world. It was really encouraging.

Mel Jensen

One of the things that the Jensen family did before the trip to Mexico was to dedicate ourselves to God in every area that we understood to. Little did we know that the battle was on.

In many ways Satan tried to thwart our mission but God was faithful. This was the toughest year on record for us to save the money to go, yet God provided at the last second.

I have been fighting a real depression this year that made me afraid that I would not be able to be used by God in

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1 The team consisted of Jim and Taryn Osman, Mel, Tracy, Nikki, Taylor, and Shayne Jensen, Jennifer Barba, Anna Bottcher, Lanny and Carol Keller, Tim and Pete Slippy, and Johanna Kinne.
Mexico, but I was able to press on and God gave me strength.

There are a lot of things that I felt that I needed to attend to that made me wonder if I could sacrifice the time to go, yet I went anyway. I really dealt with fear of the unknown, crossing the border, being separated from my family and not being able to protect them, meeting new people, failing the mission, not being prepared enough and getting sick, but I consciously gave those things to God and decided to trust him all the way. When I make myself vulnerable and helpless, that is when God becomes more real to me.

Right before we left for Mexico, our family received a letter that challenged us to watch out for fighting amongst ourselves. We were warned that disunity could really limit the effectiveness of the mission. We noticed that we were facing challenges as a family in that area even during the trip, yet because of that advice, we focused on treating others as more important than ourselves and avoided many conflicts.

When we arrived in San Antonio, it was a real blessing to sight see and begin to realize that missions was fun and enjoyable. Preparing for the rest of the team's arrival was exciting.

I found out that God had already begun to prepare the way by helping Bruce to get a better deal on the vans.

Then that evening I found out that the bank had put $4500.00 of the mission team's money in the wrong account. What was God going to do with his money? We had to go to Mexico on faith that it would work out and wouldn't be able to deal with that problem for three days.

Monday afternoon, Bruce went to call the bank in Sandpoint but didn't have the number. I remembered the number to Interstate and we called someone whom I work with who is also a Christian and got the number to the bank. I prayed while Bruce talked on the phone, and in less than five minutes, the money was in our account!

Upon leaving the hotel in San Antonio, we almost had a car accident. God protected the two vans the whole time we were traveling. Driving conditions were a lot different and more risky, yet we didn't hit anyone or anyone's burro.

Both times we crossed the border, things went very smoothly. I had fitful dreams in San Antonio before crossing into Mexico about what would happen, yet was calm when we were there.

The second night we were in Dr. Arroyo, Linda sent four girls to a store about 4 blocks away, and after they were done in the store, they got lost on the way back to the hotel. At the same time, Bruce had gone to another place to let the youth kick a soccer ball around and they lost the soccer ball. After they lost the ball, they decided to walk back. They even decided to go back another way. On their way back, they intercepted the lost girls. During that time Linda, Tracy, and I had gone out looking for them and returned empty-handed.

All the while my heart was calm knowing that God was going to watch over them. (One of the lost girls was Nikki, my daughter.)

While we were down in Dr. Arroyo, Ranulfo and Silvia had a major family crisis that caused them to need support. Bruce and Linda were there to pray with them and cry with them and give them the comfort that otherwise I'm not sure they would have had. God even was working in that situation with people's hearts.

When we were there, our group decided to go out and do street evangelism. I have never been good at that. The fact that we did it exposed my kids as well as the others to how many opportunities are out there. Our youth were able to see Jim set the example of a fearless witness. That experience alone ignited a fire in some of our youth and the interpreter that only God can do. I even heard our interpreter ask if we wanted to go out and “minister some more.” Praise God!

God gave the group energy to serve. It seemed as the week dragged on, about Tuesday night, the group seemed to look to God for strength to do the next task. Our own plans were laid aside and we began to look to find God's plan, because things had proven to be unpredictable. And God gave us strength to encourage each other and even encouraged us through the people we were trying to minister to. I believe that a bond was building within the group as a result.

