

Young

Students marvel at Mexicans' simplicity, love

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

If you need to know what time it is, don't ask Hilary Schuler — she'll tell you she doesn't care anymore.

Not that Schuler, a 21-year-old accounting major at St. Bonaventure University in Olean, is apathetic. Her recent trip to an impoverished region of Mexico made her realize she has other priorities more pressing than clock-watching.

"I don't even wear a watch anymore," she said. "I used to be a very stressful, worried person."

What cured her stress was meeting poor people who could afford little more than the clothes on their backs, let alone watches.

"These people made me realize that it's not the end of the world if you don't get what you want," she said.

Schuler was one of 16 St. Bonaventure students and three adult leaders who traveled to the village of Quelites in northwestern Mexico from Jan. 5-11. The University Ministries Center organized the trip to help build a chapel in the region as well as build relations between the students and the people.

Schuler, who is a parishioner at St. Cecilia's Church in Irondequoit, said she signed up for the journey because she always wanted to travel to a underdeveloped country. She said the students and their leaders helped lay a foundation for the chapel, played numerous games with local children, and distributed various donated goods to residents. She also remarked that she and her fellow students were struck by the conditions many of the people lived in, including those who occupied shantytown residences they visited.

"These people were living in very small houses the size of a bedroom with maybe a cloth door," she recalled of one family's residence.

Despite their poverty, the Mexicans were hospitable to their foreign guests, regularly feeding them meals even when the group was only briefly visiting a church or a home, according to Sara E. Geith, 19, a sophomore majoring in elementary education. Geith attends Messiah Lutheran Church in Greece, and participates in Catholic services and outreach work on campus. Like Schuler, Geith said she was moved by the Mexicans' devotion to one another despite their lack of material wealth.

"They were in so much poverty, but to them it wasn't poverty because they had the family, they had the love," she said. "The people I saw down there, I wouldn't say that any of them were unhappy. They



Submitted photos

From left, Brian Sigritz, Monica Penner, Rebecca Pollack, Sara Geith, Catherine Snopkowski, Michael Hill, Juan Peguero, Gabe Iturbides and Brian Palmeri mix cement for the floor of the chapel in Coahuila, a village in San Isidro, Mexico, on Jan. 7.

taught me that if you care for someone, that's enough."

Monica Penner, 21, said she shared some of the same feelings that Geith and Schuler expressed. Penner is a senior majoring in elementary education, and is a parishioner at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Irondequoit. She said she was impressed by the universality of the Catholic Church when she attended Masses in Mexico.

"While attending Mass, I felt for the first time ever like we are all truly brothers and sisters," she said.

Penner added that the group traveled to several "ranchos" or small communities — sometimes numbering only a handful of inhabitants — within San Isidro, the parish in which Quelites lies.

"Depending on the size of the rancho, some ranchos only had Mass once a month or every other week," she said. "When they were able to have Mass said at the rancho, it wouldn't necessarily be on Sunday."

All the students on the trip have various levels of fluency in Spanish, Schuler said, but, in the end, their expertise in the language did not determine their relationship with the Mexicans they visited.

"Most of the Masses were in Spanish," Schuler said. "You got past that because the people were so warm, so it didn't matter that you didn't know what they were saying."

Schuler added that she came back from Mexico with a renewed sense of



Michael Hill, an adult leader, plays with a Mexican boy on Jan. 8 in Arteaga, Mexico.

what it means to believe in a loving God who guides every moment.

"I don't think I've complained at all since I've been back," she said. "I just really enjoy where I am at that time and know that God has put me there for a reason."

Events

Unless otherwise indicated, for information on the following events, call the hotline for Odyssey, the Diocese of Rochester's young-adult (20s and 30s, married and single) network at 716/328-3228, ext. 375, or 1-800-388-7177.

• **Sunday, Feb. 27** — "Church sampler" at St. John the Evangelist, 55 Martha St., Spencerport. Mass begins at noon, followed by brunch at Spencerport Family Restaurant. Call Laura at 716/241-9307 by Feb. 26 for reservations and directions.

• **Thursday, March 2** — Supper program at Blessed Sacrament Church, 259 Rutgers St., Rochester. Volunteers needed from 6 to 8:30 p.m. to help prepare and serve meals. Call Tracy at 716/473-5328 or Cathy at 716/242-9189.

• **Friday, March 3** — Bowling at Ladd's, 873 Merchants Road, Rochester. Bowling begins at 7 p.m. RSVP to Dave at 716/482-8825 by Feb. 29.

• **Sunday, March 5** — "Church sampler" at St. Leo's Church, 167 Lake Ave., Hilton. Mass begins at 10:30 a.m., followed by brunch at the Hilton Diner. Call Tim at 716/461-5833 for reservations and directions.

• **Thursday, March 9** — "What Are You Giving Up for Lent This Year: An Introduction to the Lenten Season." Father Steve Lape, presenter. Runs from 7:30 to 9 p.m. in the Art Room at Good Shepherd Parish, 3318 E. Henrietta Road, Henrietta.

• **Saturday, March 18** — "Odyssey Outdoors." Hiking or cross-country skiing, depending on weather, at Genesee Country Park, south of Batavia. Meet at 9 a.m. at Chili K-Mart parking lot. RSVP to Glenn at 716/271-1818.

• **Tuesday, March 21** — Spiritual Tuesday at Blessed Sacrament Church, 259 Rutgers St., Rochester. Join Crossroads, the parish's young-adult outreach, for a 7:30 p.m. Mass that will include a shared dialog homily. Call Chris Hood at 716/271-7240.

• **Thursday, March 23** — Dinner at the Elmwood Inn Restaurant, 1256 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester. This monthly dinner begins at 7 p.m. RSVP to Teale at 716/637-4922 by March 22.

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