



***Living Water in a Thirsty Land:  
My Journey With the Rarámuri***

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## ***WATER***

Water moves through every corner of our lives.

We drink it to sustain our bodies, we wash in it to begin and end our days, we cook with it to nourish the people we love. It fills our tubs, runs through our pipes, carries our waste away, cools our engines, and keeps our trees, flowers, and gardens alive. It is the quiet thread woven through everything, simple, essential, and sacred.

Most of us have never gone a day without water.

Life cannot survive without it.

But have you ever gone for a day, a week, or even a lifetime without clean water?

Most of us haven't. We turn a handle, water appears, and we trust what flows out.

Yet beneath that trust lie truths we rarely face: chlorine, pharmaceuticals, pesticides, factory runoff, all of it circling back into the water we call "clean."

And while we debate purity, entire communities have no water at all.

Some walk miles beneath a burning sun, or across frozen ground, just to fill a jug that must last their family through the day.



Every long shower, every bright blue pool, every leaking faucet, every sidewalk washed clean, all of it is a luxury of living in an industrialized place.

And still, with all this abundance, water remains one of our most fragile resources.

What we waste, someone else dreams of.

What we take for granted, another family risks their safety to find.

So let this be a soft pause in our busy days, a moment to notice the everyday miracle of turning a handle and watching water appear, and to remember the people for whom clean water is not routine, but rare.

***This is where my journey begins.***

Even though the hard work of many had been underway long before I joined, years of planning, fundraising, organizing, and bringing people, churches, and clubs together, the real foundation was built by countless hearts working across borders. CAPTAR, Rotarians from Mexico to the United States, FECHAC, Creation Care International, and Church of the Palms all poured their time, skills, and resources into this mission long before my feet ever touched the Copper Canyon soil.

I stepped into this mission without knowing a single person. I had never traveled to Chihuahua, Mexico, or the Copper Canyon mountains. I arrived with uncertainty, questions about safety, and the feeling of stepping into the unknown, only to discover the powerful results of devoted hands and faithful teamwork, each group playing a vital role in the hope of delivering clean, safe water one home at a time.

Yet there I was, surrounded by a remarkable group of men and women, different cultures, different languages, different backgrounds, all coming together for five days to help a village learn to install a simple home water system. A system that meant women no longer needed to walk miles with buckets, and that their children could finally drink water without fear.



We visited a village high in the desert of Chihuahua, deep in the Copper Canyon, home to the Tarahumara people, where clean water simply does not exist.

Where families and animals bathe, drink, and wash in the same stagnant pools.

Where streams shrink to a trickle after long summers.

Where children become sick, even die, from the water meant to sustain them.



How do we help them?

And beyond that, how do we protect ourselves?

As the world grows, as infrastructure weakens, as land gives way to concrete, we all inch closer to the same edge these villages already stand upon.

This is not **“their”** problem.

Water does not recognize **borders, politics, or distance.**

We share one planet, living, breathing, finite.  
And water is the lifeblood that keeps it alive.

What I carried home from this journey is hard to explain.

I left Mexico feeling accomplished, welcomed, and deeply connected to people who are now part of my heart forever. Friends I will cherish for a lifetime. This adventure reminded me that when people show up with good intentions, steady hands, and love, even strangers from different corners of the world, we can create real change, one home at a time.

This is the story of how a dream, a simple concept, became a reality.

A reminder that meaningful change often begins quietly, with one idea, one conversation, one person choosing to care.

This journey reminded me that God moves in ways we don't always recognize at first. He nudges, guides, protects, and speaks, If, we are quite long enough to truly listen.

And perhaps, as you walk through this journey with me, shaped by people, by faith, and by the raw beauty of nature, you'll feel inspired to reach out and become part of something larger than yourself.

Because this is not a story of scarcity.

It is a story of hope, of believing that together, we can change the future, one family, one village, one drop at a time.









## ***The path that drove me in***

My path to this moment didn't arrive with fanfare or planning. It came gently, like a whisper, like a nudge from something bigger than myself. I wasn't searching for a mission, or was I? Yet somehow the mission found me.

It began with a phone call, a conversation, a simple invitation that felt strangely like destiny. One moment I was going about my ordinary life, and the next, I was being drawn into a world where clean water was not a convenience, but a miracle.

Something in me stirred, a tug on the heart, a sense of duty, a feeling that *this* was where I was meant to show up. I didn't hesitate. I said yes before my mind had time to catch up.

***Yes to the journey.***

***Yes to the unknown.***

***Yes to being part of something that mattered.***

I stepped into this story as an outsider, but each mile, each face, each shared purpose pulled me closer to the heart of it. I quickly realized this wasn't just a trip, this was a calling. A doorway into understanding how precious water truly is, and how deeply it is needed by those who have none.

That is how I became involved, by listening to that quiet inner voice of God, by trusting the pull toward something meaningful, and by saying yes to how I met twenty-four people, brought together over a span of five days, strangers at first, but quickly woven into a family.

A family built on strength, on integrity, on hands willing to work and hearts willing to serve. Together, they carried hope up a mountain and placed in one home the most precious lifeline on Earth: a simple yet efficient system to deliver fresh, clean, living water.

**DREAMS** drift through all of us, no matter where we were born, what we own, or how clever we are. They rise up like little lanterns in the night, reminding us that the soul always reaches for something more. I've never had just one dream, but a whole handful of them, bright, stubborn, and impossible to ignore. One of the clearest was the wish to go on a mission trip, to serve people, protect nature, and care for the animals who share our world. It was the kind of dream that felt like a calling, a quiet tug on the heart that never really fades.



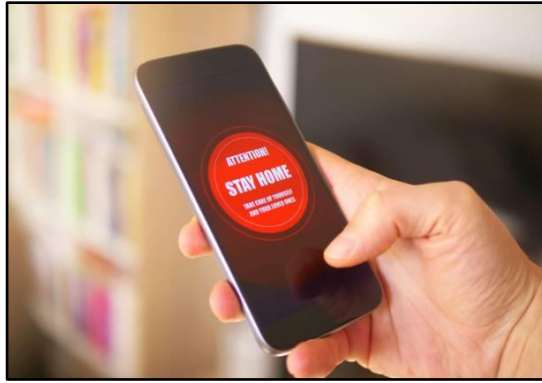
After arriving in Florida from California during the great epidemic, I found myself living just down the road from **Church of the Palms**. For five years I passed that church, always feeling a gentle pulling, as if something inside those walls was quietly calling my name. One day, I finally listened and stepped inside, not out of impulse, but out of a feeling that I had been slowly guided there all along.