While we were shopping around town with Isaiah, I accidentally found out that he was in need of a saddle for his horse. He talked about his horse like a 21-yr-old boy would talk about his car here. He was riding his horse bareback because he was embarrassed to use the burro saddle that he had. It was also broken, so even that saddle was worn out. When the group found out about it, the whole group was willing to pool their personal resources to get the saddle for him. What he did for us was priceless in helping us connect with the Mexican people. God was ahead of us though. We had the money in the fund because of the money returned to the account, cheaper van rental, cheaper hotel rates, cheaper plane tickets, and cheaper gas. What a joy to see his face when God rewarded his willingness to serve us by giving him a saddle, and more than a fair wage for his time with us.

While we were doing VBS, the people prepared meals for us in a sacrificial way. It was such a humiliating thing to
receive food from them when we knew that they were struggling to eat themselves. Even after eating the food they prepared for us, no one in the group got sick--one more area where we got to trust God and see his protection.

When we went to the church to do VBS the first day, we found out that the group was about 8 to 10 kids. We had traveled close to 3000 miles for this? As we did the VBS we found ourselves growing to love the people there. We also noticed right away that the group was not just 8 kids, but the 8 parents that came. By the end of the week we had 16 kids and their parents come. We found out later that the only teen in the church had been encouraged in the fact that there are other teens who are Christians. I think she may be the only teen in her village that is a Christian. Hearing her quote all the verses of the week was a blessing. We also found out that we had really encouraged the pastor to continue in the work. There was also an older man that came on the last day, who had not been to church on any of the services, who committed himself to Christ.

I have also been blessed by the passion that the people in the group have brought home for missions. Many of us, if not all of us, want to do this again. We are looking for ways to be more effective here at home. I don’t think any of us will be the same again, as long as we do not forget what God did to us and through us, in spite of us.

Tracy Jensen

When the youth leaders came to me and asked if I would be interested in looking into having Kootenai Church involved in a missions trip, I didn’t have to be asked twice. I have wanted to go on a missions trip since I was 12 years old, listening to missionaries speak at a church my family attended. Till now, the opportunity never presented itself to me. All I could see as a child was the adventure and excitement of such a trip. Many of these feelings carried over to my adult life. So, needless to say, I jumped at the chance with both feet. My motive was simple: to go and serve the Lord in another country. Taking the youth along was an added bonus, since I wanted them to have this opportunity at an earlier age than I did.

About one month before we were scheduled to leave, the planning and importance of what we were about to do hit home. We had seen the team change from the beginning, but now we had plane tickets and all systems seemed to go. A couple weeks before take off, many of us experienced a testing of our faith. The borders seemed to be more dangerous than ever before and I needed to re-evaluate my motives once again. Was God really asking us to go, or warning us to stay? That decision was difficult, but after much prayer we decided to trust God and the missionaries who were giving us the all-clear.

There are so many things that I could share, but three things stood out to me. First was that the things we plan seldom go the way we imagined them. I began thinking of how wonderful it was to have this opportunity to serve the Lord. I ended up thinking how gracious of the Lord to allow me to experience this. As much as I wanted to do great things for God, I find myself looking back, thinking how self-centered that idea was. I think God took that willingness and blessed me in spite of myself. I saw the team find special blessings each day to encourage and renew us.

Second, when we began planning this trip about a year and a half ago, the team was very different from the team that actually went. Not only did we add members, but we also lost some. Looking back, I find myself wishing that everyone could have experienced what we did, but I also believe that God knew just who He wanted for this trip. From the oldest to the youngest, every member of the team was chosen. We all had such diverse talents, and where one of us was weak, someone else was strong. I remember on the last day, when Anna pulled out a handful of thank-you cards I thought of how neat that was and how I would never have thought of that. Or the friendship Shayne found with the missionaries’ son, who was also 11 years old. Although they couldn’t speak the same language, they became good friends. There is a story like that for each one of us. It was a good example of the body of Christ and its many members.

