

Deep Gratitude Simply

brother Placid

AS THE SEASONS CHANGE WE MAY FIND OURSELVES looking back over the recent events in our lives, realizing how swiftly time moves on. Two years ago we were in Mexico with our brother Philip; it was to be his last trip to Mexico and visit with our Mexican Benedictine Sisters there. So our return to Mexico and our Sisters this past January had about it a poignant sense of memory and of the happy time together one final time.

This year we again went to Mexico during our winter season. It was a home-coming and reunion!

Leaving behind the snow and cold of the Northeast for awhile, we returned to Weston and entered once again into the winter. While not as severe as some winters can be, we did have a couple of good storms here in the Northeast. New York City was hit several times with cold, windy weather. One story reported on one particular storm that swept through the city. The wind came with sleet and snow bringing out many umbrellas. One observant reporter noted in an article shortly afterward that the trash bins along the city streets were piled with broken and wrecked umbrellas. My mind raced back to our recent time in Mexico. As we drove down a street in Cuernavaca, there, sandwiched between a tortilla shop and a shoe repair store was a small brightly colored storefront proudly announcing in bold letters: "Umbrella Hospital." I had to chuckle, thinking of all those poor injured umbrellas in New York, languishing for want of care and fixing! Mexico delights with the surprising and unexpected. I recall, too, getting behind a flatulent truck, struggling up a steep road, loaded with gorgeous ripe watermelons...and this in January!

When we brothers first visited Mexico over thirty years ago, we were captivated by the rich culture, beauty, and people of the country. Meeting our Benedictine Sisters deepened that experience and opened the door into a profound encounter with the reality of Latin America. Finding our life to be greatly enriched by their love and insightful guidance, we began searching for a way to share this experience with others, especially from the U.S. So it was together with the Sisters that we established the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Here through the hospitality of our



Benedictine Sisters' Council: Sr. Miguelina, Prioress (2nd from left)



Gerardo Thijssen, a presenter



Isabel Alonso, a helper/presenter



Ross Gandy, a presenter

Sisters and their wisdom, programs were offered to introduce people to the actuality of Latin America: the people, culture, history, and struggle. In an era of rapid globalization and virtual reality, faces and names, concrete hopes and dreams touched each other as friendships and neighborly involvements began to grow.

We are now celebrating twenty-five years of the Center's life. As we look back from a quarter of a century of rich experience, a deep gratitude emerges to all who have been a part of this adventure: the participants, the presenters, helpers, and, above all, our Sisters, who so graciously and untiringly host and organize the experiences, continuing to discover new and enriching ways of presenting the many faces of Latin American life.

Today the Center continues to offer hospitality and the opportunity to encounter the people and dreams of our neighbors to the south. More than ever there is the hope and possibility to further realize the bonds of friendship and understanding. The present time is ripe for deepening the peaceful conversation and strengthening the solidarity between friends, north and south. Today offers us the opportunity to continue building bridges of trust and care that are the signs of enduring friendship. Together as a united people—north and south—we can continue to foster our mutual dreams and longings for the common good of all.

It is crucial that we not let the dreams slip through our fingers. Perhaps it is in its simple work that the Center can offer something to this end. Realizing there is unfinished work ahead, we give deep thanks simply for these twenty-five years, but especially for the Sisters' loving efforts to share the Mexican and Latin American life. ■