When people asked why I joined, the answer came easily: I wanted to be part of a community that genuinely cared about helping others. One afternoon, I picked up a pamphlet about a mission supporting families in Chihuahua, Mexico. Something in it spoke straight to me. I emailed the two contacts listed, Bob and Linda, not expecting anything immediately. But within thirty minutes, I received a warm voice message from a woman named Eloisa. She asked me to call her back, and I did.

I was so excited it felt like a dream opening its own doorway. After Eloisa finished her introduction, the only word I could manage was yes. She laughed softly and said, “Wonderful, I’ll get your ticket booked.”

She went on to explain: Creation Care International was built on relationships; on people whose hearts were stirred long before mine. Eloisa shared that she first met Bob and Linda back in the 90's during a mission devoted to serving those what had been forgotten by the world. What began as a single trip grew into a lifelong calling. Together, the three of them returned to Mexico again and again, completing countless journeys into remote communities, each focused on lifting up families who needed help the most. Their bond was forged in the dusty roads, the long drives into the mountains, the prayers spoken over meals, and the shared belief that service is powerful when it is grounded in love, humility, and faith. Creation Care International grew out of this shared vision.





After saying yes, fear found its way in. For a moment, I almost backed out. I had read a government bulletin warning that the region was under a red alert because of drug cartel activity.

*The U.S. Department of State advises that many violent crimes occur in Mexico, including homicide, kidnapping, carjacking, and robbery, and notes that the U.S. government has limited ability to assist in many regions. In the state of Chihuahua—where Copper Canyon is located—there is a documented risk of violence involving cartels, gangs, and other criminal organizations. Because of these concerns, U.S. government employees are prohibited from traveling to certain high-risk areas, and officials recommend that U.S. citizens follow the same restrictions. Travelers are urged to remain on established routes, avoid remote areas, and use trusted transportation and guides at all times.*

My pastor looked at me with concern and gently urged, “Don’t go.”

I called Bob the member from Church of the Palms, the contact person on the pamphlet, and he told me to follow my heart, pray, listen, and trust that God will guide me. Eloisa had already shared my concerns with him, and he said that only I would truly know the right answer and he did not want to try to convince me one way or another.

I asked why he wasn’t going this time, and he explained that the holidays had filled his calendar. But when I asked if he *would have* gone, he didn’t hesitate, *absolutely*. He even said that if he had known another member from our church wanted to go, he would have rearranged everything to make it work.

I want you to know, it would be an honor, truly, for you to join this mission.

I texted Eloisa back and said I am not sure I feel safe and this was her reply:

“I understand your concern, and yes, there are very real safety considerations. But allow me to explain. The Sierra Tarahumara is vast, a sweeping land of mountains and canyons, and the areas experiencing cartel conflict are many miles from where we travel to install water-harvest projects. We chose this location with care, months of watching, listening, and monitoring, and during that time there wasn’t a single incident.

We take every precaution. We travel only in pickup trucks clearly marked with the logo of the service we provide to the poorest families in the region. We move caravan style, never alone,

never unannounced. Before each journey we contact the mayors of the local municipalities, letting them know when we are coming, where we will be, and how long we will stay. If there is even a hint of risk, the trip is canceled immediately.

Our work is known, and respected, even by those in the cartel. Of course, nothing in this world is guaranteed; danger exists everywhere, even here in the United States. And I say this not to convince you, but to give you clarity.

Those who join us on this journey are asked to travel with strong faith and a steady trust in our Heavenly Father's protection. Your peace of mind matters deeply to us. Turn the worry over to Him, listen for that quiet inner guidance, and trust that you will know what is right for you. What matters most is that your heart feels at ease with the choice you make."

Then my son spoke up with a quiet truth: "Go. You love the people of Mexico. You've been going there for over forty years." And his words settled into me like an anchor.

My church friends gathered around me, lifting prayers for protection and peace. And I prayed too, every single day, for my own safety, and for the safety of the new faces I had not yet met but already felt connected to.

***Courage comes softly sometimes, a whisper that says, Trust. And slowly, I did.***

That afternoon, still buzzing with disbelief, I sat down and began searching for everything I could learn about the Rarámuri. The more I read, the more amazed I became. Here is what I found:



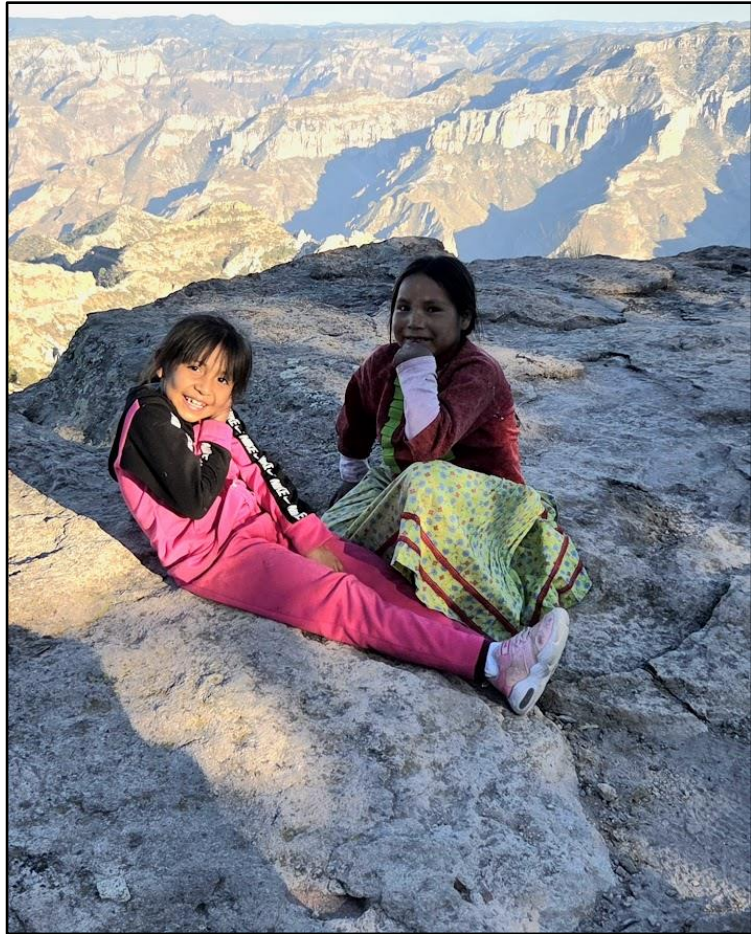


**The Rarámuri**, known to many as the Tarahumara, are an Indigenous people who have lived for centuries in the vast, rugged expanse of the Sierra Madre. Their name means “*the light-footed ones*,” a testament to both their spirit and their legendary endurance. For generations, they have built their lives in the deep folds of Copper Canyon, farming small plots of corn and beans, tending their animals, and crafting homes of stone, timber, and adobe structures that blend into the canyon walls as naturally as if they had risen from the earth itself.

