



## Newsletter for the Mission of Friendship

Diocese of Erie, USA

December 2024

### The Magic of Christmas



The month of December in Yucatan is a much-anticipated time that both children and adults eagerly await. For Christians, it commemorates the birth of Jesus. Flowing from its religious roots, Christmas has evolved to become a cultural and family celebration, and a time of giving and sharing with loved ones.

As a child, this is one of the most exciting times of the year. We see the excitement and anticipation in our girls at the “Nueva Vida” Enrichment Program. Everything they see around them is magical: from listening to stories of the child Jesus and The Three Wise Men, to dreaming about the arrival of Santa Claus... from learning Christmas carols and getting involved in decorating the Christmas tree, to delighting in a special holiday dish. It is a joy for us to see the surprise and shine in their eyes when receiving an unexpected gift.

For all this and more we continue with the hope that year after year the girls of the community can preserve, in this small world that is “Nueva Vida”, love, innocence, enthusiasm and compassion.

**“THANKS TO YOUR DONATIONS, MANY GIRLS WILL ENJOY A WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS THAT THEY WILL REMEMBER FOREVER.”**



## Long Live Mother Mary!

Long live Mother Mary!

In Mexico we have a very particular phrase that almost everyone knows or has heard throughout their lives. The phrase is: "Every Mexican is Guadalupano." This reflects the great love and affection that Mexicans feel for our Blessed Mother under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

It is no coincidence that many Mexican women are named Guadalupe or Lupita, as well as that some of the houses have "niches" in the doors with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Although the importance of the Virgin is respected all year round, it is in the month of December that Mexicans commemorate their devotion to Mother Mary by carrying out different activities such as novenas (prayers), Masses, processions, and celebrations in her honor.

December 12 is the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. A special Mass is held on that date accompanied by festive music by mariachi bands and beautiful flower displays.

We would like to share with you a special Mission of Friendship tradition: every year we sponsor a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of the Virgin in Mérida, where the members of each program, as well as their families, accompany us to give thanks for all the blessings received during the year. We also share photographs of how some Sister Parishes mark this special day according to their own traditions.

Finally, to all of our Sister Parish friends - we thank you for always accompanying us in prayers, and please know that we always pray for you through our beloved Virgin of Guadalupe.







## TESTIMONY OF THE MELENDEZ CHAN FAMILY

Hello, everyone! We are the MELENDEZ CHAN family, made up of my mother Mariana de Jesús Chan Uicab, and my siblings Galilea del Socorro, Juan Isael, and myself, Sináí Victoria, the writer of this article.

I share with you the memories we have from our childhood when my grandmother's neighbor told her that her daughter attended the "Los Amiguitos" Daycare Center. My mother worked, and my sister Galilea was cared for by my grandmother who had progressive muscular dystrophy and could not walk.

In 2001, my mother applied for a place for Galilea at the daycare. She was accepted, but my mother could not take her because she had to go to work very early, at 6:30 in the morning. Thanks to the support of Gladys (+) and Silvia, my sister Galilea was able to attend. They picked up Galilea every morning so that she could stay at Los Amiguitos while my mom worked.

Starting that year we had the good fortune of being sponsored by Sister Mary Elizabeth Mackowiak, CSSF, through the Amigos Program - with whom we were able to interact with photos and letters. She even visited us on one occasion. My sister studied primary school, attended Estancia Nueva Vida where we met Cari and Marilyn, wise, happy people and very good teachers. They impacted our lives and the lives of our families in unforgettable ways.

When only 3 months old, I began to attend the "Los Amiguitos" daycare. The staff became like family to me. I turned five and left kindergarten to attend primary school. My little brother Juan also attended "Los Amiguitos" but he only stayed until he was 4 years old. After finishing preschool, he began his studies in a public kindergarten due to changes in government regulations.

Our sponsor, Sister Mary Elizabeth, could not continue supporting us in the Amigos Program, but we were fortunate to be sponsored by new sponsors, Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Mary Jane McConnell. Ever since, they have been supporting us with our academic education, food, and encouraging us to achieve the goals we set for ourselves since our elementary school studies. My little brother, Juan, remembers that he wrote to our sponsors Robert and Mary Jane, and they answered him. He was so happy at that time because he was going through difficult times in school and with just one letter from them, he was motivated to work hard in his education and started high school. He couldn't finish it because of (problems with) math, numbers are very difficult for him, but when he left school, he decided to work. He is now working in an automotive shop for electricity and tinting windows. He is independent. He is happy with his job, and he dedicates his free time to sports. He loves soccer. My sister Galilea finished high school. She is now married and has two children, a girl and a boy. She and her husband are working to buy their own house.

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I wish to personally express my thanks for the support of my sponsors Robert and Mary Jane McConnell. I express my gratitude to them by striving to be the best, showing them with good grades and by excelling in playing volleyball. I was able to travel to other states of the Mexican Republic representing Yucatan, my state, and without their support, my mother would not have been able to cover the expenses. My sponsors were always willing to help us, including throughout the journey of my university studies. I have completed a Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogy, thanks to those wonderful people that God put in my path to achieve my dreams.