Third, the generosity of the people that we went to serve was humbling. I was amazed time and again by all that they gave us. The pastor’s wife from La Union gave me a large Precious Moments picture that she had drawn and colored with crayons on a felt background. I had mentioned on the first day that I liked her decorations in the church, which were pictures of Precious Moments. She remembered that and made me one. Every day after VBS, the ladies of the church would make us an elaborate lunch and serve us in a little kitchen off the back of the church. This room had very little in the way of sanitation. Although we were a bit concerned to eat this food, we were also touched by their generosity. So after praying over the food, we would eat and wash it down with a Coke. If Coke can disintegrate metal, we thought it would kill anything else as well. Of course, praying over the food was probably the more effective of the two safety precautions.

All of these experiences have challenged me to consider how much of these things that I learned can be put into practice here at home. Why don’t I evangelize aggressively here? Why are we not as generous with our time and finances? Why is it so hard to put God first? I’m left
contemplating these questions and am challenged to find a way to change. I don’t want to lose this passion and replace it with the complacency of everyday life.

Nikki Jensen

I left for Mexico on Thursday, the 2nd of April, with my mom, dad, and two brothers. We got to the airport at eleven o’clock on Thursday morning and left at one o’clock for Denver. We arrived in Denver at around three thirty and had a short layover there. At around six-thirty we boarded the plane for San Antonio. We arrived in San Antonio at ten-fifteen and headed to a Wendy’s for dinner and then to our hotel. The next day we visited the Alamo with Bruce and Lynda Morrock (our mission team leaders). We also strolled down the river walk before we returned to our hotel to swim. At around ten-thirty, the rest of the team - Anna, Johanna, Taryn, Carol, Lanny, Jim, Tim, Pete, and Jennifer - arrived at the hotel. We went directly to bed and slept until four thirty or five that morning, ate breakfast and then hit the road for Dr. Arroyo.

We arrived at Dr. Arroyo at around seven forty-five and had dinner with Ranulfo and Silvia’s family. Ranulfo was the pastor in Dr. Arroyo that we set out to help. Ranulfo’s wife, Silvia, has had polio since she was fourteen. They were never supposed to have any children because of Silvia’s ailment, but they were blessed with three. Their children’s names are Abby, Ranulfo Jr., and Misael. Shayne immediately became friends with Misael, who is eleven years old. After dinner we returned to our hotel and went to bed. We woke Sunday morning at six and got ready to go to church at Ranulfo and Silvia’s. The church service consisted of a few songs, testimonies, the message, and then a few more songs. After the service we prepared lunch at Ranulfo and Silvia’s and when we were finished we returned to the hotel to freshen up before the evening service in La Union. This service lasted until around eight and we got to the hotel at around ten that night.

The next morning we woke up at around six and ate breakfast and had a morning meeting and were introduced to our translator, Isai, and then headed out to La Union for VBS. Ranulfo and Misael went along with us. We started the VBS with games. The games usually started by kicking a soccer ball or waving a parachute. The kids would just appear from nowhere. After we played games for about a half an hour we would go into the little church and sing songs, tell a story that was tied in to the Gospel message and then we would do a memory verse and finish with a craft. After VBS we went into a little room and ate a little of whatever the pastor’s wife had made for us and wash it down with a Coke. After we said our goodbyes we went to Ranulfo and Silvia’s house for comida (lunch). After our comida the youth went out and started kicking a soccer ball around and in about five minutes we had a soccer game going. After the soccer games were over we returned to our hotel and prepared for the next day. We finished our prep early so we went into the plaza and handed hundreds of tracts out to kids and parents. Isai translated for us when any of the people had questions. Once we were finished we returned to the hotel and went to bed.

Tuesday started the same as Monday, but after our soccer games with the kids around Ranulfo and Silvia’s we went back to our hotel to prepare for Wednesday and then got ready to go to church. At this church service we did a VBS and when it was done we returned to the hotel once again and went to bed. Wednesday was the same as Tuesday but on Wednesday we went to Isai’s village and played a game of soccer and painted the pastor’s house. When we were all finished we changed our clothes and went to Isai’s church and did another VBS during the service. We got back to the hotel late again and went to bed.