Their culture is woven with community, hospitality, and a profound reverence for the land. Festivals resound with prayer, with dance, and with the sharing of **tesgüino**, a traditional corn-based drink that lies at the heart of their gatherings. Songs travel from one generation to the next, carried on canyon winds that remember every step of their history. Outsiders often know them for their astonishing running ability, though for the Rarámuri, running is not a sport, it is devotion. Men and women traverse steep, rocky trails barefoot or in simple leather huaraches, running not for competition, but for prayer, for celebration, and for connection to the ancestors who ran before them.



Their clothing mirrors this deep connection to culture and land. Women wear vibrant, layered skirts and beautifully patterned blouses, colors as bold as canyon sunsets, as steady as the earth beneath their feet. Men often dress in loose white or lightly colored shirts, woven belts, and traditional headbands, simple garments suited for ceremony, work, and their long-distance journeys. While not every color carries a written meaning, patterns and hues often reflect family roots, village traditions, and stories passed down through cloth rather than words. Whether preparing for daily life or for a sacred race, their attire is more than fabric, it is identity, resilience, and a quiet thread tying each person to their community and to the mountains they call home.



Life in the canyons is beautiful but demanding, and the Rarámuri face challenges with access to clean water, health care, and basic resources. Yet despite hardships, their cultural identity remains strong, steady, resilient, and deeply rooted in their traditions.

This was the community, the mission and vision of **CAPTAR**, the fellow **Rotarians**, **Creation Care International Inc.**, **FECHAC** and **Church of the Palms** hoped to serve, to bring and install a home water system that families could maintain themselves and eventually duplicate for others. A tool meant not to replace their self-reliance, but to strengthen it.

It was humbling to be invited into a project that honored people so rich in history, faith, and quiet, enduring strength.



## My Arrival

The airplane touched down in Chihuahua, Mexico, and waiting for me was Eloise, the same warm, gracious voice I had heard on the phone, now standing before me with open arms. She greeted me with a hug, the kind that immediately tells you you're in good hands, and from that moment, the journey continued.

We drove through the city of Chihuahua, and to my surprise, it felt nothing like the harsh images painted in warnings and reports. The streets were clean, the architecture thoughtful and modern, lush shrubbery lined the sidewalks, and everywhere I looked I saw familiar American companies, manufacturers, stores, restaurants, blending seamlessly into the rhythm of the city. For a moment, I could have sworn I was in a U.S. metropolitan town.

We were taken to the place we'd be staying in, a quirky little spot I ended up nicknaming **the mousetrap**. Eloisa met us there again, smiling as she handed out the series of codes we needed just to enter, three gates, in total, before climbing a set of stairs that finally led to our rooms. It was an adventure before the adventure even began.

Once we dropped our luggage, we headed straight to the San Felipe Rotarian offices. As we walked in, we were greeted by a line of men wearing matching black shirts embroidered with the Rotary emblem and the Mexican flag. It felt like stepping into a welcoming tide, hugs, warm handshakes, smiles that reached their eyes.

There, I met the other U.S. Rotarians. Being brand-new to a Rotary gathering, I had no idea what to expect. One by one, each person introduced themselves, sharing their profession, and then, with great humor, their nickname, most of which happened to be borrowed from classic American cartoon characters. I couldn't help but laugh; even in a foreign country, hospitality had a way of feeling like home.

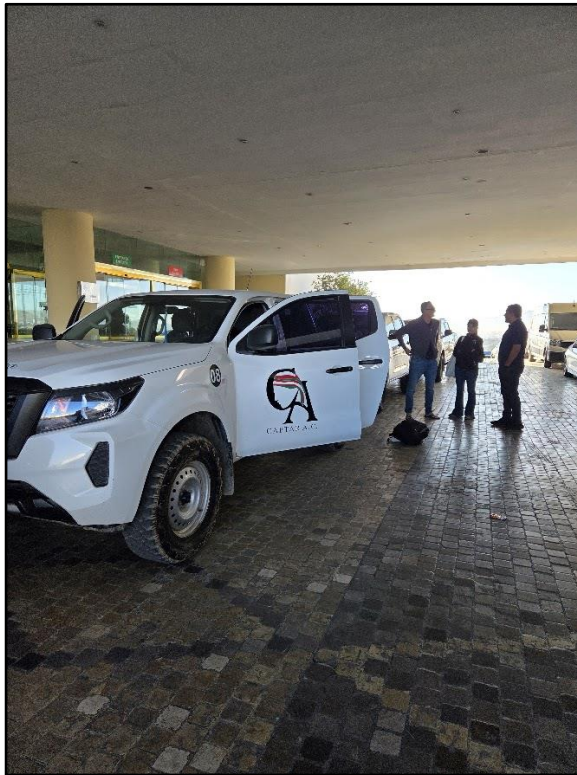


The Rotary Club of San Felipe in Chihuahua stands as a shining example of service, compassion, and community partnership. Guided by Rotary International's core value of "Service Above Self," the club brings together local leaders, Indigenous communities, and international partners to uplift some of the most remote regions of the Sierra Tarahumara.

Their mission centers on creating sustainable, long-term solutions for families living in rugged mountain villages, where access to basic resources is limited. One of their most impactful efforts is providing clean, drinkable water through rainwater-harvesting systems designed to function where traditional infrastructure cannot reach.

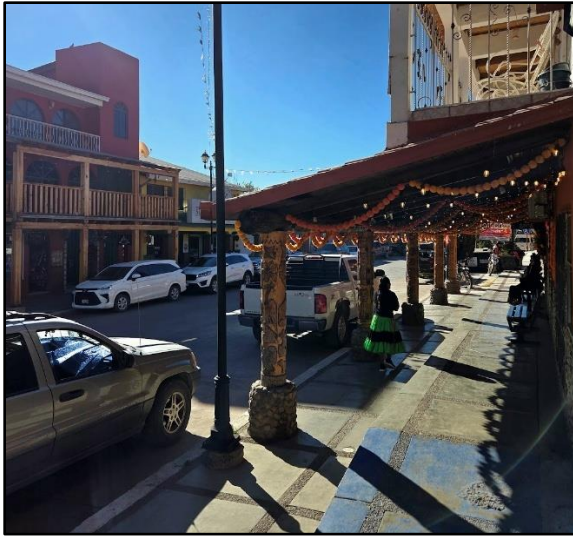
In collaboration with CAPTAR and other humanitarian partners, the Rotary Club of San Felipe supports programs that offer not only water, but education, training, and community empowerment. Families learn how to install, maintain, and eventually replicate the systems themselves—ensuring independence, resilience, and dignity.

Through this work, the club continues to transform lives by replacing short-term aid with sustainable change, always guided by the belief that strong communities grow when people work together with purpose and heart.



