

July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005

FIVE YEARS! In October we will be celebrating five years since the hospital officially opened. Five years of work, trials, tribulations and joys. Five years ago, I must have felt like General Eisenhower did on the day after D-Day. Yes, his forces were ashore but he had people and equipment scattered and disorganized throughout Normandy. Five years ago we had a hospital, but we had yet to build a cohesive team that could deliver comprehensive medical services to the population. We were a new mission that had yet to prove that it had the staying power to remain in this remote part of the world.

Five years later, we have built a solid team of medical, nursing and community health personnel who are ready and willing to endure the hardships of living in this difficult area. It hasn't been easy; we lost one doctor to a fatal accident, while others had to leave because of personal difficulties and trials. We have had to battle health difficulties among the staff including my personal bout with tuberculosis, a near fatal case of appendicitis among one of the community health workers trapped in a remote area of the canyon, a bone cancer scare with our dentist and ongoing cases of dysentery that plague anyone that must live and work in remote areas. I'm reminded of the Apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed". But Paul goes on to say, "All this is for (our) benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the Glory of God."

Building this enterprise has been the hardest thing that I've ever done; harder than medical school, harder than surgery residency; but I am filled with nothing but thanksgiving because, "Grace is reaching more and more people." We recently performed our 1000<sup>th</sup> surgery. One thousand surgeries in four years without a single serious complication or infection. One thousand children and adults with birth deformities, tumors, arthritis, cataracts and a host of other problems helped by surgery! And the volume of surgery keeps accelerating – we did one third of our total surgical volume in the last year alone. As Jesus said, "The lame walk and the blind see...and the good news is preached to the poor."

We have attended tens of thousands of medical and dental consults, emergency room visits, and births. We travel thousands of miles every year conducting clinics in remote villages. We have established a permanent presence in multiple communities where Community Health Evangelism programs are transforming the lives of hundreds of persons. In partnership with the mission group Ameritribes, we are drilling wells to bring clean water to communities that have none.

Pilot Mark Egolf and aircraft mechanic Dave Hardin are hard at work establishing the aviation program. The landing strip in Samachique was finished this spring, and last month a hangar was built to house the air ambulance which is due to be delivered this

fall. The aviation program will allow us to reach out throughout the Sierra Madre where most of the people live in isolated communities with little or no road access.

In the past year we have opened our blood bank which has allowed us to expand the scope of our surgeries, as well as provide life saving transfusions to people with hemorrhages.

God has answered prayer by bringing us some wonderful new co-workers. Dr. Sergio Realivasquez is an orthopedic surgeon who also serves as hospital medical director. His wife Eunice serves as our anesthesiologist. Tiburcio Reyes and his wife Estella serve as our hospital chaplains as well as community health workers.

I'm proud and thankful for the team that God has assembled at Hospital Misión Tarahumara. They are dedicated, hard-working persons, all of whom left comfortable lives and secure jobs in their home towns to come to Samachique and work among the Tarahumara Indians. They serve because they genuinely love the people of the Sierra Madre, and because Jesus has commanded that they care for others; they all believe that the Gospel of Christ is more than just words, but is also acts of love and service that cause a person to open their hearts to the "Great Physician."

So the first five years draws to an end. To borrow a phrase from Winston Churchill, this is the "end of the beginning." And, by the Grace of God, it has been a very strong beginning. We are now poised to expand our work throughout the vast Sierra Madre Mountain range. But to continue we need help. We need financial partners who will help fund this mission; we need people who will pray for God's divine protection over us.

I write these words on Independence Day. I am reminded of the last sentence of the Declaration of Independence, "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." The Founding Fathers risked everything to establish a nation; we can do no less to establish Heaven's Kingdom in the Sierra Madre.