

*Trip to the School of Love & the Miracle of the Holy Oil*  
*Mexico Mission trip August 2007*  
*By Maria Mansour*



On May 12th we received an email from our beloved friend Christian in Mexico. He told us that oil had been dripping off the icons in our church there since Good Friday. During our regular online evangelism meeting, we marveled at the comforting message that God had sent to this new church. Although we did not know the amazing story behind it, we felt that God was inviting us to this place. As time passed, our dream of visiting the church was becoming a reality. Eventually, 11 Copts joined the mission trip. Every Christian who has been on a missionary trip will say that they have seen the book of Acts unfold before them, but in this trip we testify that we lived the book of Acts. So get ready to start with us our adventures in the blessed Land of Mexico.

We each arrived at the airport in Mexico not knowing one another. At the airport, three of the beloved members of Saint Mary & St Mark Coptic Church of Mexico greeted us and took us to the place they call home “the church”. Being in a foreign country is scary, not knowing the people made it even scarier. So, in order for us not to feel worried, the beloved members made a special welcome card for each of us. The cards were simple but the content made each one of us feel welcomed as they wrote “Welcome to your Church, welcome to your family, we are one in Christ”. During the drive from the airport to the church, about a 2 ½ hour trip, Luke (the first member of the church) told us the story of how the church started.

He said that he moved to Mexico about 20 years ago and that there was no Orthodox church to pray in. He began thinking of opening a small church and he and his Mexican wife searched for land but could not find any. Afterwards, his wife suggested building the church on the small property they owned, and so they did. He was telling us that he had no tools to build just like Moses in the wilderness, but finally he did build a small chapel for his family and friends to pray in. He took some pictures of the church, sent them to Abouna Mikhail Edward in Ohio, and asked him for a priest to come

and pray the Divine Liturgy for them. For his annual convention, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III went to Boston. Abouna Mikhail showed him the pictures and the request of his children in Mexico. His Holiness smiled as he was thinking of the same thing. He asked Abouna if he trusted Luke and Abouna said yes.

His Holiness requested that Abouna tell Luke to buy land that they can build a bigger church on, and that His Holiness will send the money for it. As happy as they were, the worries of finding a piece of land took over. They knew from past experience that it was very hard and expensive to buy land in Mexico. Days passed and Luke was in his shop waiting for an answer to an ad for land that he had posted in the newspaper. Finally a lady came and spoke to him regarding some land she was wanting to sell. He jumped for joy asking her about the location of the property. The land happened to be a few streets away from the chapel and his house! They sat to talk and negotiate about the money; the lady requested \$40,000. Luke thanked the Lord for there is no land in this area that could have such a cheap price. He then told the lady that on this land they would build a church. The lady cried tears of joy, as it was her heart's wish for this land to be given to God. After the blessing of His Holiness, the money was sent right away and the Church was named after the Blessed Virgin Mary and the evangelist St. Mark.

The construction period was difficult and obtaining the required authorizations took a long time. Eventually, Luke and his friend went to the Department of Religion. They met with the lady responsible for issuing such authorizations and gave her a gift from his Holiness, a picture of Archangel Michael on papyrus paper. The lady's eyes teared up in joy and granted them the authorizations they sought. Thank be to God, His Holiness Pope Shenouda the 3<sup>rd</sup> took care all of the expenses of the construction and the Church in General. At the end of December 2005, God chose Abouna Zachariah el Baramousy to serve in the church in Mexico.

On February 28th 2006, His Holiness came to consecrate the church. The blessed visit of His Holiness was a national festival in the land of Mexico, it was even reported in the news "they don't do so believing in the separation between the church and the government". At the end of January, there was a baptism for a convert. Everyone was so happy about the girl born again in Christ. Abouna took pictures with his digital camera and viewed the pictures several time, however, this time he felt the urge to check them again as a comforting message awaiting him. Abouna started looking at the pictures

again, doubting to find anything new. Around the girl's head, he saw a crown of light reflecting on his face and her mother's face. Many came and saw the picture, including one photographer who testified that it was a true picture and had not been tampered with.

