Ten years... It has been almost ten years since the opening of Hospital Misión Tarahumara. This fall we will be celebrating our tenth anniversary, and it causes me to ponder and to remember all that has been accomplished, and all that we have left to do. In April of 2000, we were finishing up the construction of the hospital, recruiting staff, importing medical equipment and doing the myriad tasks required to open a hospital. It was daunting, and I remember thinking this must have been how General Eisenhower felt the day after D-Day: a beachhead had been established, and it looked like the allied forces were not going to be pushed back into the sea; but there were personnel and supplies scattered everywhere.

Just to have arrived at that point a decade ago was a miracle. We still tell “war stories” of how God arranged financing, provided construction teams, obtained the land, sent doctors and nurses, and cleared the way through the complexities of Mexican bureaucracy. Ten years later, we still look back with amazement at how God has continued to provide all that we need to accomplish His purposes among the people of the Sierra Madre of Mexico.

And what has happened over the past decade? The raw statistics show countless medical consults and thousands of surgeries, births and ambulance transports, not to mention the community health work, aviation program, well drilling program, native midwife training and literacy education.

But the real question is what has happened in the hearts and minds of the Tarahumara people.

This has been a difficult decade for the Tarahumara Indians as the drug cartels have invaded the Sierra Madre and now control much of the economy. We live in a corner of the world which is quite different than the one we knew when we first arrived. Many missionaries have been evacuated due to the increasing violence in the region. Income from timber is down due to the results of poor forest management. Tourism, once the bright hope of the region, has been devastated by the continued reports of Mexican violence that permeate the US news. The once famous mines of the Sierra Madre are largely closed. Some days it seems that the only things left in the Sierra Madre are the drug cartels and 100,000 Tarahumara Indians caught in the crossfire.

continued on p. 2
However, there is no atmosphere of despair among our workers here in the Sierra. We have all seen God provide generously over the years, and we have no doubt that he will continue to do so in the future. Our prayers might have changed with the years; I seem to hear more requests for God’s protection than I used to. But, despite the risks, the conviction that God has called us to minister to the Tarahumara has only grown with the passing of time.

But back to my question as to what has happened with the Tarahumaras as their culture has been buffeted by all these changes. We have all been praying for a spiritual awakening among these precious people. We all desire to see the Tarahumara people come to a saving faith in Christ. We all want to clearly communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them. We do get to see new Tarahumara Christians but, as of yet, we have not seen broad inroads of the Gospel among them.

But a strange thing is happening here in the Sierra. We interact with many missionaries in the Sierra from various denominations and mission agencies. Now one thing you must understand about missionaries is that they are an independent and difficult lot, and rarely seem to agree on anything. But I have seen an increasing shared conviction among all the missionaries of the Sierra that God is preparing to do a great work among the Tarahumaras. We believe that all of God’s work done by His people and His Spirit is reaching a “critical mass” and that, as the Apostle Paul wrote, “the word of the Lord will speed ahead and be honored.”

My wife Maci recently made an interesting observation. She had to run the hospital pharmacy while the usual pharmacist took a week off to get married. Maci had not worked in the pharmacy for many years, and she recalls that previously the Tarahumara patients that came to pick up their medicines were sullen; they would not look directly at her but rather silently stared downward while they waited for their prescription. But now she noticed that, besides there being many more Tarahumaras coming for medicines, they were more cheerful. They smiled and greeted Maci, and chatted while she prepared their medicines.

Ten years of work to produce a smile. I don’t begin to call this saving faith, but it is a big start. God seems to have moved within the hearts of these people to make them more receptive to hearing the Gospel; and in doing so He has laid another burden on us - to preach and teach the Gospel more intentionally.

So this is the task before us for our second decade. We must continue the steady drumbeat of medical work day in and day out, and we must improve our language skills and communicate the Gospel in the Indians’ native language. We need to carry health and hope to more remote villages; and it is my prayer that in another ten years’ time, I will be writing to inform you, our supporters, that God has reaped a huge harvest among the Tarahumara people of the Sierra Madre.

~ Mike
Joy in the face of this young Tarahumara woman is a beautiful thing to behold! Lupita is the teacher of the new school in the village of Chikué. She grew up in Charerachi, a village not far from the hospital. Most village girls do not have the opportunity to advance beyond a few years of school. Lupita completed the eighth grade, and later came to work at our hospital on the cleaning staff. With her quiet and gentle spirit, along with typical, extreme, Tarahumara shyness, no one imagined the desires that were growing in her heart.