The next day we gathered at the Sheraton and set out for Creel, our home base for the following two nights. I rode with Daniel from CAPTAR, better known as Speedy Gonzalez, along with Humberto from the San Felipe Rotarians and Charles from the Decatur Daybreak Rotary Club from Alabama, a Judge who retired but was full of stories, and me with my love of Mexico and my past adventures in this amazing country. As the miles slipped by, we talked about everything from our governments and politics to the local crops, especially the endless stretches of apple orchards. We shared our stories of how each of us found our way to this mission, strangers slowly becoming companions on the same path.





By early afternoon we reached our destination, a beautiful lodge nestled in a village that looked almost Swiss, with log cabins and a charm that felt like stepping into another world. We dropped our luggage, breathed in the crisp mountain air, and without lingering long, continued our journey. Up the winding road we climbed, another hour into the heights of Copper Canyon, where the air thinned, the world grew quieter, and the true purpose of our mission came closer with every turn. Yet, I couldn't deny that part of this still felt more like a vacation than a mission; the beauty around us softened the edges of what we had come to do. But tomorrow would come soon enough. For now, we allowed ourselves to settle in, to talk, to laugh, and to learn more about this remarkable country and the people who call it home.



Copper Canyon, or *Barranca del Cobre*, is not just one canyon but an enormous network of six interconnected gorges carved into the western edge of the Sierra Madre. Its sheer scale is breathtaking, spreading across nearly 25,000 square miles, it is roughly four times larger than the Grand Canyon. Some ravines plunge more than 5,900 feet deep, making parts of it even deeper than the canyons in Arizona. The canyon walls shimmer with a copper-green sheen that gives the region its name, and the land has shaped the Rarámuri people for centuries, rugged, isolated, and profoundly beautiful.

The climate here is as dramatic as the landscape. The upper elevations of Copper Canyon receive an average of **15 inches of rain a year**, most of it falling in the summer months, typically **July through September**, when sudden afternoon storms sweep through the mountains. Winters, stretching from November through March, can be bitterly cold, and snowfall is not uncommon at higher elevations. Snow may arrive as early as December, dusting the peaks and villages with white before vanishing under the next burst of sun. These seasonal swings mean that water is plentiful only in brief windows, then gone for months.



Threading through this vast wilderness is one of the most remarkable rail lines in the world: the Chihuahua al Pacífico Railway, known lovingly as **El Chepe**. It took decades to build, finally opening in 1961 after engineers battled the unforgiving terrain of the Sierra Madre. Today the train crosses 86 tunnels and dozens of bridges, climbing toward 8,000 feet as it winds through cliffs, ridges, and deep canyons. For travelers it is considered one of the most scenic journeys in the Americas. For the people who live here, it is a rare link to the outside world, one of the few lifelines connecting remote mountain villages to the cities beyond.

And this is why water-capture systems matter so deeply. With no major reservoirs in these scattered settlements, families must rely on the land itself. The brief but powerful rains must be gathered and stored, because once the storms fade, the mountains return to months of dryness. Installing rainwater-harvesting systems is more than a project, it is survival. Understanding the immensity of this canyon and the scarcity of its water makes the mission feel even more urgent.

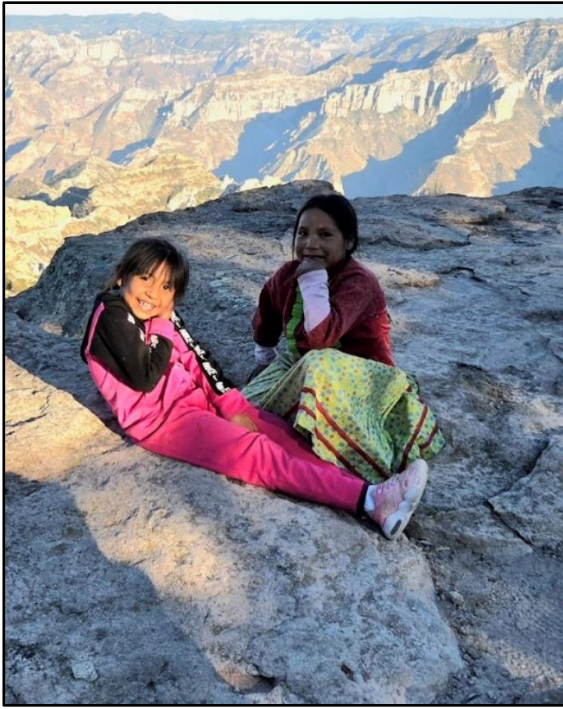
The further we climbed, the clearer it became: in a place this remote, this vast, and this beautiful canyon, bringing clean water to even one home carries a meaning beyond words.



After stopping at the train station to take in the sweeping mountain scenery, we wandered through a small open market where local Rarámuri women sold their handcrafted goods. Their tables were lined with woven baskets, wooden figures, and beadwork made with quiet precision. Of course, I couldn't resist, a hand-woven basket, still smelling of fresh grass and earth, came home with me.



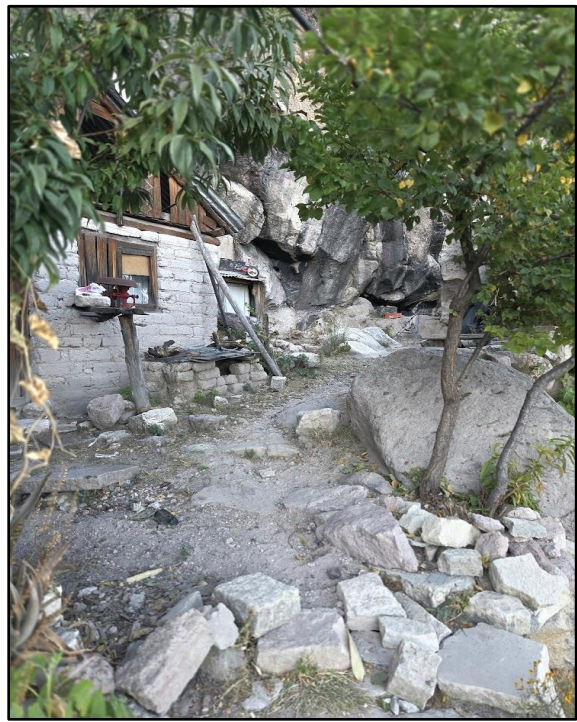
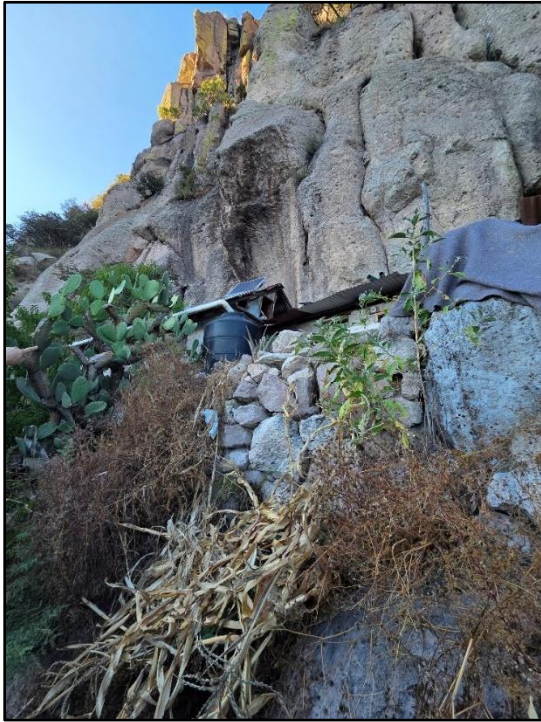
From there we continued on to the famous zip lines. We took a wrong turn along the way, and by the time we finally arrived, the gates were closed. Oh well, another adventure for another day. The view alone, stretched out over infinite cliffs and canyon walls, was worth the trip.



