



Missionaries' Memorable Moments

Hogar Rafael Ayau Orphanage
16 Calle 3-61, Zona 1, Guatemala City
Guatemala 01001 Central America

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Newsletter

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How can you begin to describe the way this place makes you feel? You can't, but we'll try!

The Cincinnati 2005 Mission team was comprised of 10 women and 2 men, 6 of whom were back for the second time. We were designated a maintenance project of painting the interior of the Administration Building and the stairwells and entry rooms of the *Senoritas'* casa. We had incredible team leadership from Kris Duke, along with spiritual, intellectual, and emotional guidance from our team priest Fr. Steven Kostoff. We enjoyed afternoon and evening activities with the children that ranged from time in the nursery to games in the gymnasium to a graduation ceremony to watching *Gone with the Wind* with the *Senoritas*. We also had to make sure the *ninas* and *ninos* were getting great cardiovascular activity so we taught them drills and relay races in addition to many games of football (i.e. soccer) and rollerblading! We had the pleasure of experiencing a day trip to the Lavra Mambre Monastery to visit with Madre Ines, Madre Maria, and the older boys. We were so impressed with their varied skills – farming, fishing, bee keeping, cooking, carpentry, etc. – and the wonderful progress that has been made on the new church and what will be the boys' new home.

You cannot help but to feel enveloped by the Hogar. The beauty and love of the children and the church is evident to all. You can feel God at work in everything you do and see. We are so blessed to have had this experience. Thank you for opening your home and your hearts to us.

Kara Krueger, Christ the Savior/Holy Spirit Orthodox Church, Cincinnati, OH

To let you know more about our experiences, we wrote the following;

Father Steven Kostoff, *Team Priest*, Christ the Savior/Holy Spirit Orthodox Church, Cincinnati, OH: One of the volunteers, Senora Margarita, fell and broke her ankle on one of the first days of our arrival at the Hogar. Everyone, including the children, were understandably upset. Senora Margarita is the new ESL teacher and she is quite popular. Madre Ivonne accompanied her to the hospital where her ankle was set and her cast put on. Upon their return to the Hogar, Madre Ivonne had Senora Margarita 'set up' in the lobby of the Admin building in a comfortable chair with her leg propped up. Then, very impressively, and with great order, all of the children were brought in procession, according to their age group, into the lobby to personally greet Senora Margerita with a hug and a word of comfort. Their love and concern for her were clearly expressed in their very open and sincere signs of warmth and affection for their 'maestra'. I was particularly impressed by what I saw as a display of great respect on the part of the children for not only an 'authority figure', but for an adult member of the Hogar community. And the whole 'procession' to the lobby for the sake of cheering up Senora Margarita was a concrete expression of the Hogar community as a 'family' of boys and girls under the guidance of Madre Ivonne.

Kris Duke, *Team Leader*, Christ the Savior/Holy Spirit Orthodox Church, Cincinnati, OH: This was my second visit to the Hogar and as an Orthodox Christian my most memorable moment would have to be attending church. It simply amazes me to watch all of these children not only recite the entire service they are attending but to also perform all of the ceremonial acts of that service. Each child knows exactly when to venerate and respond even without a book to follow along. These children are truly a gift from God and were brought to this wonderful place to be healed and restored. If you haven't visited here, you must at least once in your life. It truly changed mine and I will always remember this life changing experience. Big is God!

Jamie Duke, Christ the Savior/Holy Spirit Orthodox Church, Cincinnati, OH: One year ago, my wife came to the Hogar as part of a mission team. Regretfully, I did not go on that trip. I could only worry that my wife was going to return wanting to adopt a child.

My worries were more about fixing and remodeling our house here in Cincinnati. Now I am at the end of my own first trip. My most memorable moment is the first day Sarah came up to me and gave me the gentlest hug in thanks for just being here. From that moment on, we had many little 'discussions' about her life here at the Hogar. Her stories practically brought me to tears right in front of her. Not tears of sadness, but tears of joy, happiness and fulfillment. I see that these children are blessed with everything a person needs. They are given love, spiritual guidance, discipline, and an education. Madre Ines and Madre Ivonne are truly guided by God in this voyage, and God provides them with all that they need. Thank you for showing me what my life should be like.

Shirley Leara, Christ the Savior/Holy Spirit Orthodox Church, Cincinnati, OH: I don't think I'll ever forget the face of a little boy as he was called by Madre Ivonne to commemorate his birthday. After vespers, before the whole church, Madre Ivonne gave him his birthday gift and we all sang many years. His face was filled with such happiness and love. They hugged each other with love.

