

ESPERANZA: TWENTY-THREE YEARS LATER



Group photo of the GCC volunteers and community members on June 20, 2025, at the house at Lomas de Valle, Tijuana, Mexico. From left to right: Kathryn Heyser, Jim Matarazzo, Laura Heyser, Christine Morris (long term volunteer from Seattle), Karla (home recipient), Elena (community leader), Moises (community member), and Sue Newberry.

Twenty-three years ago, in June 2002, I took about 25 high school youth group members and adult chaperones from the First Congregational Church of Winchester, Massachusetts, on a mission trip to Esperanza International in Tijuana, Mexico. We flew into San Diego and rented two passenger vans and an SUV. At this time, domestic cellular phones rarely worked outside the United States. There was no 5G internet with Google maps; so we were met at the US border in San Ysidro by an Esperanza staff member who took us across to Mexico. Border control into Mexico from San Ysidro was and is random. I recall that a border guard asked us what we were doing in Mexico and just waived us all in. No documents were checked: no passports, no notarized letters allowing us to take minors into Mexico without both parents, nada. The staff member guided us to the “posada” – the gated Esperanza compound. The posada is located in La Gloria, a southern suburb of Tijuana. This would be our home for the week.

Back in 2002, we arrived at night and met the resident long-term volunteer, Robert Rivers. Robert, a jovial and friendly young man, was from Helena, Montana. He was in his 20s. (I was 34 at the time.) He was a graduate of Seattle University which has a long history of sending volunteers to Esperanza. As the long-term volunteer, Robert would be our main contact and guide. He spoke fluent Spanish having worked previously in El Salvador. The female teenagers were smitten with Robert because he was “hot”. “Hot Robert” worked alongside us at the building site in a poor neighborhood, largely a barren area of muddy hills. I should add that Robert Rivers and I remain friends to this day – and we both are married to Brazilians! (Yes, he’s still “hot”). Our task was to build a concrete foundation and use rebar to reinforce it. We ate

lunch each day prepared by the recipient family, which was always delicious. We worked alongside the Esperanza technicians and community volunteers.

Our foreman and Esperanza's Volunteer Coordinator was Eduardo Zavala Reyes, a native Tijuana. Eduardo had also lived for several years in Los Angeles. He had been with Esperanza for five years. He was imposing with his long black hair, fierce Mexican patriotism, and fantastic sense of humor. Each evening, exhausted, we would gather in the posada's common room and share our experiences. Side trips included a tour of the border wall from the Mexican side. We also visited the port and tourist resort of Ensenada. It was the best mission trip I had ever led. My youth group was transformed by the experience. They had never seen this level of poverty in their lives. Winchester is one of the wealthiest towns in Massachusetts. I hoped that one day I would take another group to Esperanza.

Twenty-three years later, I returned to Esperanza in Tijuana. This time with a small group of three adults from GCC: Laura Heyser, Kathryn Heyser, and Sue Newberry. Unlike in 2002, we simply drove across the border using Google maps as my cell phone worked just fine in Mexico. As in 2002, we simply glided through the border in our SUV, this time without speaking to a border guard, just a green light telling us to proceed. No passport check, no stamping of our tourist cards, nada. Soon, we were in La Gloria and at the posada. It looked much the same as it did 23 years ago. However, it now had a lush indigenous garden surrounding it. We soon met Christine Morris ("Chris"), a retiree from Seattle. Chris is the first long term volunteer at Esperanza who is retired. Like Robert before her, she went with us to the building site daily and worked alongside us. Esperanza has no lower or upper age limit for volunteers. All are welcome to work as they are able. Chris is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Lynnwood, Washington. Trinity has been sending mission trip groups to Esperanza for over 30 years. Chris accompanied us to the border wall, a must-see ritual. It is a surreal experience to walk up to the steel border fence that plunges into the Pacific at Playas de Tijuana and look through it into your own county.

Eduardo Zavala Reyes is still the volunteer coordinator 23 years later. He has worked for Esperanza for 30 years. He now has short hair, but his patriotism and sense of humor are the same. His two sons are grown, with one completing medical school. It was amazing to see Eduardo 23 years later. He managed our small group with the same care and humor that he did with my youth group in 2002. And we built a house from the ground up; a house that will shelter a woman named Karla, who has a serious medical condition, and her children. Another large group from Xavier High School, a Jesuit Catholic all-boys high school, located in Manhattan, New York, would follow us after we departed. They will complete the roof and other details of the house. Like those from Trinity Lutheran, the boys of Xavier High have been coming to Tijuana with Esperanza for many years.