Thursday we woke up at around six again and ate breakfast and during our meeting we decided that we wanted to get Isai a saddle for his horse because his saddle was for a donkey and its horn had fallen off and he wouldn’t spend money for a saddle. We headed to La Union and did our VBS, but after it we had to say goodbye to all the kids because this was our last day doing VBS. It was so hard to leave these children!!! After we left La Union we ate comida and said our goodbyes to Ranulfo, Silvia, and their family, and gave Isai his saddle. Isai was speechless. Saying goodbye to all of them was very hard for all of us and there were many tears shed. Saying goodbye to Misael was the hardest for all of the youth!

Friday morning we woke up really early and got into the vans to leave. We arrived in San Antonio after driving thirteen hours, and ate at a Chinese restaurant. After our delicious dinner we checked into our hotel and the youth swam for about an hour and then we went back to our rooms and packed everything. We woke up the next morning around three forty-five and headed to the airport. We got to the airport at around four and boarded the plane for Denver. We arrived in Denver at six and had a two and a half hour layover. We left for Spokane at nine and arrived at ten forty-five in the afternoon.

I noticed how BIG God is. There were SO many times where God showed how great he is, but I will only mention two so this paper doesn’t end up being a five-page letter. On the first day of the trip, just as we were pulling out of our hotel on our way to Dr. Arroyo at six in the morning, a dark
car was cruising down the street as Bruce was talking and pulling out. We were just inches from having a head-on collision, but God protected us! Another time I was out getting some groceries for the next day's VBS with Miss Jennifer and Anna and Taryn and we ended up getting lost. We had been circling for a while when suddenly we decided to stop and look around to try to see if we could recognize any of the buildings or anything so we could get back to the hotel. I was getting pretty scared at this point and realized that the only one that could help us return safely was God, so I said a quick prayer along these lines: "Lord I don't know where I am and I know that we will not find the way without your help." Just as I said Amen and looked up, I saw Bruce and Isaiah walking our way with most of the rest of the team! Come to find out they had been playing soccer in a parking lot and Taylor kicked the ball over a wall, which made them head back to the hotel, but just at the last minute Bruce decided to go a different way back, just because. This decision led them right to us girls. God is so AWESOME!!!!!

This trip showed me so many things, encouraged me in my walk, and challenged me as well. I was really blessed by the contentment of the Mexicans. They have very little yet they are so happy. I was so blessed by the hospitality of all the people that I met. Each and every one of them was willing to give everything they had if we needed it, and they would do it without even thinking. The last thing that really stood out to me was the fact that the people would serve you sincerely. I was really challenged to die to myself and serve the people around me even when it is really difficult. I hope to return to Dr. Arroyo, Mexico, in the NEAR future and serve God with my new brothers and sisters in Christ!

**Taylor Jensen**

It was 8 a.m. on April 2nd. Dew was still dripping from the leaves. I could hear a rooster crow in the distance, and then I saw my dad walking into the room. He told us to get up. "Oh, no," I thought. "Get up! I don't want to get up! I want to stay in bed forever." I got up even though it wasn't easy. I dragged my body out of my bed and before long I was dressed and we were on the road. We arrived at the airport around 11:30 a.m. and boarded the plane. This was my first plane ride and we made it to San Antonio "alive." The next day we saw the Alamo and some more famous buildings. The rest of the team showed up late that night. The next day the suffering for the Lord began with a 13-hour van ride. We arrived in Dr. Arroyo without hitting anything or going off the road. Our supper that night was nothing special. The next day was Sunday and we went to Ranulfo's for church and lunch, then to a church service that night at La Union. The next day we started the VBS and did that for the next four days. On Friday we began the 13-hour drive back to San Antonio.

One of the things that really shocked me was the generosity and hospitality of the Mexican people. On many occasions they would spend a whole day's wages to make us comfortable. One thing they did was give us each a Coke, which cost them a full day's wage. They also gave us a meal every afternoon. They would even serve us first and then wait to eat till we were finished with the food. This really challenged me to give what I have and to serve God, whether it be with my money or my time.