Charlene Myers, Christ the Savior/Holy Spirit Orthodox Church, Cincinnati, OH: When I think of my most memorable moment, I think not of just one moment but a collection of moments or maybe feelings. The first thing that comes to mind is the peaceful feeling that allows you to forget the outside or other world you left behind. Second is the bond created by my daughter, Sophia, and fellow missionaries upon our arrival, and with one of the children. Immediately, the young girl came up to my daughter to hold her hand.

I realize that many missionaries have come in contact with this girl, but the fact that she remembered us made us feel great. Last is the church atmosphere that surrounds the daily life of the Hogar. Without it, there would somehow be emptiness to the daily routine. The church and the daily reminders of God's work are needed in a place where despair and depression could easily consume everyone. Yet it does not because of the church.

Sophia Myers, (age 11), Christ the Savior/Holy Spirit Orthodox Church, Cincinnati, OH: My most memorable moment was when I gave Gloria her present and she opened it and took the Bible out. She started to read the Creation to me from the Bible. I liked how she wanted to read to me and not do anything else. She just kept reading and reading. Now she takes it to school every day. I also liked when she showed me her cards that I had sent to her. Now I know that she got my cards and was saving them.

Kristia Fertile, Cincinnati, OH: The last day of our trip to the Hogar was the most memorable for me. Watching the children in the commodore as they were presented with the sherbet the Cincinnati team had purchased for them. Something so little meant so much to them, as witnessed by the 'yessss' that we heard throughout the room once Madre Ivonne made the announcement. Watching the children as we presented them with skates and bats/balls – their eager faces and fearless souls. Their smiles lit up the entire park as they skated around in circles, never once arguing or complaining. Watching the graduation ceremony in the gym to celebrate the last day of school for the summer. The boys and girls were all dressed up anticipating their names being called - the next child more proud than the one before. Madre Ivonne and Madre Ines were right there cheering them on, so proud of each and every one of them. There was so much love in the room; I could barely hold back the tears. For so many children who never had a chance with their own families, the Hogar has become their home and a wonderful and loving home it is. This place has turned despair into possibility for so many of these children. It's truly one of God's special places in the world!

Christina Davis, Christ the Savior/Holy Spirit Orthodox Church, Cincinnati, OH: My most memorable moments are the faces of all the children when they were given a gift. It really made me feel like I was able to add to their lives. Each one of these children has something to give and I was just happy I was able to contribute.

Mary Blakely-Feick, Bower Hill Community Church, Pittsburgh, PA: My most memorable moment is a scene as in a tableau, a moment of simplicity, a timeless action incongruous in my own world. Padre Atanasios cast a net into the tilapia pit at the monastery. He was dressed in the manner of the monk priest, two boys at his side waiting to put the captured fish into the adjacent pond. The net unfurled in the air, landed in the brown water and was gathered together and lifted out to yield its small load of fish. I was reminded of a phrase of Madre Ines which has stuck in my head and which I have tried to incorporate into my life: the consolation of beauty.

Kathryn Kisha-Wise, Holy Assumption Orthodox Church, Canton, OH: In the span of a lifetime, a moment should surely be more than just a minute or an hour. The greetings of Jorge, Christina and Madre Ivonne were warm and welcoming as the children peeked around every corner. The Vespers, Matins, and Liturgies filled me with memories just like 'home', even though the language barrier was there. Smiles, giggles, and prayer are the same in every language. Working in a united effort on our service project adds to my memories. My 10 days have been filled with 'moments' of awe as the staff here at the Hogar and the Monastery maintains a beautiful, well disciplined home for the children full of God's Love, Guidance, Protection and Mercy. Seeing the children throughout their day was a joy. Whether it was serving in church, studying in school, creating a craft, reading a journal, or participating in graduation, they will forever be ingrained in my mind. The Hogar is a beautiful place and I understand why the Holy Spirit guided me here. May God grant them many years!

Lesla Postel, St. Joseph's Catholic Church of North Bend, Cincinnati, OH: There are so many memorable moments, but for me the most overwhelming moment is the children singing. I could listen to them sing for HOURS! It gives me chills to listen to them sing and tears because it is so beautiful.

We hope you can tell what a wonderful journey this experience has been for all of us. May God continue to bless and provide for these children and the selfless people who provide for them.

Madre Ivonne, you and the Hogar are never far from our hearts and our prayers.

En Cristo, **Cincinnati Mission Team, June 2005**