It was a wonderful, human, and humane experience for me to return to Esperanza so many years later. It is my hope that many more members of Glenview Community Church will consider going to Esperanza next year. We are booked to go again *June 7-13, 2026. Save the date!*
-Rev. Jim

About Esperanza

Esperanza was co-founded 40 years ago in 1985 by the late Fr. John Howard, CJM, (1940-2021), a priest of the Catholic order known as the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. The other founders, also deceased, are Robert Morris (1929-2021), a Catholic layman, and Al Graff (1919-2024), a married Catholic deacon. It is a testament to these founders that Esperanza has survived and expanded for 40 years. The first volunteers, in 1986, were students from the University of San Diego, a Jesuit university. Although Esperanza's founders were Catholic, the organization is entirely secular and welcomes volunteers of all faiths or none. It is noteworthy that Esperanza has an exemplary safety record: not a single violent incident has occurred at Esperanza in its 40 years.

PRIDE PARADE

To kick off Pride Month a crew of GCC representatives marched in the Buffalo Grove Pride Parade on June 1! It was a joyful morning of fellowship and celebration of what it means to be an Open and Affirming Church!



YOUTH MISSION TRIP

This past month, a crew of 6 students and 3 adult chaperones went on a mission trip to Louisville, KY, through Youthworks! From sorting medical supplies and helping at a local summer camp, to painting projects and forming friendships with teens from Nebraska, they spent the week making meaningful connections and serving with open hearts. We're so proud of the way our youth represented GCC with compassion, energy, and joy!



PRIDE MONTH & PRIDE SUNDAY

June was full of opportunities to celebrate Pride and our identity as an Open and Affirming (ONA) church. From joining the Buffalo Grove Pride Parade to gathering for our Pride Month Book Study of *Outside the Lines* by Mihee Kim-Kort—where we explored themes of “Queer Spirituality”—our community embraced the richness of faith and identity. This spirit of celebration culminated in our joyful Pride Sunday service on June 22, a beautiful reminder of God’s inclusive love and the vibrant welcome we share.

Living out our ONA commitment is a yearlong journey—one we embrace together every day.



A NOTE FROM GUILLERMO

Dear friends,

The past ten years serving Glenview Community Church as Director of Adult Choirs have been tremendously fulfilling and rewarding. When I first arrived in 2015, I couldn't have imagined the countless blessings the last decade would bring.

Working with the Chancel Choir has been one of the great joys of my musical life. Together, we've performed hundreds of compositions across a wide range of styles and genres – from a cappella pieces to works accompanied by Gary Wendt playing the sanctuary's magnificent organ and gifted instrumentalists – always with a focus on elevating the message of this church and its community.

There have also been challenges, such as the silence imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic or the struggles with my own health – but even in those moments, it was a gift to experience rewards and blessings, including the great love and support I personally received from you.

I end my time at GCC with deep joy and gratitude for many things, but most of all, for having all of you alongside me throughout this journey.

Warmly,

Guillermo



FAMILY FUN DAY

On Sunday, June 8, members of Chapter 7 of the Women's Association (Laura O'Mera, Margaret Ludemann, Cathy Shapiro, and Laura Heyser) volunteered at **Building Peaceful Bridges** annual Family Fun Day. Approximately 160 people RSVP'd for this event and enjoyed a beautiful day. The chef (far left in photo) prepared a feast that we all enjoyed and our volunteers helped with kitchen set-up, serving, and clean-up. Outside the field house-turned-dining hall, attendees enjoyed Karaoke, giant bubble making, basketball, football (aka soccer), a scavenger hunt, and more. There was also a donation drive and distribution. After learning about BPB from GCC's own Debby Fosdick and co-founder Lori Lucchetti, it was very rewarding to meet so many volunteers and recipients of the program's offerings.



COMING SOON: STORIES OF BELONGING AT GCC

This year, our generosity theme centers on belonging—the deep, meaningful connection we share as a community. To bring this theme to life, we've created a series of videos featuring members of our congregation sharing their personal stories about what belonging at GCC means to them.

Keep an eye on your inbox for these inspiring testimonies coming soon! As you watch, we invite you to reflect on your own belonging story here at GCC. How have you experienced community and welcome? And how might you help foster a deeper sense of belonging for others?

Together we are building a church where everyone truly feels that they belong.



HEALTHY HINTS

I drink this shake almost every day and I'm full until lunch. It is an easy way to provide your body with essential nutrients and protein to fuel your day.

