

Mission UpReach Newsletter

When the Lord builds the house...!

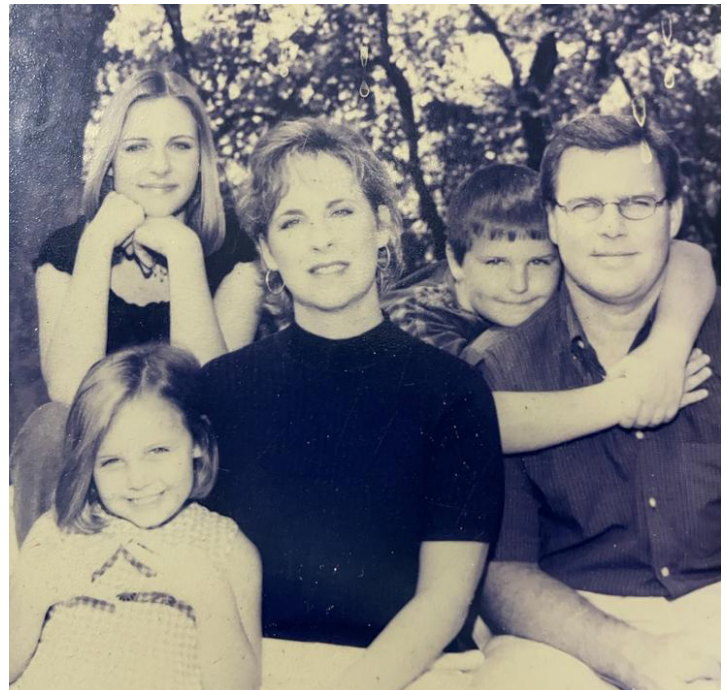
By: Phil Waldron, CEO
Mission UpReach, Inc.

On October 4th, 1998, Donna and I moved our young family to the island of Cozumel, QR, México. Thus began a five-year-long mission that God flourished in some incredible ways. During our time there, God allowed us to establish an orphanage called the Ciudad de Ángeles, to establish a Bible Institute, to plant a new church, and to build a church building with auditorium, classrooms, and offices to serve their needs. We converted many, many people from all over México and the rest of the world during those five years due to the huge tourist industry where many people came through Cozumel to work for a while and then return home.

This past month Donna and I were invited back to the Island to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Ciudad de Ángeles, a children's home for orphaned and abandoned children. It

was heartwarming for us to be able to be present as members of their Board along with friends and donors who came together to mark this historic occasion. As Donna and I reflected on all that God has done in the intervening years since having first obtained the license to open a children's home, we couldn't help but praise God for having allowed us to be a part of something so incredible.

For us, pausing to reflect on all that He has done in this work was just one more example of the truth of Psalm 127:1 which says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor



in vain who build it..." Clearly, after looking back on the twenty intervening years, God was building a beautiful work that we got to be a part of helping Him accomplish. I phrase it in this way because of how all of this happened. As briefly as possible I would like to share with you the beginnings of the Ciudad de Ángeles that now has its own campus and staff that attends to upwards of 50 children at times. I hope this story encourages you as much as we were encouraged to recall two decades of evidence of God's providential blessings. This is a work that began with nothing more than a dream to meet a need that we recognized in the local community.

In 1999, I studied the Bible with a man by the name of Roberto Franco who lived on the Island of Cozumel, Quintana Roo, México. After many studies, he was baptized and became a close friend. I got to know him quite well since we spent so much time



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together. Roberto had been orphaned early in life and at the age of twelve he walked by himself across the border from México into the United States. He suffered greatly, eating out of garbage cans and begging for work so that he could earn a little bit of money. Some man took Roberto under his wing and gave him work. He also encouraged Roberto in his natural abilities in art. As a result, Robert became an accomplished sculptor. After spending many years in the USA illegally he returned to México and settled in Cozumel. There he opened a shop where he sold jewelry and sculptures in black coral. He became quite successful in his business.