Our next stop was a lodge overlooking the canyon, where our photographer, Nikola, convinced two young girls, both about twelve years old, to take us on a 1.5-mile hike. For girls with little formal education, they were remarkably bright. One dreamed of becoming a nurse someday, her eyes full of quiet determination. What amazed me even more was how quickly she sensed my love for plants. As we walked, she pointed out the names of shrubs and plants in her language, teaching me the land through her eyes. At one point she picked berries from what looked like a manzanita bush and handed them to Humberto and myself. I paused, unsure, until she giggled and popped a few into her own mouth. Only then did I taste them, sweet with a citrus tang, touched by the mountain wind.

Her little sister darted ahead of us, opening gates and waiting patiently until we all passed through before closing them again. Then off she ran to the front, nimble as a deer, doing all of this at nearly 8,000 feet of elevation while my lungs felt like they would explode. And while we all sported expensive hiking boots and gear meant for high-altitude trails, those two children ran effortlessly in simple sandals, moving with a grace that belonged to the mountains themselves.



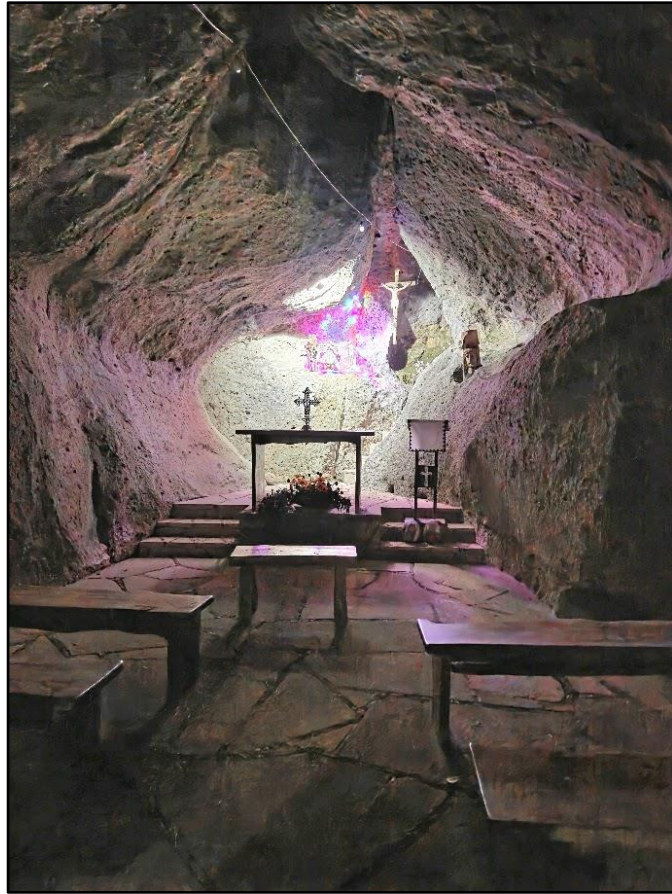


At the end of the trail we passed their home, tucked into the mountainside beneath the lodge. It was no larger than a single bedroom by U.S. standards, walls weathered by sun and wind, but cared for with pride. Below it stood an older cornfield and a water cistern fed by a trickle from the boulders above. The top portion held the cleanest water for drinking; the lower, green-tinted pool was used for bathing and washing. Standing there, seeing how simply and resourcefully they lived, I felt the canyon shift from breathtaking landscape to a place of deep humility, a reminder of why we had come.



We headed back down the hill and made our way to meet the Creel Rotarian group. What a surprise awaited us; a meeting room built directly into the side of a cave. But the surprises didn't stop there. Carved into the rock was a bathroom sink, and just beyond it, a small church tucked into the stone as if it had grown there naturally. After taking in this remarkable place, the meeting began with presentations from both the men and the women's Segorachi and Creel Rotary Clubs.





It was the women's presentation that struck me hardest. They had recently lost someone in a fire in the town of Creel, and they were desperately trying to raise funds to buy a firetruck. As I listened, my CERT (certified emergency response team) training and background immediately kicked in. I grew up in California where fires were a way of life and death and destruction. I knew there were solutions that were far less costly yet still lifesaving. I shared with them that I would gather information and send ideas on the alternative plan I had in mind, anything to help them protect their community in a way that was realistic and attainable.

After the presentations, we were treated to homemade tamales, warm apple turnovers, and two delicious hot drinks. One was, Ponche, a comforting beverage made from dried and fresh fruits and spices, rich with the aroma of tradition. The other was **Champurrado**, a thick and hearty Mexican chocolate drink made with masa harina, milk, and cinnamon. Each sip felt like a hug on a cool mountain evening. It was a simple meal, yet one of the most memorable and heartfelt I've ever had.



The next morning, we were up early, restless and eager to finally do what we had come all this way to do. The climb from roughly 4,000 feet to nearly 8,000 was a long three-hour haul, rugged, narrow, and dustier than anything I'd ever imagined. Dani, Speedy Gonzalez our driver, navigated it like a master, weaving around places where the rains had carved deep trenches straight across the road. About halfway up, Charles was like a child in the backseat asking, *"How much longer?"*

Dani answered, "Ten minutes," and I couldn't help but laugh and say, "Mexican minutes."

Twenty minutes later Charles asked again, "Are we there yet?"

Dani replied, "Just ten more," and again I said, "Mexican minutes."

Sure enough, ten Mexican minutes later, forty-five real minutes, we finally arrived.

Besides the endless dust, we saw only one-armed cartel along the road, so all things considered, it was a remarkably safe trip.



