

layman

# action

for children, inc.

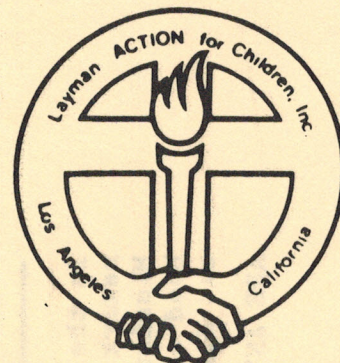
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TRYGVE D. JANSEN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JUNE 1975



DEAR FRIEND OF CHILDREN,

We haven't communicated with you since we sent out our annual report in the beginning of the year. Some of you have sent your contributions regularly, - others we haven't heard from in a long time. We hope you'll remember the children and help maintaining the work during the summer.



This June the two student nurses, Danira and Dora graduated. They have already been placed. Dora will be working at the hospital in Xicotencatl, and Danira in the social security hospital in El Mante. You can see them in the photo to the left. Danira on the left and Dora on the right. They send their gratitude and thanks to all of you who have had a part in this accomplishment.

The board in Mexico is going ahead with the plans for the boys' home. Boys will be admitted this summer, and the old building will be used temporarily. As finances become available it is our hope that the new building will be erected in the near future.



A new sponsorship program will probably be launched this coming Fall. We will be attempting to help as many children as possible get an education. Our plan is to move into many areas in Mexico with this program.

On the next page we have reprinted an article from Los Angeles Times of May 18, 1975. This article should give you an idea of the tremendous need that exists in Mexico, - - and that help is URGENT.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

LET'S CONTINUE " - - - DO FOR OTHERS - - -."

A group of children at  
"CASA HOGAR MAMA PAULITA"  
and some who work with them

Sincerely yours,  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
Layman ACTION for Children, Inc.

*There is only misfortune in not being loved; there is misery in not loving.*

—Albert Camus



# Mexico City Surrounded by Exploding Population

SAN LUCAS PATONI, Mexico (AP)

—The children are everywhere, running, skipping, jumping. Their presence is the most striking feature of this slum of 150,000 people on the outskirts of Mexico City.

And it is the same in dozens of "cities of misery," the slums ringing Mexico's capital. There are thousands of children, their faces smudged by the ever-present dust and mud. They wear tattered, soiled clothes and play in unpaved, narrow streets lined by open sewage ditches.

San Lucas Patoni is perched on the side of a 2,500-foot hill about 20 miles from the neon glare of downtown Mexico City. The slum is a microcosm of one of Mexico's most pressing problems: population explosion.

Some Mexican officials have predicted that at the current annual birth rate of 3.5%, Mexico's present 56 million people will grow to at least 150 million in the next 25 years.

That will probably mean more unemployed workers in Mexico, the nation which already is the main source of illegal immigrants working in the United States. The United States is approaching a zero birth rate.

The Mexican Health Ministry provides birth control information to married couples but little else is done on a governmental level to control population growth.

But even providing birth control information in a country 95% Roman Catholic indicates the government is becoming alarmed about the baby explosion.

The government, headed by President Luis Echevarria, himself the father of eight, opposes legalizing abortions although the Social Security Institute estimated recently that 60,000 abortions are performed each year in clandestine clinics, doctors' offices and private homes.

Many abortions are performed by untrained midwives in cardboard or wooden shacks like the houses that make up San Lucas Patoni. The institute estimates that 25% of the women who undergo abortions in Mexico die.

Among the maze of unpaved alleyways in San Lucas Patoni is the home of Ventura Rodriguez and his family. Don Ventura, a 45-year-old artisan, is head of a household of 20 people, including his wife and 11 children. They share three, dirt-floored rooms without running water, electricity or even basic sanitary facilities.

They are a typical family of the "barrio" which grew four decades ago from a community of squatters.

Don Ventura—his friends have given him the respectful title of Don—is a shy man who rarely receives visitors from the city "to avoid their seeing my living conditions."

He is 5 foot 4 with a full round face criss-crossed by wrinkles and colored a deep brown by the sun and the swirling dust of his barrio.

Don Ventura has fathered 17 children, of whom 11 survived. The others died in infancy from tuberculosis, malnutrition or pneumonia.

"That stuff about pills, that's against God," he says, "and abstaining like the Church says, well, that's kind of difficult, you know."

Both Don Ventura and Lucia, his 43-year-old wife, describe themselves as devout Roman Catholics.

"Children are given to us by God and we have to respect His decision as to how many we will have," Don Ventura said. "Right now I know I have problems just supporting my children. But what am I going to do? Give them away? Sell them?"

The Rev. Ramon Torres, 28, is Don Ventura's parish priest. His church is a dust-covered tent.

"These people have heard about birth control through radio and television but the Church tells them it is a sin," Father Torres said. "I don't go around convincing them to accept family planning because they don't know what it means. But if I have the chance to talk somebody into having fewer children, I'll do it."

The priest, who was assigned to the barrio in November by the Mexico

City diocese after missionary work in the Philippines and Japan with a training stint at Holy Trinity parish in Detroit, describes himself as a member of "the Third World Church in action," or the Catholic Church operating in the field in developing countries.

Father Torres said he has counseled Don Ventura and his wife, neither of whom can read nor write, on family planning. The priest said flatly he is opposed to the Church's policy banning artificial methods of birth control.

But Don Ventura, and people like him, are not ready for family planning, Father Torres said, because of what older priests have told them against birth control.

Don Ventura works in a little shop in his home, hammering copper into trays sold to a middleman who in turn sells them to tourist shops in Mexico City. He says he earns between \$60 and \$90 a month, not enough to clothe his family. As a result the clothes his family wears are hand-me-downs from more fortunate relatives.

"I can't make ends meet," he said.

Veronica, one of Don Ventura's five daughters, is 2. She plays on a bare patch of ground outside the hut, wearing only a soiled, torn white blouse. She is Don Ventura's youngest. His eldest, who still lives at home, is 26. Seven other people live in the three rooms. They are relatives from Don Ventura's home state of Guanajuato, in central Mexico, who came to the big city looking for work.

Don Ventura has only three beds, shared by him, his wife and as many children as can squeeze in. The others sleep on "petates," the straw mats used by Aztecs before the Spanish conquest. The roof, made of corrugated cardboard, leaks when it rains.

In the magazine "The LUTHERAN STANDARD" for June 3, 1975 this remark could be noted; The executive director for The Baja California Mission in Tijuana said that home economist surveys in the neighborhood of the compound of his mission indicate that 40 % of the mothers eat dirt in order to quell hunger pangs.

ARE ANY OF US THAT HUNGRY ? ? ?