

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF MISSION MEXICO**

September 25, 2016

The year was 2000 – the dawning of a new millennium. Pope John Paul II declared it a Jubilee Year. At St. Mary's Parish in Cochrane, Alberta, Fr. Fred Monk proposed a Jubilee Project. Girls in a remote village of the mountains of southern Mexico, known as La Montaña, needed an orphanage, operated by the Sisters of Immaculate Mary in Tlapa, Guerrero. If every parishioner would give one loonie per week, St. Mary's could raise the required \$100,000.

Following that success, Fr. Fred travelled to Mexico to look over the completed project. At that time, he visited throughout La Montaña with Alejo Castro, Bishop of the Diocese of Tlapa. Bishop Alejo took Fr. Fred to many of the truly poor villages in his diocese and instilled in Fr. Fred – and by extension, in us here at St. Mary's, and ultimately throughout our own diocese – a vision for partnering with these folks who are the poorest of the poor to affirm hope and dignity in their imageness of God. Thus, was born Mission Mexico, now an official outreach of the Diocese of Southern Alberta.

Through the early, formative years of Mission Mexico, Leslie Davies of St. Mary's Parish was the full-time on-site representative. Mission Mexico has funded micro-economic projects, thereby encouraging agricultural and small-business initiatives, adult literacy programs, construction of a high school with student accommodations, and student bursaries for young people who would not otherwise have the opportunity to pursue a higher education. As well, Mission Mexico has helped with post-hurricane disaster relief and human rights issues.

Since September 2013, Mike MacDonald has been officially part of the Mission Mexico Team. Mike is a former Calgary Catholic high school teacher who has lived most of the past thirty years in southern Mexico, serving much of that time as assistant to Bishop Alejo Castro. He has been available to offer hands-on assistance and the lived-out gospel message to the people served by Mission Mexico. You can read about his experiences in his blog on the Mission Mexico website.