One day after this miracle, a lady and her children came to the church seeking prayers from Abouna for her ten year old child. He had cancer in his blood that had affected his digestive track and taken over his body. Chemotherapy had become useless and he was in his last days on earth. Abouna, with his strong faith, asked the lady to bring her son to be baptized and told her that he would be cured right away. The lady had such a strong faith, even though she was not a Christian yet, agreed and on the day she had a doctor's appointment for her son, she instead took him to be baptized. She later took the boy to see the doctor. The doctor examined the child for hours and finally asked the mother where she had taken her son. The mother replied that he was the only doctor they had been to. Finally the doctor asked the mother to tell him in detail about what had happened since the boy's last doctor visit. When he learned of the baptism story, he marveled and said truly this is a miracle, your son is cured and he is as a healthy as any boy in his age. Of course Satan's wars toward the church grew more and more because of those miracles. "Nevertheless, He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." (Acts 14:17)

On Good Friday, as Abouna was chanting the hymns of the last hour, he saw something strange on an icon, but he had to focus on the hymn. Thereafter, they all went to eat aghapy, except Adriana, the wife of an Egyptian deacon. She wanted to take a blessing from the icon of Saint Mary because she had fallen on her hands and was in pain. When she was trying to touch the icon, she saw oil dropping from the picture of the Virgin Mary. She ran and told Abouna and the other church members. When they returned to the church, they found not only the icon of the Virgin but rather all the icons in the church dripping with oil.

This was truly a big comfort for the church and Abouna. In Mexico, the Government fears the power of the church, especially the Catholic Church, to take over. Therefore, they do not publicize any church's news. In this case, reports came and interviewed Abouna and the church congregation and broadcasted the story. It was also written in their newspaper. The message reached many people who then came to the church, where taught the

Orthodox dogma, and then were baptized. So during our 2 ½ hour bus ride from the airport, we took such a big blessing before we started our work. When we arrived, Abouna welcomed us with roses and his huge smile. That is what I mean about the language of love, the unconditional love that gives from the hearts even if you don't know the person.

We started our first activity on Saturday morning. After praying the Divine Liturgy, we had a session on how to approach people and how to show them the Coptic Church. Then we went to the Mega Market and distributed pamphlets inviting the people to come to the church that evening for food, songs, children's activities, and the "Jesus" movie. It took us sometime around the market to give out those pamphlets and talk with the people. It was truly amazing that we all did so much work and we felt we had accomplished a lot.

We returned to the church and started our first bible study on the Book of Acts. Later in the evening God sent us a message: only the church congregation came and not many new. As we were all sad, we understood that God wanted to teach us that it is by His grace, not our efforts that the people will come. We continued our program with the adults, followed by the raising of incense, but of course God did not leave us upset for the rest of the day, but just right after, the oil started pouring again from the icons, so we can truly say that we also have witnessed it by our own eyes. However, the mother church has still to investigate before pronouncing the verdict on the oil dripping from the icons. Later, we gathered for dinner, where the congregation had prepared Mexican fasting food for us, seasoned with their unconditional love that they were taught through their love of Christ. We prayed the midnight praise thanking God for everything He had done for us. We woke up the second day for the Divine Liturgy, to find 2 surprises waiting for us. There were two baptisms, one of a new born child and the other for a child of the age of 7 coming especially from New York with his Mexican orthodox grandmother to be baptized. After the blessed Divine Liturgy, an adult hymn class was conducted by one of the Egyptian deacons, while the children had their Sunday school class. The children made a huge card for Abouna, demonstrating that even the children learned the language of Christ's love.

On Monday we were blessed by a visit from Abouna Timotheus from Miami, Florida. After many prayers, we felt that God wanted us to direct our work towards the children, so every evening we had Sunday school and

crafts for them. Others stayed with the parents and spoke about the Coptic Church and others spent time praying that the word of God will reach their hearts. The experience of this trip were very beneficial to all of us as a group as well as individually. God has taught us that no matter what we do and how hard we work, it is only by His grace that we will accomplish anything in life. Don't say you are not a good enough person to become a servant or that you are unworthy, for we all are, but say to God that you are just a tool ready to be used by Him for the glorification of His Holy Name. Most importantly, if the love of God fills your heart, then you can move mountains. This story is just the continuation of the book of Acts. Please keep the church in your prayers. To read more stories: take a look at the presentation of the missionary trip to Mexico, please visit:

<http://evangelismcopticorthodox.org/images/mission.ppt>