

### h2.contentheading {text-align: center;} 2-2013



I accepted Christ early in 2002. One of the first things I wanted to participate in was an international mission trip. At the time, I was going to a church that had an attendance of approximately 1,500 people every week. Only about 25 people went on an annual trip. When I went to sign up, the trip was booked. Along with the cost of the trip being close to \$2,000 and the lengthy duration, I felt there had to be alternative options for international mission trips.

In March of 2004, a friend of mine came back from Rocky Point with a newspaper article. The article talked about the need to build bathrooms and showers at the Women's Rehab Center. I made the initial contact, and that following Saturday in April of 2004, 6 of us guys from our church men's' small group started what became our project for 6 trips over 8 months. During this time, we realized that these trips had positively improved our lives, brought us to a closer relationship with Christ and each other and gave us the desire to share the experience with others.

From 2004 to 2009 we either stayed at a donated condo or we camped. Each trip we hauled all of our supplies and food from the States. In 2009 we started looking at vacant restaurants that we could convert into a home base for Weekend Missions. When we were given the list of available real estate, The Villa Granada was last on the list. Though I was hesitant, we decided we would take a look at before going back to Phoenix after a weekend trip. The place was desolate, ravaged and there were homeless people living there, yet it was almost as if God audibly spoke that this would be home for Weekend Missions. From October-December of 2009 the ad was posted at least 5 times but the owner wasn't getting any offers for the asking price of \$199,900. Needless to say, Weekend Missions would not be able to pay that either. Because I knew that this was Weekend Missions future home base, I repeatedly and patiently offered. The last offer I told the owner, Robert Fleisher that God wanted to buy his hotel. At this, he accepted the offer. It took an entire month and many long hours just to get all the trash out. The renovation of the VG is ongoing; however, with the generous donations and volunteers, we have a place to call home for our missionaries and volunteers both local and from the States.

### **Who we are and what we do, where we are going...**

Having the VG allows us to lead at least 9 mission trips a year; 7 open trips, 1 Adult Singles Trip and 1 Men's Only Trip. Additionally, we have a handful of churches that customize their own trips for their congregations. About 40-50 students per year from the Spanish classes at Desert Vista High School participate on the trips as well. So right now, we total about 30 weekends per year. We receive over 1,000 volunteers on an annual basis, which also includes people from the local community here in Rocky Point.

While building homes is not the bulk of our ministry, we have repaired countless roofs, built walls, rooms, laid block and many other construction related opportunities for individuals, families, churches and shelters. Our ministry foundation is about building trust and relationships, coming alongside churches and families in the community to be a part of what God is already doing in their lives and to empower them to use their God given gifts.

We have been a part of building 4 churches over this last year of 2011-2012; working with the Pastors and their congregations to construct places of worship and education. With these same churches we spend time working with their Sunday school teachers helping with children's ministry and just playing and loving on the children and adults both.

### ***This past year we also worked alongside...***

*La Montaña - a school for special needs children to clean, paint, garden and to provide materials for their new library. We did this with parents and teachers of the students.*

*La Esperanza Men's' and Women's' rehab centers – building relationships. Sharing stories with each other, nurturing those who are hurting, improving living conditions and just being there.*

*La Esperanza Women's Center – preparing for community celebrations. Beautifying the center with painting and landscaping. Providing assistance with their various programs.*

The people of Rocky Point are very grateful for the consistent and growing relationships we have with them and they know that we are committed for the long term. We are reminded that we are all God's children in need of love and called to love one another. We are also reminded that life isn't about material wealth but about being all that we were created to be and helping others realize that as well.

When asked to describe how it feels to work with the people of Rocky Point, I tell them it can be uncomfortable, but I believe we need to step out of ourselves and go beyond what we are used to. Most always, it is humbling, because I realize that we all have needs. By helping others we get out of our selfish "it's all about me" mindset. God wired us to serve others and build relationships, to "know and be known". This is our heart's cry, it's how we are designed and when we follow that design, it fulfills our deepest needs.

Long-term, we hope to continue to make short term mission trips accessible to people. We are committed to a lasting, long-term relationship with the community we have grown to love. Most importantly, we hope to truly make a difference by empowering the local people to "own" the programs and initiatives using the gifts God has blessed them with.

In the future, we'd like to see the Villa Granada filled with local people who consider it a second home. We hope it will bring hope, healing and transformation for them and for those who attend the trips. We also plan to invite more groups from across the country to use our facility as a retreat center and/or short- term mission opportunities.

Some of the needs the community has expressed are: Spanish literacy and ESL education, a variety of support groups, Bible studies, pastoral support, exercise classes, health and wellness education, plastic grocery bags, yarn, Spanish/English bibles (the kind with both languages on

the same page and Spanish/English Children's bibles.

Some of the needs of the Villa Granada; our Mission Central and emerging Community Center, we are always in need of electrical supplies, cleaning supplies, rice, beans, single, bunk or queen sized mattresses and frames, linens and garden supplies and seeds for our upcoming community garden.

What we need most is partnership. People who get excited about our vision and want to help out in some way. What does this look like? Becoming a missionary for the weekend, becoming a volunteer, praying for the volunteers and the community or giving financially. Having a solid monthly financial foundation is crucial to the ministry of Weekend Missions, so we ask that you prayerfully consider becoming a part of something bigger than yourself.

Thank you,

Mark Lastovica