Last summer, she expressed a desire to train to be a village teacher. Dr. Esperanza, our dental community health evangelism worker from Mexico City, discovered a new government program specifically created to quickly train teachers for small rural schools. Lupita enrolled with her help.

Concurrent with Lupita’s aspiration and growth, things were happening in the remote village of Chikué. The people began to seek the help of the nurse we had working in nearby Pamachi, and ended up begging her and Esperanza to make Chikue an active part of their work. Then young and old came out to prepare the ground and help build a school for their children. A group from First Baptist Church of Athens, Texas came to build the school, and Springhill Baptist Church in Longview, Texas donated playground equipment.

After a three month crash course, and with a great deal of support and encouragement from Esperanza, Lupita began teaching the 6 children who arrived for the first day of school. Now the school year is coming to a close, and there are 36 children in the now crowded schoolroom - clean, in the school “uniforms” of native dress, well-nourished, healthy and with beautiful, happy smiles!

A triumph of Lupita’s success is that these children have a teacher who speaks their language. Because very few Tarahumaras have the education to be teachers, government schools are run by Spanish-speaking teachers, which puts Tarahumara students at a disadvantage. I have heard it said in remote villages that the Tarahumara children do not understand much of what is being taught. There is only one other school in our area that has a Tarahumara teacher. An even more wonderful thing than having a teacher who is Tarahumara is that the children of Chikué have one who follows Jesus and seeks to love them as He does. We don’t doubt this is part of the reason that they want to be with her day and night!

Lupita and the village of Chikué are glimpses of the vision that the CHE program is built on: people taking ownership of their own development as they recognize their God-given abilities and the possibilities open to them. Chikué is the same village in which Deb and Andy Kramer recently began literacy classes. The adults in the village, as they watched their children learning, expressed a desire for knowledge for themselves. What a blessing it is to watch this village grow! The Tarahumara people simply need their eyes opened, resources provided, and encouragement given to pursue life like God intended it to be: life in abundance with hope and Joy.
Checks are made out to Mexico Medical Missions. If you wish to designate your gift for a particular ministry focus or missionary, please attach a note to your check.

Online donations can be made using a credit card at www.mexicomedical.org. Click on the blue “Online Donations” button on the home page and follow the links. Automatic withdrawals are easily set up for recurring gifts. Send the response card enclosed, or call the office number below and we would be happy to help you through the process. Please feel free to contact us anytime with questions about giving.

Ivan and Jen Wang and their children arrived in Samachique in November to begin work at the hospital and in the communities. Ivan recently completed his training as a physician assistant in Albuquerque. Ivan and Jen have five children – Ellie, Joelle, Jackson, Ethan and Timmy, two of whom were adopted from Liberia, West Africa. By God’s grace, they are adjusting to a new career, new country, new culture, and two new languages thanks to the support of Calvary Chapel Rio Rancho (New Mexico) as well as their family and friends. Ivan has enjoyed assisting in surgery and delivering primary care in various remote Tarahumara communities. He is pictured here after assisting a delivery in the birth center, and in Pamachi, where he has been doing weekly consults. Jen has demonstrated the love of Christ through practicing hospitality, helping local Tarahumara children to memorize Bible verses, and reading Scripture with the women who visit. They request prayer for their language acquisition and for knowing where to focus their efforts in ministry.

Dr. Bruce Daugherty, pictured on the right, has visited as a surgeon many times, and now plans to join us in September of this year. With 30 years experience as a general surgeon, he will fill the need we have had for a surgeon at the hospital, and also provide support in many other areas. Dr. Daugherty is diligently studying Spanish, wrapping up his practice and life in Lake Tahoe, and rehabilitating from a serious illness that God brought him through last year. His passion to serve the Tarahumara people and his excitement to leave everything and use his retirement to serve is a blessing and encouragement, and we anticipate his arrival to work full-time. Please pray for Dr. Daugherty as he prepares to come, and that he would have success in language acquisition.

Would you invest in what God is doing among the Tarahumara people? You could help grow a future Tarahumara leader like Lupita, save a life in the emergency room, or help a community reach for hope for their children. We would be thrilled for you to experience with us the joy of seeing Tarahumara people impacted for the Kingdom, one precious individual at a time.

Gifts are tax-deductible and can be made by check, credit card or automatic withdrawal:

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Natetaraba - Thank You!