

Watsonville Mission Trip throughout the eyes of a young adult!

By Minh Mai

This Christmas I had the privilege of going on a Missionary trip up to Watsonville led by Juan Carlos Montenegro. There were at different times during the week anywhere from nine to a dozen volunteers on the mission trip and the experience of the trip would not have been the same without their contribution. The trip was a week long and it was an eye opening experience for me. There were many moments throughout the week that I felt God's presence.



The first day we got up to Watsonville, we were put to work at Mary Help of Christians building and setting up the Nativity Scene. I must confess that at the beginning I was surprised that we just went straight to work after we arrived, but that would be the pace for most of the trip. We did not all know each other very well, however, we all got to work quickly and we worked well together. We all contributed to the Nativity Scene, whether it was rolling construction paper into rock-like balls or setting up the Christmas tree. A day later, one of the parishioners came up to us and thanked us for setting up the Nativity Scene. She said that we were the answer to her prayers because they had a lot to do to prepare for Christmas Mass. I was both touched and humbled by her words. I was very proud of the fact that we helped them by setting up the Nativity Scene. However, at the same time her words reminded me that it was not us but God working through our work. It put things in perspective because it stopped being about me, my work, or my sacrifices. It mentally and spiritually reaffirmed the fact that I was there, as was everyone else I am sure, for God and for this community.

For most of our mission trip, we wrapped presents to give out to the kids at the three Posadas we were invited to. We spent most of the day wrapping presents. At first I felt it was somewhat of a waste of time having all of us just wrap presents. I was there to make a difference and wrapping presents was not "making a difference."

Occasionally I would forget and think that in order to make a difference I have to do something big.

Yet, once we got to that first Posada and I saw how the kids' faces lit up when they received their presents I understood that it was not a waste of time.

The kids were all smiles when they received their presents. It made me realize that the things we did, however little and insignificant it seemed, was worth it because it made them so happy. We did not have to do "big things" but we still made a difference by making the kids happy. That was what mattered and sometimes we all need a little reminder.





Family was one of the things that I thought I was giving up going on this mission trip. However, I came to realize that there was another family I had forgotten about—the Salesian Family. The students from St. Francis High School not only helped us by contributing presents and their presence at the Posadas, but they also welcomed us into their home, so to speak. At the third posada on Wednesday night, even when they did not have to come help us, a good number of the youths from both the school and the parish came and helped anyway. It was great seeing their enthusiasm and even better seeing their active involvement in caring for the youths in their community. Speaking of family, on Christmas Eve a family from Mary Help of Christians invited us into their home to have Christmas Eve dinner with them. Everything they had they offered to us—food, a place to spend Christmas, and family. During a time when we all felt a strong longing to be with our own families, they welcomed us into their family and made Christmas 2009 a Christmas to remember. Then on Christmas day, the Salesian community in Berkeley invited us into their home for a Christmas Day dinner and present exchange. It once again reminded me of how inclusive the Salesian family always tries to be.

The Christmas Mission Trip was an eye opening experience for me. During the trip, I found God in the people that I worked for and worked with. The smiles on the kids' faces, the love the people of the community gave us, and the support we gave each other, they all helped to remind me of why I am involved with the Salesians. I believe that anyone who could go on a trip like this should go. The experience is worth it.