The Mission of Friendship Amigos Program is a blessing for us. It is so much more than just another program. When sponsors decide to support a family, they adopt the family, empathize, and open the way to be part of that family forever. In difficult times they never abandon us, they always support us. May God always bless our sponsors, all the Amigos sponsors, and all the people who make this great Amigos Program possible.

We will always be grateful to the Amigos Sponsorship Program.

Sinai Victoria Meléndez Chan



Our childhood: My mom Mariana, and (left to right) Sinai Victoria, Juan Isael, and Galilea del Socorro

Us all Grown up



My High School Graduation



Galilea with Marylin Randolph and Cari Seraphin



## A Life Devoted to Sharing Love

During the COVID pandemic a very particular phrase emerged to commemorate the action of doctors and it was that they are: “heroes without capes.”

For the Mission of Friendship, Dr. Silvia has been, is, and will continue to be more than a hero without a cape. She has provided love for almost 48 years by providing medical services to anyone who requires it.

Her story with the Mission begins in the Mobile Dispensary where she provided medical service, continuing the tradition that her beloved brother, Dr. Roger Solís started: showing us that the sense of love and service is in her veins.

As the years went by, Dr. Silvia became responsible for the Medical Dispensary located in the San José Obrero Parish (January 2025 would have been the 38<sup>th</sup> year in this dispensary). During all these years, the doctor was able to care for thousands of patients of all ages. She has been able to witness how generations of families have grown and moved forward, she was able to deliver love and compassion to those most in need.

As these years passed, the community became more than just patients; they became friends and family.

Today, with deep respect and profound appreciation for her years of service, we accept that her time at the Medical Dispensary will end as she retires on December 20, 2024. This is a decision that will affect us all deeply, but we know it was inevitable and it is a decision that was made with everyone’s best interests at heart.

The Mission of Friendship would like to express its deep love, gratitude and affection to Dr. Silvia and her family. In our hearts, she will always be an important part of the Mission and our great family. But, as she herself has said, everything has a time and her time at the Dispensary must end so she can move on to the next phase and devote more time to family.

The doctor leaves us a great lesson in love and we will always admire what she has given to the Mission.

God bless you always, Dr. Silvia



## Amiguitos December

It is a pleasure to share with each of you an update on our activities in the Amiguitos Daycare over the last few months.

In October and November, we shared the activities to celebrate Halloween and Hanal Pixan (meal for the dead in remembrance) and the commemoration of the Mexican revolution.

Each activity had its own special flavor, such as Halloween where the boys and girls enjoyed a mini fair and ate delicious hot dogs (thank you for the donation of the hot dogs). During the Hanal Pixán (meal for the dead) celebration, not only did they learn about the reason for this custom, but they also liked the food that was placed on the altar. It is nice for all of us to see how interested they are in knowing more about our traditions and customs.

For the Mexican revolution, the families surprised us with their creativity by dressing the boys and girls as characters from the Mexican lottery (“loteria” – a very popular board game in Mexico).

And now we are preparing for December, the month of Christmas, a month full of dreams and love for each of our boys and girls.

Remember, you too, can be part of this beautiful mission and give hope! Together we can do even more!





## A Note From the Director's Desk

As Christmas time is fast approaching, I wish to take this time to deeply thank you for all of the support you have given over this past year. And as this year draws to a close, I reflect on how your prayer, friendship, and financial gifts have made a tremendous difference in the lives of many children and their families. I am so grateful to you. Be proud of the work you have done.

I am proud of the tremendous generosity shown to the Mission of Friendship through this year's iGiveCatholic campaign. \$1,555 were donated by 23 individuals this year. Those funds will go directly to support urgent needs at the Mission of Friendship's programs and facilities. Great job everyone!

### Some Important Reminders...

The Mission Office in Erie will continue to receive and forward to Merida cards, letters, and photos sent by **Amigos sponsors, Nueva Vida sponsors, Day Care sponsors and Sister Parishes**. The Mission Office also continues to receive financial contributions by way of checks and online credit card donations. These funds will be wired periodically to the mission account in Mérida.

Please know that the Christmas greetings and financial gifts that were sent are now on their way to Merida. Amigos sponsors can, at any time, send special donations, in addition to their regular monthly contributions, that are earmarked specifically for their particular sponsored family as Christmas gifts, Easter gifts, or birthday gifts. These special gifts are not added to the common Amigos fund. They are kept separate to be given specifically to the sponsor's particular Amigos family. If you would like to give a special gift just for your sponsored family, please make a note in the memo line of your check or enclose a note of explanation with your donation. Your intentions for the special gifts will be communicated to the mission staff in Mérida.

Tax letters for 2024 contributions will be sent out in January. If you wish for a donation to be counted toward 2025, please be sure to send it to our office after January 1, 2025.

If you have questions regarding your donations, tax deductions, or new sponsorship or would like to communicate changes in your contact information or sponsorship status, please contact mission office director **Indira J. Suárez** by e-mail: [isuarez@eriercd.org](mailto:isuarez@eriercd.org) or by phone: (814) 824-1231.

Finally, I wish to offer my deepest gratitude to Dr. Silvia, who is retiring from the Medical Dispensary after nearly 4 decades of service to the families of Merida. Words cannot describe how much good you have done. May God bless you abundantly as you begin this next chapter in your life.

I wish a blessed and Merry Christmas to you and your families this holy season!

~ Indira ~





**Mission of Friendship**

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