



RSCJ who joined together on an international service program last summer are, from left, Imma De Stefanis, Reyna González, Madeline Ortiz and Mary Finlayson.

Solidarity in Service

By Imma De Stefanis, RSCJ

They arrived in a steady stream in mid-June. They came to “risk something different and discover the loving face of Christ.” They came “with a small vision of the world, yet knowing a bigger world was out there.” They came “tired of the routine of life,” “to help and to serve others,” because they wanted to “change the world.”

They are fifteen young women in their late teens through early thirties who hail from Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico and the United States. They were drawn to an international summer service project born of many conversations among RSCJ who wanted to come together across provinces and reach out to young adults, while providing them with a concrete experience of who we are and how we live our charism.

The project, held in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, and coordinated by four RSCJ—Mary Finlayson of Canada, Reyna González of Mexico, Madeline Ortiz of Puerto Rico, and myself—centered on service, reflection and input. Most mornings we gathered at the community center to enjoy a breakfast prepared by young people of the neighborhood. Beginning the day with prayer, we reflected on the gifts and struggles of living in a different culture, working within an international group, and sharing tight quarters with families who had opened their homes and hearts with generosity and

care. Morning-long workshops on various topics helped participants better understand the reality in which they were immersed and to lead them to deeper reflection on their own call and their commitment to social change through action.

Topics, presented by lay people, Jesuits and local RSCJ, included methods of “popular education” (education aimed at raising critical awareness of the world one lives in); theological perspectives on reality; migration and immigration; and effects of globalization.

In the afternoons, participants were assigned in pairs to age groups ranging from three to twelve. The children, right down to the three- and four-year-olds, were encouraged through a variety of activities to get to know their neighborhood as a community to which they belong and can contribute.

Capturing the interest of teenagers proved to be a bit of

*“I came because I wanted
to change the world,
and the world changed me.”*

— Sarah Massoud of Canada

a challenge. During evenings spent with older youth, we teasingly threw down the gauntlet: “The goal is to increase youth group participation from its current eight to

a hundred.” They managed to attract forty to fifty more.

Friendships that developed with both children and teens came not only from planned activities, but from hours of soccer on a dusty open field, early morning jogs, a field trip to see *Madagascar*—a first-time visit to a movie theater for many of the seventy-five who went—and hanging out during every little bit of free time otherwise provided for resting and taking care of chores.

In a ritual of sending that ended our time together, each woman was given a black wooden ring as a symbol of her solidarity with the poor and her commitment to work for justice. Perhaps more importantly, participants left impressed by the simplicity and generosity of the people and a desire to continue to live and work with the poor. They took with them the knowledge that they are unified across borders in their struggle for justice and a strengthened determination to make a difference in the world, combined with the knowledge and confidence that they can. ❖

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