



# Karitas



*“Building Bridges, Celebrating Community”*

[www.karitasfoundation.org](http://www.karitasfoundation.org)

Annual Newsletter

2014-2015

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Letter from the President

## Seeds of Promise... Harvests of Hope

Dear Partners in Compassionate Action,

As a partner, you join a broad and wonderful circle of people, celebrating ever deepening bonds of shared vision and commitment, journeying together toward fuller well-being and richer futures. Let three metaphors of sowing and reaping, planting and harvesting speak both poetically and concretely.

Some years ago we moved into a new home in early fall. After settling in, we planned and planted flower and vegetable gardens, some sapling fruit trees as well. From the first thaw we tended those gardens with diligence and care. The blossoms were beautiful, the vegetables robust and succulent, and the fruit trees showed promise of harvests to come. *We* planted and harvested; *our* sowing and reaping. Much of Karitas’ fruitfulness of the year past, dedicated and concerted work, are *harvests of effort*.

A few years later we moved again, this time in the spring. Too late to plan that season’s garden. But we delighted in watching each day for first tender shoots; a first sign of the prior owner’s planting. Each blossom a delightful surprise and a serendipitous array of vegetables. *Another’s* planting, our harvesting; *someone else’s* sowing, our reaping. We called that our *garden of grace*. Some of Karitas’ bounty this year are *harvests of grace*.



The community of El Texcal meets weekly to plan the activities of the recycling and reuse center

Welcome a touch of humor in the third vignette. One fall I got arguably carried away, precisely mapping each of our gardens, with bulb planting in mind, plotting the sequencing of blossoms and contrasts of color across the following spring and summer. I left our nearby nursery with over twenty small containers, each with different bulbs carefully labeled for species and color, set in rows in the truck of my car. As I turned the last corner, a boy chased a basketball into the street and I hit the brakes. I opened the trunk to

find dozens of bulbs tumbling in disarray! So, we planted, bulb by bulb, and found springtime and summer a *harvest of surprises!* Karitas casts seeds broadly, plants seeds deeply, casting with abandon, like the biblical sower, yielding *harvests of surprise*.

This newsletter shares those differing harvests – *harvests of effort*, the yield of creativity, planning and hard work, *harvests of grace*, the unexpected and surprising, the gracious, and grace-filled, and the *harvests of surprise*, the people “who showed up” and the things that “just happened” – always with exquisite timing. A simple prayer comes to mind: “We will *work* as if it is all up to us, and, we will *pray* as if it is all up to God.” Contemplatives of any faith tradition invite us to live the delicate balance of *effort and grace*. Seeds of solidarity . . . harvests of hope.

Con cariño y fuertes abrazos,  
Howard Friend

## SAPECO

**our micro-economic development program encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit**



A micro-economic development program encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit, SAPECO was Karitas' first project venture in Cuernavaca. Beginning with an initial cooperative, FRISAN, a transmission repair shop, the number of businesses has grown to twenty – though, fact is, we may have lost count!

### **OUR HARVEST OF OUR EFFORT: twenty-five years of steady expansion**

Just to name a few: three more transmission repair shops ... Vicente and Olimpia operate chicken farms, sell wholesale to restaurants and at their small street stand, and recently opened a large farm supply store ... Francisco has a successful torque converter repair shop ... Rodolfo and Chito are just two of a number of auto repair related shops ... Enoch and Ana Laura are among ALEM grads who now operate their own businesses ... two transmission parts stores ... and ALEM itself. There are more.

### **OUR HARVEST OF GRACE: the joy of losing count!**

"Pedro, who I do not remember having met, stopped me on the street to say thank you," Erik reports. Long story short, he began as a low level mechanic's assistant at a SAPECO-spawned shop, worked hard to expand and master skills of the trade, and reported that his own shop was thriving. Women in La Estacion learned silk-screening, secured used but workable equipment, and are making custom tee shirts they sell at craft fairs. A team in Texcal learned to grow a tasty and popular mushroom, first for their own use, then to sell in the community, now learning packaging techniques for sale in the municipal market. None of those three were counted in the twenty.