When we reached the village, the real work began. Five trucks pulled in, each loaded with volunteers and supplies, food, toys, therapeutic food supplements to help decrease **malnutrition**, and materials for the water system. The moment the engines shut off, everyone jumped out and moved as if we had practiced this together for years. Within three hours, the roof and the entire water system were installed. Down the hill, food sizzled on an enormous grilling pan while some of us handed out gifts and vitamin supplement packages to the children.

As I handed each child their bag of therapeutic food supplements, a few of the younger ones handed them right back to me, wanting them opened so they could eat immediately. It broke my heart to see how hungry they were, but the way they recognized the supplements said something powerful. It meant we had reached them before. It meant *we had them*, that they were already in our care, already part of the circle of people we were trying so hard to protect and nourish.



The women were especially grateful for receiving sewing kits to make their traditional garments, and for cotton, colorful scarfs known as “paleacates” that they wear as part of their custom to cover their heads.



Another question rose in me as I looked at the women. Even though food was scarce, many of the women carried a roundness in their bellies that didn't match the hunger etched into their faces. When I came home, I searched for answers, and what I learned made my heart ache. In communities where nutrition is limited and meals are often built around only corn and beans, the body can swell from a lack of protein and essential nutrients. It isn't fullness, it's **edema**, a quiet swelling that happens when the body, worn down by hard work, pregnancies, and long days spent caring for everyone else, simply doesn't have what it needs to function. These rounded bellies are not signs of abundance, but signs of lives lived on too little, of women giving the best of what they have to their children and families. It is one of the most painful contradictions of poverty: a swollen belly in a place of hunger.

As the morning went on, more families arrived, some walking miles across the mountains, to watch the installation, join the training, and share the meal. The goal was simple but powerful: **deliver the system, and teach the community how to build and maintain it themselves.** Their only tools were hand saws, hammers, and pliers, yet with guidance and grit, they took ownership of the work. The installation went smoothly, a true partnership between our team and theirs, proof that resilience and determination live strongest in places where resources are few, but hope runs deep.





The water system was finally installed, gifts were handed out to the women and children, and bags of food and necessities were shared with each family. As I looked around, I noticed something striking, there were so many little girls, all dressed up in their Sunday's best because they were told visitors were coming, but only a handful of boys in the entire village. It was a quiet reminder of how differently life unfolds in these mountains, where hardship shapes families in ways we may never fully understand.

When I returned home, the question stayed with me, why were there so many little girls in the villages and so few boys? I searched for answers, reading everything I could find, and what I learned was quietly heartbreaking. Around the world, boys enter life with a touch more fragility, their immune systems slower to strengthen, their earliest days marked by a higher risk of complications. In places where children already face steep odds, medical researchers note that this natural vulnerability can become more profound. In the remote Rarámuri communities, where food is often scarce, medical care distant, and the land itself demanding, those small biological differences can grow heavier, and some boys may be lost in their early years. The rest of the difference unfolds later, when boys, sometimes as young as eight or nine, are drawn away from home to seek work, help extended family and lighten the burden of poverty. Beyond the safety of the village, the world is harsher: long days of labor, uncertainty, and, in some regions, the reach of criminal groups that prey on vulnerable boys. Meanwhile, the girls remain close to their mothers, rooted in the daily rhythm of village life. And so, in the dust of the mountains, you see mostly daughters, bright-eyed, barefoot, and present, while their brothers have already stepped onto a harder, more uncertain path far too soon.



While we cleaned up, I sat with several of the girls and colored in the little books I had brought for them. The air was dusty and dry, and as my asthma flared, I began to cough. One of the girls noticed instantly. Without hesitation she ran into her home and returned with a glass of water. I hesitated, unsure if it was safe to drink and painfully, aware that a single glass of water here was precious. Still, I took a small sip, moved by the kindness shining in her eyes. Moments later she handed me two small pieces of gum, a treasure, in a place with so little. Only later did I learn that in their culture, if someone has more than you, they give you half of what they have. That simple act of generosity humbled me deeply. If only our own country practiced kindness so freely.

Soon afterward, we all walked down the hill toward the smell of sizzling meat and the warm smoke rising from handmade tortillas cooking over open flames. We had been told that the Rarámuri wanted to provide *us* with lunch, however, it is a **CAPTAR** tradition that when a water harvest system is completely installed, the operations team offers a seasoned beef with vegetable taco meal to give thanks. It was a profound gesture. We were instructed to eat only a little, not from politeness, but because this meal normally fed the entire community and we wanted to make sure that they came first and had plenty to eat, we knew we were heading back to a hearty dinner. And despite the language barrier, somehow, we all understood each other. We shared smiles, nods, laughter, and a meal prepared from the heart, a different and unique Thanksgiving.



After lunch, the celebration began. The women tied their gift given colorful scarves together to form a long ribbon for the ceremony, creating a vibrant chain that fluttered in the mountain breeze. We gathered in small groups for photos, capturing not just the completion of a project, but the joining of two communities, two worlds, drawn together by purpose and compassion.



With the work done and the celebration complete, we gathered our belongings, exchanged warm hugs with the families, and began our venture back down the hill. One of the unspoken laws of the land is to leave before dusk, the mountains grow quiet, the roads grow lonely, and safety becomes uncertain. So, we slipped away gently, carrying with us the echoes of children's laughter, the gratitude of the mothers, and the humble realization that even the smallest act of service can ripple through a community like water through a dry riverbed.

As we wound our way back down the mountain, bone-tired and dust-covered, our hearts were crowded with everything we had seen and felt. A father and his young daughter, both quiet, humble, and grateful, climbed into the truck with us. They had walked miles to reach the training, and now, with their arms full of food and supplies, they faced the long journey home. We dropped them off near a small clearing, and just ahead walked an elderly woman with her dog. She balanced a heavy sack of potatoes or onions on her head, and in each hand swung bulging bags that looked far too heavy for her small frame. She climbed slowly into the back of the truck. Charles offered to sit in the back of the bed, but the driver said no. I wish I had taken her photo for all to see but I was so amazed at this woman I sat frozen in my seat.