In 1999 after becoming a Christian, Roberto shared with me his story of being an orphan and lamented the lack of resources available for the orphans in the State of Quintana Roo where we were living at the time. This led to Roberto and I taking a trip to Ensenada, Baja California, to visit the orphanage of Ciudad de Niños. The visit had a moving impact on both Roberto and me and we jointly prayed that God would give us the ability to open a similar work in Cozumel. It was on the way back from Ensenada that Roberto proposed the name for the orphanage as the “Ciudad de Ángeles.” I liked it immediately. Roberto explained at the time that it was very common in his culture for parents to refer to their children as “Ángeles” or “Angels.”

Stan Stout was the Director of Ciudad de Niños during those years, and he agreed to sit on our Board and help us get started. For the next two and a half years I worked very hard to get the license to open a children’s home. At the same time, I worked hard in telling the story to anyone and everyone who would listen in the US in an effort to find a financial sponsor. All we had was an architectural rendering of a bird’s eye view of the campus that we were dreaming about having for the children. I left no stone unturned even resorting to waiting out front of the mayor’s house before dawn to get to talk with him about

getting his help. He referred me to the governor of the State of Quintana Roo. I tried numbers of times to get an appointment with him, even resorting to traveling to his office and waiting outside in his secretary’s office to catch him as he came in and out. We also paid a lawyer for his help. All to no avail though, and after two and a half long years, we finally gave up.

Then, while having an evangelistic campaign with Dr. Dan Coker in Cancún where we were helping to plant a new church, I met a criminal attorney by the name of Justino Cerezo. He was very interested in helping us get a permit to open the Ciudad de Ángeles. I agreed to let him try, and in one month we had the permit as an Institución de Asistencia Publica, a nonprofit. The rest is history, as they say. God’s timing proved to be perfect as always. Our next step was getting the first donation of funds to hire staff and send them to



Ciudad de Niños in Ensenada, for training. We then began discussing a sponsorship for the home with the East Cobb Church of Christ in Georgia. The pace of the project picked up when Stan Stout recommended Gary and Nancy Gardner as potential Directors for the home.

Gary and Nancy came to visit us and stayed in our home for several days. We were so impressed with them that before they left, we were begging them to come and work with us. Thankfully they accepted and made the move to Cozumel to take the reins of the Project. God used their incredible talent for organization and fundraising and over the following years they built a solid organization that has now developed into the incredible work that you can see if you visit the Island today.

Looking back 20 years to when things came together, it is impossible to not see all the good that has been done in the intervening years by so many different people. Hindsight is 20-20, as they say, and now it is so clear that “when God builds the house, those who labor in constructing it will not be disappointed.”



DESEO excited for new school year

As the new school year kicks off in Honduras, so does our DESEO year. We are thrilled to announce the addition of 4 new team members this year. Also, two of our former team members have moved into new positions within Mission UpReach. Hector Villanueva, who has served our DESEO team for over 6 years, has “graduated” to our church planting team. Sara Molina, a 7-year veteran, also “graduated” to our ESPERO team. Hector and Sara have been married for two years now and have recently adopted a daughter. We are excited to see how God continues to use them in their new roles.

Our new team members are Michael, Jackelin, Victor and Wisthon. Our 2023 team consists of 10 members, including Irma Santos the team administrator. This year we will be serving 16 schools

for a total of 1100 students with our weekly values and Bible lessons. The teams’ afternoons will consist of basketball leagues and tutoring. As we have stated many times before, one of the main requirements of this team’s members is that they are young, energetic, and passionate for the Lord. Many times, we see a young person’s potential and even if they are not Christians, we invite them to join our team. We have seen numerous team members come to a personal and more mature relationship with Christ in the process of being a part of this team. Recently, Victor, one of our newest members, was baptized. His cousin Wilson, a new team member last year, was baptized earlier in 2022. We believe God has a beautiful plan for each of these young people.



