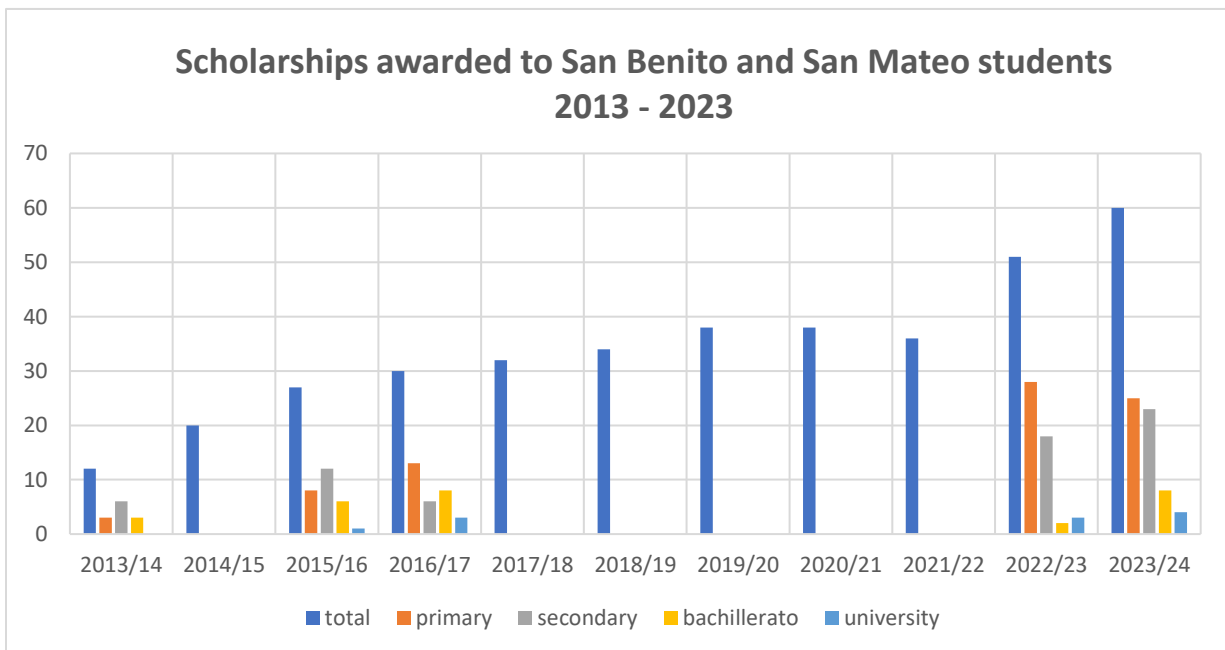


Llevando el Evangelio a través del Pan y la Tortilla

Bringing the Gospel by Bread & Tortilla
Chiapas Project Bulletin # 64, August 2023

Celebrating ten years of the Chiapas Project scholarships 2013/14 – 2022-23

Record-keeping has not been one of the strengths of our Chiapas Project, a lay-led, collaborative project within our Chicago Diocese Companionship with the Diocese of Southeast Mexico. But oddly, we do have remarkably accurate statistical records for the first ten years of the scholarship (*beca*) program, “*Becas para una vida mayor*” initiated by Bishop Benito’s wife, Angelica. Its origins go back to 2009 with financial support from the Diocese of West Texas; the Diocese of Chicago first sent scholarship money in 2013/14 and was joined the following year by a parish in Palo Alto, California. It was in 2015 that Angelica first drew up formal guidelines for student applications: a record of their grades, an essay about why the scholarship was needed, and an account of an applicant’s activities in one of the Diocese congregations. Successful applicants (which were, in fact, all applicants) were required to keep up their grades and jointly undertake an ecology project. The first half of the *beca* was announced and awarded in September and the second half in January, after completion of the project. If a recipient fell behind in their grades, the second half of their *beca* was suspended and they were encouraged to apply again the following year. Between 2013/14 and the end of that decade an average of probably 120-130 students and families across the Diocese of Southeast Mexico were touched



by this program each year. In the churches of San Benito and San Mateo there were about 185 recipients during those seven years. Equally important was the fact that, in a diocese with widely dispersed churches and only an annual synod that brings church leaders together, the *becas* came to represent one of the few shared connections joining congregants across vast distances.

