



¡FELIZ NAVIDAD!

December 2013

## Hello from San Cristobal de las Casas!

This year we celebrated our fourth Christmas in Mexico. While our first Christmas in 2010 was very simple, knowing virtually no one at the time - now over 3 years later we have enjoyed a month of various Christmas posadas, services, and lots of time with friends. It seems quite normal now to enjoy eating *tamales* and *ponche*, keeping warm with another layer of wool, and hear the blast of *cohetes* (fireworks) all through the night!



We also wanted to share some thoughts and photos from this year, and wish you all a very **Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!** Here is a family picture that we took on Christmas day while visiting *Las Grutas de Mamut*.



We finish the year of 2013 with much joy and thankfulness—for God's protection, kindness and faithfulness throughout the year. We traveled to new places and met new people, but our richest experiences have been the deepening friendships we have in our different communities of work, school, church and neighbourhood. MCC often talks about the key role of building bridges between cultures, faith, race, gender, and socio-economic classes. And so while we have so greatly appreciated the opportunities to share our love,

skills, talents, and time with a diverse group of mexicans—indigenous and mestizo—(and other foreigners too), we have also been blessed to receive, grow and learn through all these relationships and experiences.

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!*

## OUR MCC WORK

### INSTITUTO de ESTUDIOS e INVESTIGACION INTERCULTURAL (INESIN), A.C.

"*Acompañamiento*" - This Spanish word sums up very well the work of INESIN. It is the "how" in its work to build peace in Chiapas. It means walking alongside, supporting, and mutually sharing the strengths and hardships that exist amongst community groups/processes and the network of organizations such as INESIN. My work with INESIN has been more than I imagined...here are a few of the strongest impressions I have received....the importance of practical work, growing to appreciate "the other" Christian confessions, the depth of connection with creation and its daily sustenance, the friendships that have been formed with families and youth from communities, and also those within the INESIN family. This past year in



particular I have been more involved in other aspects of INESIN's work—youth leadership training, family violence prevention, and week of prayer for Christian unity (singing with an interconfessional choir!). I feel grateful to God for the opportunity to serve with MCC and INESIN, agencies that are committed to accompanying communities in search of *Shalom*.



### FUNDACION YIRTRAK, A.C.

I have found a good rhythm in my work with Yirtrak this year, which involves lots of organizing, planning and working with money! I am thankful for the combo of solo and community work I get to do, and for the opportunities to make friendships, learn Spanish and grow during my time here. While the diverse community has opened my eyes to what it really means to be a holistic person and pushed my limits on working in community (this is good), I sense my more natural analytical/orderly mind has really helped this organization through a transition time in their history, I think they are thankful I came along.



In regards to the kids' experience at their schools (which Yirtrak supports)...Hilary shows herself to be quite bright and athletic—her teachers tell me her vocab is above average (in Spanish). More I'm thankful for the creative, fun and safe place Pinguinos is for her. It's been a great social environment, where she also receives lots of love from her teachers. Ezra has blossomed during his 3 years at school here in Chiapas. For a more shy child, his school has been a place to gain lots of confidence and feel secure to express himself while providing lots of creativity in developing his whole person. I also think his teachers appreciate a more calm/attentive presence in class. Recently he shared his favorite thing about school was mathematics!





## FAMILY TIME AND EVENTS



“What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.” Mother Teresa



- Visits: Jacquie’s parents were here with us in Feb/March, including a memorable trip to Palenque, Rick’s former colleague Gord stopped by for a few days in November—just in time to watch the Grey-cup, and Jacquie’s sister Stephanie and family are coming for the New Year!
- Other trips included some days in nearby Tuxtla; hiking around El Aguacero (waterfall), a big adventure to Guadalajara to relax and see Canadian friends, and a weekend in Tapachula, with days trips to the beach and coffee country (*see blog for more pictures—randjblock.mennoboy.com*).
- We had a big bash for Ezra’s 7th at INESIN. Grandma/pa Falk made Hilary’s 4th seem extra special, while Rick and I celebrated more quietly our number 39, but watch out for next year!
- Our MCC family evolved during this year, but with this changing group of people we enjoyed time together here in Chiapas, and later in the year in Tepetzlan and Chihuahua.
- We also enjoyed a camping trip with Hialry’s school to Baños de Carmen (hot springs) and participated in a Bible youth camp near Villaflores (both here in Chiapas). We also were thankful to reconnect with Gomez/Schreuder family in the summer (friends who are currently living in the US), and were encouraged by meeting Bill and Maryanne Thiessen (BC), who are long-time MCC workers/supporters.
- Many more memories were made taking moments to hike, play in parks, and learn together. Of course going out for Tacos remains a treat, but even more special were trips out to the campo/communities with INESIN work or just to meet new people!



## Friendships



While our church experience has continued to be a blessing, we especially enjoyed spending a bit more time with the youth group at the church (ages 15-28) in work projects, sports days, spiritual retreats and speaking English. Jacquie and the kids continued their bi-monthly play dates and occasional family times with Bea (Freddy), Odei and Benat. We also hosted some parties or enjoyed meals out with other neighbours/friends, and our times with Miriam (fellow mccer/saskatchewanian) were always a highlight. Jacquie has had great opportunities to meet new people playing basketball and really enjoys her

weekly visits with our househelp Christy (and her kids). Meanwhile, Rick has endless stories of his INESIN coffee times and overnight stays in communities. Ezra has maintained a close friendship with his buddy Nogai, but also gained more confidence in playing with the bigger kids at school. Kids from Hilary`s school have come and gone, but we are thankful for her enjoyment in making new friends (older and young) wherever we go.



As a family we continue to look for ways to befriend Juan, and his family. Numerous times Jacquie shared some good tea and brownies with an INESIN colleague, Lindsey. Lastly, we remain thankful for our psuedo grandparents Sue and Al, who care for us and our kids!