Erik spends time-as-needed to help would-be entrepreneurs become ready to launch a business; offer or arrange technical, marketing, financial and relational counsel; stop by to offer support. And, wonderfully, they "show up" for each other: Rodolfo constantly guiding and encouraging someone starting a business; Francisco coaches Victor; Mayra assists ALEM grads who have "gone out on their own." "I think SAPECO is like a vine," a rather poetic auto mechanic mused, "from a single plant extends vines that then expand into more vines, and more vines. I know," he smiled. "I am one of those vines!"

Karitas underwrites a small portion of Erik's salary to provide time spent nurturing and guiding these budding businesspersons, many now solid and successful. He visits regularly and is on call as needed.

## ALEM

**Autonomia, Libertad en Movimiento  
Independence, Freedom through Movement**

From its unlikely "birthing moment" and "serendipitous founding story" nine years ago, ALEM has grown in every way. Having escaped dependency and tentative self-worth, the ALEM team, each in a wheelchair or with

difficult mobility, has supported each other in personal and professional development. They design and fabricate specialty wheelchairs and provide drastically needed wheelchair repair, each mastering a needed skill.

### **OUR HARVEST OF EFFORT: fruitfulness of our dedication, creativity and hard work**

The past year has been one of economic success and relationship deepening. Having been registered officially as a Worker Owner Cooperative, each month over the last has shown an upswing in the volume of work and profitability. As technical skills sharpen and the quality of work continually improves, jobs of greater complexity can be received. With a second grant from Rotary International, they "go on the road" repairing wheelchairs on three-day visits to nearby cities.

### **OUR HARVEST OF GRACE: celebrating "finding our way" to ALEM: our home and family**

We knew we needed a teacher, someone with a range of skills and a gift for instruction. So, one day, Daniel "showed up" – machinist/welder/designer rolled into one, with a fully equipped rolling shop. Though we could trace his itinerary to our door, he concurred that he was "sent," that he was "supposed to be there," somehow he was "led" to ALEM. We marveled and felt thankful, even though this was "not the first time" such perfectly timed "gifts" arrived.

But our greatest rejoicing in how deeply ALEM has become more than merely "like" home or family, but *truly* home and family! Raul, rejected by his family as a child, living years both in an orphanage and on the street, "found his way" to ALEM, "my first home and family," he shares with a broad smile. Mario, an adult, shunned by his family when diabetes claimed his leg, "found his way" to ALEM, "my home and family." "One afternoon we sat in a circle, each one sharing 'how I got here' and 'what ALEM means to me'," Lili explained. "We struggled to remember just how we arrived, because we each felt "guided" to ALEM." "And our 'what ALEM means to us' sharing had us all in tears," Rosie added.

[www.alem.org.mx](http://www.alem.org.mx)

Karitas, partners with ALEM for nine years and more recently with Rotary International, shares the cost with the worker/owners of purchasing and maintaining equipment, a parts inventory, utilities, the technician/bus driver, Pancho's salary (\$9,600 annually) and the director, Mayra Solano's, modest \$16,000 annual salary.



## La Estación

**the station: a huge squatters' settlement in downtown Cuernavaca**

Mission delegations from Gladwyne Church and Karitas began visiting La Estación, a huge squatters' settlement in the defunct railroad yard, over 25 years ago. Walking the narrow pathways, sitting in often flimsy, make-shift homes deadly hot in summer and damp and muddy in the rainy season, was nothing short of culture shock. But the generosity and graciousness, the heartiness of welcome, the poignancy of their stories made the deeper impact. Still another serendipitous "birthing moment" and "founding story" forged a more on-going presence and partnership in La Estación.

**OUR HARVEST OF EFFORT: we built it and they came!**

The hearty and resilient, ever creative and competent women and men of La Estación have tapped their longstanding historical legacy of determination and communal activism. Our partnership encouraged the expansion of a small, struggling nursery and pre-school from 60 to 150 students. They commandeered a trash-filled building, secured discarded but still useable kitchen appliances, and fed 120 kids. We worked together three years ago to build a two-story community center. Now 180 kids get that hearty breakfast and the "lights are on" every day and night with activities. There are programs for kids – tutoring, personal hygiene, psychological coaching and a safe place to gather; and for parents – nutritional meal planning on a limited budget; parenting coaching; work readiness training; "cottage industry" options like moccasin-making, crafts and doll making, and more recently, with rehabilitated equipment, producing silk-screen tee shirts, to augment family income.