When Bishop Julio was consecrated in 2020 the diocesan *becas* were discontinued in favor of other programming. That was when Fr. Florencio requested his bishop that the scholarship



program be continued for students at San Benito and San Mateo, *if* his sister churches in Chicago were willing to support it. The Bishop approved, and in the past four years (since 2019/20) we have provided scholarship support to more students at the Chiapas churches than had received

support during the previous seven years. This is because the congregations have increased so dramatically during the pandemic. [above: this year's ecology project at San Benito: Lombricomposta, to be explained in next month's newsletter]

This year, to offset some of the inflation the Mexican economy has faced, the level of support has been increased by 10% at each level (the first increase since 2018): 25 primary students will receive 770 pesos (\$45.00 US), 23 secondary students 1430 pesos (\$84.00 US), 9 *bachillerato* level awards will be given at 2090 pesos (\$123 US) and 4 university students will receive 2750 pesos (\$161 US). While these sums may appear modest, their impact has been enormous in subsistence households. In some cases, the *becas* permit a child to stay in school. The prestige of these awards is tied to the value their churches place on education. Knowing that it is their brothers and sisters in Christ from Chicago who have made the *becas* possible adds to the pride with which the scholarships are celebrated – this year in 60 families in San Cristobal and Yochib. Applications are being processed now and awards (the first half) will be made in September. Many, many thanks to those of you who have made these awards possible.

August 5th Carlos' report on Saturday's 'Sunday School' at San Mateo

You may remember that Carlos wrote in our last newsletter, "Next week two barbers from town will come to the church to give free haircuts to the kids who want them – and who have their parents' permission."



This event took place August 5th when the class was taken to Marcelo's house (Marcelo is the taxi driver who lives in Yochib and ferries Carlos and Fany to Yochib weekly), since there was more light there for the barbers to work. "We began, as usual, with our entrance song while some children were already starting their haircut. We read together a small booklet on God's love and they were given some blank sheets to do their own drawings. By the end of the session at 2:00 p.m. a total of 17 haircuts had been given to our kids, girls and boys. For many of them it was the first professional haircut they had ever received. The day was a total success, and at the end we walked home some of the kids so they wouldn't need to walk on the road alone.



August 6 Mass at San Benito



August 11th Food Pantry Distribution of staples



The San Benito Food Pantry is subsidized by four Episcopal churches in Chicago that call themselves 'The Chiapas Project': Church of Our Saviour, St. Chrysostom's Church, Church of the Atonement, and



Church of the Holy Comforter. Parishioners at San Benito purchase bulk items and then break them down into family supplies. Depending upon family size, four-to-six days of staples are provided for each family. Father Florencio faithfully sends us photos biweekly of each of the 45 families when they collect their groceries. The food pantry began in the wake of Hurricane Eta in November 2020 and allows one of the least advantaged churches in the Diocese to help feed their neighbors. Nearly one-half of the recipients of staples now worship weekly at San Benito de Nursia. Here are eight families who collected groceries last Friday.

Catechism classes at San Benito



August 12th

August 19th



Mass at San Benito August 13th



and San Marcos



August 19 Carlos' report on Saturday's 'Sunday School' at San Mateo



"When Fany and I arrived we found 26 kids in the church with Fr. Florencio, and we began with our song of entrance and a reflection for the day on the love of God for his children (us), and for every living being of his creation. Later we separated the group in two for their activity: first we gave the reading about Naaman being healed of leprosy (2 Kings 5, 14) and the protection of the Lord (Isaiah 31:4). After the readings we reflected on what they learned from this and had them give their point of view in a drawing, according to what they understood. At the end we did our usual cleaning for services tomorrow. We were not able to give lunch to the children since there was nothing in the market to buy. I also went to see Williams,

since he felt bad at that time, and Mari, his mother, told me that he has had headaches and lack of appetite. He was given some recommendations and some medications; next week we will bring him some vitamins and vegetables since he indicates that he is anemic according to the doctor. Blessings on you all."



August 20th Mass at San Marcos August 20th



and San Benito



August 25th Food Pantry Distribution of staples



Seventeen of the forty-five families that received their groceries this past Friday.

August 26 Carlos' report on Saturday's 'Sunday School' at San Mateo

Fany and I found the children in the courtyard of the church, and after we sang our entrance song we talked with the children about personal motivation.



We talked about what we want to achieve in the future and how we will meet these goals, removing



the fears and avoiding the obstacles that are in the way. Later we listened to an audio recording on personal motivation and then went up to the church to capture in drawing what we want to achieve. At the end we enjoyed some fruit together, and we did our usual cleaning and

disinfection of the church for Sunday. In addition to the talks, the oldest kids agreed to take a first aid course: seven boys signed up. They are very enthusiastic, and I am looking forward to modifying a first aid class to be appropriate to their ages. The young children will continue to receive their biblical themes and their normal activities from Fany who will help me while I am working with the older ones.



August 27 Mass at San Benito



and San Mateo

August 28th: Fr.
Florencio will be at a
Provincial meeting of
clergy in Oaxtepec
Morelos