A note from Donna

I sincerely have no words to describe our recent visit to Cozumel, MX. Spending time with many of the baby Christians we left behind 20 years ago and witnessing their maturity in their faith and their passion for the

Kingdom reminded us of just how God works. Amid the labor, one sometimes feels discouraged and wonders if there will be fruit one day. In our case, we left the island and have only been back two times in 20 years, the last time in 2007. I felt as if I had entered a time warp, suddenly sitting around familiar tables with people we know and love deeply but haven't seen in many years. They have a few more wrinkles and some grey hair, but they are the same wonderful souls who credit us as their parents in the faith, a title we hold with incredible pride and humility. It reminds me that our littlest efforts can bring great fruit, not because of us but because God gives the increase. Listening to their individual faith struggles and life hardships helps me to see how God works in the lives of His faithful. The journey is rarely a straight path full of joy and peace. I personally don't believe deep faith can thrive on such a path. The church of 150 that we left behind in 2003 has now become 5 separate congregations in different parts of the city serving the more than 100,000 habitants of the island. When we left there were 45,000 habitants.

One evening we were invited to the home of a couple that has served the church and the orphanage for over 20 years. They invited their family members who are now Christians because of the church

we planted. There were over 30 of them, all from the same family, all with stories of how God called them into a transformational relationship with Jesus. As they were thanking us, I truly felt so small and unworthy of any praise or gratitude. It is a most humbling experience to step into the great work of the Lord in awe of what He has done and realize that you got to be a small part of the beginning. We were so unprepared, so unworthy, but willing to be used. God does amazing things when we are willing to be used by Him.

Overall, our trip felt like a big affirming hug from the Lord. All the families we spent time with knew and loved our Harrison since he was 5 years old. After we left Cozumel, Harrison returned each summer to serve as a translator and spend time with his childhood buddies. As we all shared our memories of Harrison, we also shared tears and our common hope of being reunited with him. One of his buddies, Victor, has worked at getting a U.S. visa so that he could see Harrison and use his physical therapist skills on him. His visa was granted 2 months after Harrison's passing. This same friend remembers Harrison on his birthday every year by going out and purchasing all of Harrison's favorite treats and sharing them with his family. Such depth of friendship is built over time and shared memories. We are so thankful for the rich relationships Harrison had on that little island.

Thank you for allowing us to share from our hearts about our recent experience. We have had very rich lives and thank God daily for allowing us the energy to keep working for Him, even in the midst of pain and sorrow. It really is worth the fight.

2023 Brigade Season

Brad Russell Group	February 25-March 4	Medical
Belton Church of Christ	March 11-18	VBS
Country View Family Farms/	March 25-April 1	Construction
Clemens Food Group		
Robison Family	May 27-June 3	Construction
Blacksburg Church	June 3-10	Construction
Southside Church, KY	June 10-17	Medical
Southside Church, TX	June 17-24	Medical
Disciple Trips team	June 24-July 1	Medical
Snellville Church of Christ	July 1-8	VBS
VCOM	July 8-15	Medical
Pine Tree Church of Christ	July 22-29	Medical/VBS

Mission UpReach Board

Scott Bedichek, Ft. Worth, TX
 Phil Berry, Coral Springs, FL
 Kory Cummings, Ft. Worth, TX
 Wayne Kellis, Gilbert, SC
 Dorris Gulley Shelton, Dunwoody, GA

Jeff Simpson, White Oak, TX
 Adam Spencer, Longview, TX
 Donna Waldron, Santa Rosa de Copán
 Phil Waldron, Santa Rosa de Copán

Other Giving

Mission UpReach is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. We can assist you to designate MUR in a corporations' matching gifts program, or giving through a United Way campaign, or as you prepare wills for your estate.

Please contact us:

Our mailing address is as follows:

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Please send all checks, donations and correspondence to this address.

You can correspond directly with Phil and Donna at:

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