

Mexico in Vermont

- *brother Richard*

WHILE VISITING OUR MEXICAN BENEDICTINE SISTERS at the end of January, they invited us to meet a friend and neighbor, Kim Erno, who was working in Mexico and who came from Vermont. Kim is a Lutheran pastor who was born and raised in Vermont and still has roots with family here. He also spends part of each year walking in solidarity with the people he has come to know and love in Mexico and bringing small groups from North America to Mexico for an immersion experience similar to the retreat experience/program our Mexican Sisters offer at the Guadalupe Center in Cuernavaca. In recent months there has also been some collaboration between Kim's immersion program and the Sisters' hospitality-outreach experience at the Center.



Pastor Kim Erno

On his return to Vermont in April, Kim came to visit us for a couple days at the priory. He shared with us about his work in Mexico and the ministry to the many migrant workers from Mexico who work on the dairy farms and in agricultural production in the northern parts of Vermont.

With a group of young people visiting Mexico in his program Kim unearthed the exploitation and devastation that mining conglomerates from North America are inflicting upon rural communities in Mexico and specifically those in the area of Cuernavaca. These companies are mining valuable minerals for export while destroying the mountains and hills that are precious and even sacred to the people while at the same time exploiting and polluting the environment through mining methods that are not legally acceptable today in the home bases of these companies in the United States and Canada.

During another half of the year Kim ministers to the Mexicans living and working here in the northwest corner of Vermont along the Quebec border and Lake Champlain. This area of Franklin County is the largest dairy county of the state, home to approximately 400 dairy farms. The milk production on these family farms would collapse without the help of the migrants, mostly from Mexico and some from Central America.

These migrant workers come to find work as the only hope for the survival of their families back in Mexico and Central America. Due to international trade agreements such as NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), as small subsistence farmers in their homeland they are unable to compete with the large international agribusinesses. These companies undercut the market price of basic staples like corn, which they import, a subsistence crop that these

families could once grow and market for their own living. When these workers cross the border in search of work, a deep concern emerges for their health and wellbeing, their living and working conditions, and the daily fear and isolation resulting from their insecure legal status.

Kim Erno's outreach in Mexico is with the organization CREAR (Convergencia de Resistencia y Esperanza en las Américas/Collective for Resistance and Hope in the Americas). The Spanish acronym CREAR translates "to create". Here in Vermont he ministers with FARM (Franklin Alliance for Rural Ministries). Efforts to reach out beyond borders, national and otherwise, help to create one global world where the whole of creation and all God's people are served justly and equally as brothers and sisters. ■

For more information about Vermont FARM go to www.farministry.com