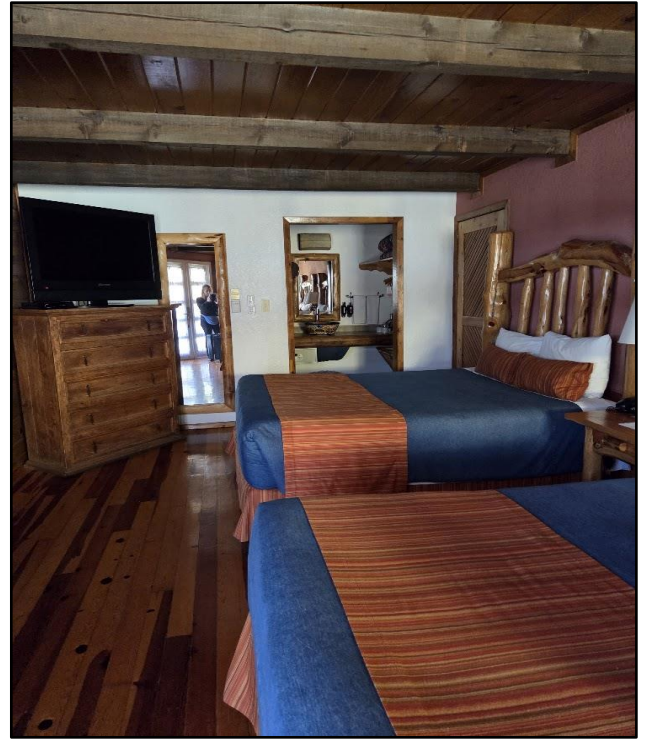
As soon as we pulled away, her dog burst into a full sprint behind us, thin legs kicking up dust, blue eyes fixed on the truck, desperate to stay close. At first, I thought we would stop, so that we'd let him catch up. But then the dirt road gave way to pavement, fast cars, narrow shoulders, no safe place for a dog to run.

We begged the driver to turn around. He refused. "He will find his way home," he said. "Dogs are valued differently here than in the United States." And he was right.

My own dogs sleep on my bed. They get groomed, go to dog parks, eat homemade meals, and have baskets overflowing with toys. But here, dogs survive on instinct. They aren't bathed or fed or sheltered. They belong to the land as much as to any person.

Still, the sight of that young dog, those piercing eyes filled with fear and devotion, has never left me. Charles felt it too. We sat quietly in the back seat praying, asking God to guide him safely home, to help him find his way back to the woman he adored.

Even now, I can still see him in my mind, running down that dusty road, loyal beyond words.



We pulled into the lodge, and all I could think about was standing beneath hot water, washing away the thick dust that clung to my skin and hair. But the moment I turned on the shower, guilt rose in my throat. I watched the cold water run down the drain while I waited for it to warm, and all I could see in my mind were the cups of water the villagers cherished, measured, precious, life-sustaining. Water that meant everything to them, now slipping past my feet.

That night, despite the heaviness still sitting in our hearts, we gathered to celebrate another successful installation. Everyone was safe, everyone had given their all, and the mission had blessed yet another family. Eloisa and the CAPTAR team had one more stop to make in the morning before heading back to the city of Chihuahua, but for that moment, we rested, grateful, humbled, and changed.



Packed and ready to go, we climbed into the truck for one final stop. We drove to a modest home about ten blocks from the lodge, a place where a water system had recently been installed for a family with three children: a twelve-year-old boy, a little girl, and their younger brother who had no arms and too crippled to walk. The Rotary Club had donated a wheelchair to him, a gift that felt both hopeful and heartbreaking at the same time. Life in those mountains is already difficult, but caring for a child with disabilities in a place of dirt roads and limited access to medical care is a weight I can't fully imagine.



After warm embraces and goodbyes, we were on our way to the beautiful city of Chihuahua, where we would rest our heads for one more night before returning home. I can't begin to explain how much I had grown in just five days, how deeply this adventure had shaped me. I thank God daily for giving me the chance to help others, and in doing so, to heal something within myself.

Sometimes we have to cross to the "other side" to truly understand how blessed we are. Yet I still wonder: with all our rushing, stress, and constant demands, are we better off? The Rarámuri people live a hard life, yes, but a simple, present, connected one. We live an easier life, but one tangled in complexity, pressure, and noise. It makes you stop and think.

And I also find myself asking why two great countries, Mexico and the United States, each with abundant resources, rich soil, vast oceans, precious minerals like gold, silver, and oil, cannot come together in unity. If we ever chose to lift each other up instead of standing apart, imagine the good we could release into this world.

What touched me just as deeply as the mission work itself were the people. In only a few days, I met so many incredible souls, each one kind, open-hearted, and ready to serve without hesitation. Our core group of twenty-four felt like family almost instantly, as though we had known one another far longer than this brief moment in time. I met so many amazing people, and

those bonds formed quickly and naturally. I know I will always keep in touch with them. Some connections become part of your story forever, and this journey gifted me more of those than I ever imagined.

God is good, and when we take the time to slow down and truly listen, He gently guides us toward what He wants us to do, toward the people who need us, the places that change us, and the work that carries His purpose.

For those of you who feel nervous about going on a mission, I understand. Truly, I do. I've traveled throughout Mexico for more than forty years, and even with all that experience, I still questioned my safety before this trip. But once I stepped into this mission, I felt protected. The faith I have in God carried me, He heard every prayer I whispered, and He kept us safe every step of the way.

And if you can't travel, please know this: you can still be part of something meaningful. This is an extraordinary group of people, clubs, and churches working together with so much heart. They need support, they need prayers, and they need hands and gifts of all kinds. There are countless ways to help this mission without ever stepping foot in Mexico.

**All you have to do is reach out.**





**Church of the Palms in Sarasota, Florida** has become a quiet but steady thread woven into the lives of the Rarámuri people of Copper Canyon. What began as one simple “yes” has grown into a heartfelt partnership, rooted in compassion, faith, and the belief that clean water and nourishment are gifts every family deserves. And while only a few members of the church make the long journey into the mountains, the entire congregation is deeply involved. They are true to their belief of Love God-Love Neighbor. Through their **donations, prayers, financial support, and generous giving**, they are providing food relief packages, **high-calorie vitamin food packets for malnourished children, seeds for home and community vegetable gardens, and the starting block of a Reforestation Project that will help both the Raramuri families and the environment.**

This mission is just one reflection of a church that lives out its calling to **feed the world**. Church of the Palms pours into its community in countless ways, through local food pantries, hunger relief programs, disaster-response efforts, support for homeless families, and partnerships that strengthen schools and neighborhoods. Beyond U.S. borders, they extend their reach to countries in need, offering humanitarian aid, clean-water initiatives, and spiritual support wherever hope is thin and resources scarce.

In every corner of their ministry, whether serving in Sarasota or standing among the mountains of Mexico, the heart of Church of the Palms beats the same: to love boldly, give generously, and meet people exactly where they are. Their outreach ripples far beyond their walls, proving that even when only a few can go, an entire church can make the world feel fed, seen, and deeply cared for.



**Creation Care International Inc. (CCI)** grew out of this shared vision, a mission shaped by compassion and a deep respect for those they serve. Their work focuses on assisting marginalized Indigenous communities in the Mexican State of Chihuahua, where the Raramuri (Tarahumara), Tepehuano, Guarojio, and Pima people face immense hardship: chronic malnutrition, limited access to clean water, and a scarcity of medical care and educational resources. These conditions have led to devastatingly high mortality rates among infants, young children, and mothers. But rather than imposing solutions, Creation care seeks to strengthen what already exists, bringing tools like home water systems, nutritional support, and health education that families can maintain and replicate themselves. Each project is a collaboration, honoring culture and reinforcing resilience. Through their decades of work, Bob, Linda, and Eloisa have become living threads in a much larger tapestry, one woven from service, hope, and the belief that caring for creation begins with caring for one another.