**Shayne Jensen**

The part of the trip that I enjoyed the most was handing out tracts and watching what the people did with them. Some would come back for more. I also liked to play with the kids. It was fun to play with Misael. He was Ranulfo and Sylvia's 11-year-old son. It was very hot. I even got a blister on my neck about 1/2 inch tall. The food was good. It was also amazing to see how much the people gave to us. They were not arrogant at all. At the VBS there was a 16-year-old girl who was the only one her age in the church. At the end of the VBS, she got up front and said that we encouraged her and she thanked us for coming.

**Jennifer Barba**

This trip was such a whirlwind for me, it's hard to summarize it all. Submitting to God's will and not knowing what it was, was a stretch for me. But seeing God's will unfold was awe-inspiring!

The surprising purpose that I saw was the "incidental" training of our interpreter, Isai, and the teens that came on the trip. My expectation prior to leaving for the trip was that mission trips are for "fishing for men" or strictly evangelism. But in hindsight, God's wisdom was evident when He allowed Isai and the teens to learn from Jim. Not only did the people in Mexico receive the gospel, but Isai and the teens learned to present the gospel. So while we were "fishing for men" we were taught how to fish. And long after our team has left Mexico, Isai will be able to carry on God's work there.

Experiencing our bond in Christ is a feeling I will never forget. The last day that we were there, I handed out some tracts to a group of people while we were waiting in line for ice cream. They looked at the "Are you a good person" tract, came back, found me and explained that they were believers from a different part of Mexico. That was enough for us, virtual strangers, to give each other a big hug and refer to each other as brother and sister in Christ. The bond and the joy is unexplainable!

Witnessing the simplicity and sincerity of believers and
the openness of people in Mexico definitely compelled me to look inward at my own walk with God. It's ironic how one of the many reasons we went was to encourage the believers in Mexico, while their example inspired me more than my known impact on them! It truly was an honor and a privilege to be able to serve God, the team, and the people in Mexico, through this trip.

**Anna Bottcher**

In 2 Peter 3:18, God commands us to "grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." It is very easy for us here to grow in the knowledge of Christ with all the resources we have available and the money to buy study books. In Mexico, it is not as easy, but the believers there sure do know how to grow in grace! I loved their enthusiasm and love for God; it was evident in the way they worshiped Him and in the way they lived. A lot of it comes naturally, perhaps because of their culture, but I learned a lot from them.

I enjoyed seeing what God was doing down there, being able to minister to the people for five days and now knowing how to pray for them. I also enjoyed working together as a team for the sake of the gospel and seeing God at work and all the opportunities He gave us. It was very hard to come home.

**Carol Keller**

The Mexican people made me feel we were part of their congregation. We were always greeted with hugs and sometimes a gentle kiss on the cheek. The children would watch us and sometimes give a sweet smile when I would look at them. It is wonderful to be in a church that is in another country, with people that speak a different language and yet you feel part of their service. Their music is energetic, to say the least, but also very touching. Even though I had no idea what they were saying I felt their love for the Lord. It was wonderful to meet them all and knowing we had one amazing thing in common and that is we all love the Lord and truly are brothers and sisters in Christ. I will miss them very much.

The pastors of the churches are struggling against the Catholic church and their hold on the people. This has been going on for generations. They do the best they can with what little they have. The Catholic church is much stronger there than it is here. The four churches we went to are very small, but their love for God and their faith is very strong. One man who came to church regularly is the only Christian in his community. They have a great struggle there. They are very poor but rich in spirit.

I also will never forget how our team came together as a team even before we left for Mexico. We shared our concerns and uplifted each other. Our concerns seemed to drift away when we talked about them. I don't think anyone can experience how God took control of all things and not grow closer to those around them. God not only touched the hearts of the Mexicans in the plazas but also ours. To actually see God work is an awesome thing to witness, especially daily for a week. I saw young people gather at an entrance to the church while we were in front singing. They never came all the way in, but did listen to the service. I saw adults come to VBS and take part. I saw the team full of energy each and every day driven by God. It was very hard coming back to Sandpoint and being pulled in many directions. We left a week of working solely for God and sharing Christ with a people we could not speak to directly. It is our prayer that we continue that here in Sandpoint and see God do that same work in us here.

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On behalf of everyone, thank you so much for your prayers and support!

Without Wax-