**OUR HARVEST OF GRACE: *Convivencia*, our "secret ingredient"**

Some Spanish words defy translation into a single English word. One such word is *convivencia*. Even a hearty collage of words will only hint at it. "Getting together . . . (truly) being together . . . life-giving conversation . . . a safe, secure and trustworthy time and place . . . 'being there' for each other . . . connected, intertwined, at-one with each other . . . sharing at every level." A given week may find dozens of meetings, workshops, seminars, work teams – each committed to meeting a goal, planning and carrying out projects, offering a service, playing a role – but the "secret ingredient," that which most draws them, that which is most gift-giving is *convivencia*. Conversations are animated; there is laughter and tears; a sharing of joys and struggles; celebrating and grieving. Blessings they give and receive. Magical, even miraculous!

Karitas funds the pre-school (three teacher salaries, supplies, building maintenance), the feeding program (food, supplies, building and equipment maintenance) the programming at the center (trainer/instructor fees, course materials) a fulltime social worker, Fresvinda's \$12,000 salary, and Juan Manuel's \$4,000 half-time salary.

## El Texcal

**A community continuing to come alive!**

Another unlikely, serendipitous "founding story." Three years ago, Jorge, the CEO of Buckman Laboratories, a transnational corporation situated at a corner of the Texcal community, concerned about the polluted stream that flowed through their entrance garden, "somehow got Erik's name" and the "rest is history" as they say. Accepting a check with appreciation, Erik invited Jorge and some of his management team to meet with the community leaders. "Poco a poco," that favorite Mexican slogan does not work here. "Rápido a rápido" works better! An unlikely partnership formed – a major corporation, a peasant neighborhood and Karitas. An almost immediate momentum generated toward tapping the vision and genius of the community.

**OUR HARVEST OF EFFORT: it's hard to keep count**

No community empowerment effort has "taken off" quite like it has in Texcal. What they have accomplished in two years – retooling the pumps at a pool in a defunct swim park; expanding environmental consciousness and a robust recycling program; tapping their natural creativity in developing half a dozen intensive gardening techniques; utilized a unique mushroom growing strategy just to name a few – is nothing short of extraordinary. The rich, natural landscape around that swim park is being readied to become a nature reserve. A second pool may be perfect for fish farming. "Free cycling" is thriving: bring a table and blanket and display things you no longer need and go shopping. Take what you need. No cost. No bartering. No trading. Truly *free* cycle.

**OUR HARVEST OF GRACE: the secret in within us!**

This reminds us of something we can be tempted to forget – that everything a community needs to awaken wishing and dreaming, focus vision, tap and mobilize resources, to craft a richer and fuller future *is already there!* We can affirm and encourage, name and celebrate, build on and amplify the tenacious hope, deeply rooted resourcefulness, the instinct for collaboration, the legacy of innovation and determination *that sustained and animated the community for decades, perhaps centuries.* Karitas never evaluates, but encourages reflection; may suggest that claiming opportunities is better than naming problems, then waits for the community to identify opportunities; does not initiate programs but affirms, encourages and partners with ideas that arise from community dialogue. We work *with* more than *for*. It is thrilling to watch a community claim its own, intrinsic, deeply rooted capacity for enriching lives and futures! was not claimed. A sports center, memorial to a U.S. teenager, is being discussed. Residents who were constantly feuding began working together. Community pride blossomed.

Karitas provides a presence of encouragement and support, a half-salary of \$7,500 for Juan Manuel, a social worker, empowering individual and group initiatives to improve individual, family and community lives and futures, providing modest financial partnership where apt and timely.

**THE SITUATION:** In the United States the most critical drop-out rate for at-risk students is from Middle to High School. In Mexico the most disturbing drop-out rates are from Elementary to Middle School. In many families there is no precedent for continuing education past age twelve, the household budget needs fresh income that child can generate, so a majority of those twelve year olds are dropping out.