The "All You Need for Breakfast" Shake Recipe*

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup frozen Wild Blueberries
- 1/2 cup Almond milk
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 avocado
- 1/4 lemon cut up, including rind
- 1 Tablespoon Almond Butter
- 1 Tablespoon Coconut Butter
- 1 teaspoon Turmeric powder
- Raw egg (optional)
- 1/2 banana (optional)
- 1 scoop Collagen Peptides (optional)
- 1 teaspoon Creatine (optional)

Seed/nut mix*:

- 1 Tablespoon of (unsalted and raw):
 - Pumpkin seeds
 - Sunflower seeds
 - Chia seeds
 - Flax Seeds
 - 2 Brazil nuts
 - 2 Whole Walnuts (or pieces making up two whole walnuts)

*Soak in water for 30 minutes or more to release enzymes in the seeds and nuts to make them more digestible.

Directions

Put all ingredients into a blender and blend for 10-15 seconds and enjoy!

Prep Time

5-10 Minutes, Yields 24 ounces

DID YOU KNOW?

Blended Health & Smoothie Bar, 950 Harlem St, Glenview, just celebrated 5 years in our community. Their products are vegan-friendly, and they cater to gluten sensitivities, allergies and other dietary restrictions.

**This recipe was adapted from Dr. Mark Hyman's "Whole Food Shake" recipe in The Blood Sugar Solution 10-Day Detox Diet. For all questions or complimentary Health Coaching, please contact Laura O'Mera, Integrative Nutrition Health Coach at 847.814.1565, laura@bramhall.health or visit www.bramhall.health.*



REV. JIM CELEBRATES 20 YEARS ORDAINED

On June 26, 2005, Rev. Jim was ordained into the United Church of Christ at the Church of the Covenant Boston, Massachusetts. Over the past 20 years, his ministry has taken him across the globe and ultimately to his new home here in Chicagoland—and to our community at GCC. We are deeply grateful for the gifts, leadership, and compassionate spirit he brings to our ministry together. This month, we joyfully celebrated Rev. Jim's milestone during worship on June 29 with cake at fellowship hour. Congratulations Jim, and may God continue to bless you richly in your ongoing journey of service!



Caring for Our Church Home:

Heating Updates and Facilities Planning from the Resources Ministry

This past month, we began an important project to upgrade the heating controls in some of the first-floor classrooms. If you visit these rooms, you may notice the heating units have been temporarily removed. This work, funded by both the Church and Nursery School, aims to better regulate temperatures in spaces shared by the Nursery School and Sunday Godly Play programs, where overheating has been an ongoing issue.

What You Should Know About Caring for Our Church Building

Maintaining and improving our church building takes careful planning and investment over time. These kinds of projects are different from our regular day-to-day expenses, which cover things like utilities and cleaning. Instead, facility projects focus on important upgrades that will last many years and keep our building safe, comfortable, and welcoming for everyone. Some improvements you can see right away, like fresh landscaping or new lighting. Others happen quietly behind the walls, like fixing plumbing or updating electrical systems. All of these efforts support the programs and ministries we care about today—and will continue to support for generations to come.

What Facility Needs Are Being Identified?

We are carefully identifying areas around the church that need attention to help plan future improvements. So far, some key needs include:

- Outdoor maintenance like landscaping, parking lot drainage, and signage.
- Lighting updates in the sanctuary, with an eventual full switch to energy-efficient LEDs
- Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) improvements for better comfort.
- Repairs to exterior walls and stonework to protect against weather damage.
- Window maintenance including painting and re-glazing to improve efficiency.
- Technology upgrades for worship streaming and office systems.
- Ongoing electrical and plumbing maintenance to ensure safety.

This process helps us create a thoughtful, long-term plan to care for our building and keep GCC welcoming for all.

Why start with the heating controls?

The classroom wings have experienced the most inconsistent heating in the entire building. With limited funds available, beginning with a full integration of heating controls across the entire church would have been cost-prohibitive and highly disruptive. By focusing on the classroom areas first, Phase 1 allows us to address a critical need and evaluate results before moving forward with broader upgrades.

This project is part of a long-term effort to care for our aging church building with thoughtful planning and strategic investment. Some updates are visible; many happen quietly behind the walls. All are essential for sustaining GCC's ministry and programs—now and for years to come.

Thank you for your ongoing support and care for our church home — together, we are ensuring that GCC remains a welcoming, safe, and vibrant place for worship and community for many years to come.

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Vétheuil in Summer, 1880 by Claude Monet