CCI is deeply grateful for all who have supported this mission, and for those who will continue to stand alongside it, donating, participating, and giving of themselves to help carry this worthy work forward.



***The Rotary Club of San Felipe in Chihuahua*** has established itself as a beacon of local service and international partnership, anchored by the core values of Rotary International: **“Service Above Self.”**

None of this would be possible without the unwavering dedication and collective effort of so many individuals and organizations. Each person who donates their time, resources, or skills plays a vital role in creating hope and fostering transformation in these communities. The ripple effect of compassion and service extends far beyond what anyone could accomplish alone, reminding us that when we work together, real and lasting change becomes possible.

As the host club in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, San Felipe, in partnering with CAPTAR and their strategic alliance, brings local municipal support, Indigenous community collaboration, and international Rotarian sponsorships from the United States. In the current initiative, the Rotary Club of San Felipe collaborates with U.S. Rotary Districts and Clubs from Heart 2 Heart.



The Decatur Daybreak Rotary Club resides in Decatur, Alabama in Rotary District 6860. There are over 35,000 Rotary clubs in the world, with a total of approximately 1.2 million members across more than 220 countries and geographical areas. These clubs are the local chapters of the global organization, Rotary International, which coordinates worldwide service projects and initiatives.

The Decatur Daybreak Rotary Club has been engaged in what Rotary calls “International Service” for over a decade with projects in Haiti, the US Virgin Islands and Mexico. The club’s primary focus has been planning, funding and conducting Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) projects such as delivering water filtration systems to hurricane ravaged Saint Thomas, building bio-sand filters in the remote mountains in Haiti and cleaning and sanitizing the water systems to the public schools in Ecatepec, Mexico.

Locally the club has supported youth education programs, conducted food drives, supported the development of youth leaders, worked on Habitat for Humanity houses, participated in the annual United Way Day of Caring and raised funds for Rotary’s worldwide campaign to end polio.

The Decatur Daybreak Rotary Club prides itself on having an outsized humanitarian impact for a club of thirty members.



CAPTAR A.C.

**CAPTAR (Centro de Acopio para la Tarahumara)** is a Mexican non-profit organization that works in the state of Chihuahua, focusing on sustainable projects like installing rainwater harvesting systems, creating family farms, and providing education to communities living in poverty. The organization, also known as CAPTAR A.C., partners with other groups to deliver aid such as food, water containers, and supplies. Their work is primarily concentrated in northern state of Chihuahua within the Indigenous population. The organization aims to address fundamental problems in communities living in extreme poverty by creating long-term, high-quality solutions. The project design emphasizes community ownership and sustainability: village families are taught to install the Water Harvest and Storage systems, including the tanks and piping themselves. Under training and supervision, they receive additional workshops in water hygiene, purification, maintenance, and all training is given in the Rarámuri language to ensure meaningful participation. Through hands-on demonstration practices, villages are shifting from short-term aid to long-term empowerment, ensuring each family has a lifeline of clean water and the ability to replicate the system for others.



**FECHAC** **FECHAC**, the *Fundación del Empresariado Chihuahuense*, is a respected nonprofit in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, created by local business leaders to support vulnerable communities through education, preventive health, and social-development programs. Rather than focusing only on short-term aid, FECHAC strengthens local organizations, builds community capacity, and partners with government and civil groups to create long-lasting change. Over the years, they've supported thousands of projects, from improving schools and health services to empowering rural and indigenous communities like those in the Sierra Tarahumara. Their mission is rooted in solidarity, transparency, and the belief that strong communities can transform their own future when given the tools and support to thrive.



## HOPE BEGINS WITH ONE SIMPLE ACT

My summary, *but not the end but a new beginning.*

I am honored to be a member of Church of the Palms, and deeply grateful that a simple pamphlet opened the door to a mission that changed the way I see the world. I've always worried about the quality of our water here in the U.S. but witnessing a community where water itself is a precious rarity took that concern to an entirely different level.

At first, the people of the Tarahumara were shy, and I understood why, after all, we were strangers arriving in their mountains. But as the days unfolded, what stayed with me wasn't their shyness; it was the quiet truth of how little they have. Food is scarce. Water is scarce. And yet gratitude blooms everywhere.

As I sit here writing, five dogs curl at my feet in my office, each one well-fed, each with water that never runs out. And I can't help but feel the weight of that contrast. In our busy American lives, we often forget how fortunate we are. We face problems, yes, but even in our hardest moments we live with comforts others can only dream of. Meanwhile, the Tarahumara live each day with so little, and still meet the world with grace, strength, and appreciation, even for a crumb.

Most of us want to help, but we get swept up in schedules and don't always know where to begin. What I learned on this mission is that when you open your heart, God does the guiding. I felt His presence from the moment I said yes, He cleared the path, He quieted my fear, and He kept every one of us safe in the mountains. I know I didn't go alone; I was led.

If you feel even the smallest tug to serve, trust it. Reach out to any one of us connected to these incredible organizations, and we'll help guide you, whether that means giving, praying, traveling, or supporting from right here at home. There is always a way to contribute, always a way to lift someone else's burden, and God will meet you in every step you take. And because of the faithful hands of Church of the Palms, one more child now wakes to a day that is filled with hope, and I am so honored to be part of that mission and many more missions to come. So, reach out and one of us will grab your hand and pull you in to this incredible experience of Life and know it will make a difference in you and the people of Tarahumara.



I would like to personally thank **Eloisa of Creation Care International** for inspiring me to go, and for giving me the space to simply be myself, observing, absorbing, and learning every moment. My gratitude also goes to the **CAPTAR crew**, especially **Luisa**, for the endless months of work she poured into this mission long before we ever arrived. She carried the weight of the details so gracefully that she made our journey feel almost like a vacation, and **Dani, our own Speedy Gonzales**, thank you for driving countless hours and getting us everywhere safely. To **Charles**, my back-seat companion, thank you for your huge heart and for sharing hours of stories that made every mile feel shorter. To **Humberto of the San Felipe Rotary**, thank you for being a true friend, for caring as deeply as I do about this mission, and for being my interpreter when I needed it most.

To **Nikola**, thank you for your incredible eye behind the camera and for bringing a smile to every child we met. And to all the **Rotarians**, thank you for welcoming us like family from the very first moment.

This mission was built on the hands and hearts of so many, and I am grateful for each one and each of you.





And as the Rarámuri say, ***Matétera ba!*** This is the Rarámuri expression for thank and it includes ***may you be accompanied with blessings...***



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