**AN ALTERNATIVE:** Our recently launched *EDUCATION INITIATIVE: Choosing the Road Less Traveled* is a creative and concerted, multi-faceted and broadly collaborative plan that will shift that momentum. Four organizations with a long history of loving presence and deep trust-formation in poor and marginalized communities in Cuernavaca and nearby Tepoztlan have formed a coalition. After a year of diligent research – exploring psychological, educational and sociological studies, and visiting similar projects in both the U.S. and Mexico – we have designed and launched together an ambitious and promising three-year pilot project that will work with twenty children ages ten to twelve. The plan is comprehensive, seeking to engage in a positive way all dimensions of each child’s life, with an emphasis on academics but a focus as well on personal and relational development, enhancing self-image and high regard for others, claiming one’s own best future and working together for the enrichment of the community, growing psychologically and spiritually.

**THE PLAN:** The two project sites – Caminando Unidos in Cuernavaca and La Jugarreta in Tepoztlan – have identified ten

**AN EDUCATION INITIATIVE**  
**Choosing the Road Less Traveled**  
**our newest venture**

children ages ten to twelve who are now fully engaged in this program over three years. The Project Proposals of each organization demonstrate their profound commitment to each

child, the stirring philosophy and methodology that will animate their work, the all-inclusive focus across the full spectrum of each child’s life experience. Notice that they work with these children within the broader family and community context. As one teacher put it, “We want these children to be contagious!” Another added, “Maybe they will start a ‘good news epidemic!’”

**THE PLAYERS:** *Karitas* has initiated and sustained four major projects in Cuernavaca over twenty-five years.

*Fundación Comunidad* has birthed, coached and maintained hundreds of projects in the State of Morelos across nearly twenty years [www.comunidad.org.mx](http://www.comunidad.org.mx)

*Caminando Unidos* has been a safe haven, licensed elementary and middle school (not unlike a charter school), vocational training center and nurturing community for children and youth for twenty years [www.caminandounidos.org.mx](http://www.caminandounidos.org.mx)

*La Jugarreta*, using streets, parks, public buildings, churches and open spaces in Tepoztlan as its “campus,” has done community development and empowerment, multi-faceted work with children and youth, family life guidance and education and the like for ten years: [www.lajugarreta.org.mx](http://www.lajugarreta.org.mx)

We will gladly send you our 19-page prospectus profiling this initiative in detail.

**REMEMBERING AND CELEBRATING**

We work with a vulnerable population. They are no strangers to illness and death. Those in wheelchairs are at risk of what can become lethal infection from bed sores. Complications may arise from their crippling injuries or congenital conditions. Preventable or treatable illnesses claim lives of the poor at every age. Chronic malnutrition continues. Drug violence kills. Everyday life can be dangerous. Watching our communities accompany one another into dying and hold another in the anguish of grieving is touching. We remember with appreciation, both joy and sadness:

Juan de Dios                      Uriel                      Citlali                      Don Felipe

**A Wonderful Challenge**

\* *Karitas’* presence in Cuernavaca has passed a "tipping point" and it’s about trust. Building trust-based partnerships, is a slow, tedious process. But, we have succeeded! We are widely viewed as compassionate, trust-worthy and committed,

\* That yields boundless opportunities to serve: potential new projects and expansion of current ones, all poised to have extraordinary impact on countless lives. If someone wrote a check for a million dollars, we could put every dollar toward effective, life-transforming projects . . . immediately!

**Like little waves circling from a stone tossed into a pond – each successive wave is significantly wider and larger than the one before, as each wave had been before that. *Karitas* began like the splash of a single stone over the two decades ago, its first ripples small and modest. But this year’s wave is substantially larger than those earliest ones, even dramatically larger than that of just a year ago! To carry this work to its fullest potential, a larger wave yet, we need a 20% increase in donor income. We invite you to rise to our challenge.**

**Let’s Keep in Touch**

We want to connect with you in every way possible. Wander our website: review our mission and vision statements, meet our board, watch an extraordinary photo essay about ALEM, and explore opening each project site in turn. We can provide our IRS tax exempt certificate, a copy of our 990 charitable organization filing in Pennsylvania. Or, give Howard Friend a call.

[www.karitasfoundation.org](http://www.karitasfoundation.org)

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