

We looked up anniversaries and found out that it's traditional to give "tin gifts" for a 10th anniversary. January 1, 2006, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of our arrival in Mexico. But please, no tin. ☺ When we arrived the average missionary stayed in Mexico less than one full term (four years). We've lived here one quarter of our lives! And are going to miss it a lot when we leave next month.

Latina 2006

Jan. 3-9 we will be in Quito, Ecuador, leading youth ministry seminars as part of "LATINA" – a triennial Urbana-style, job fair event for Latin American young adults. During the last LATINA conference, the 600+ people who attended said they were most interested in youth ministry and missions. So it's an honor for us to have been invited to present workshops on youth work.

The Tool Works, It Really Works

Veronica was seriously discouraged. The first 2/3 of the year with the youth group at our church in Toluca had gone gangbusters: 60 people worked or experienced the "EJE" youth encounter and there had been a great turnout and response for the "eXtreme faith" conference series in September. But in the fall as the students got more and more loaded down with schoolwork, attendance at the Sunday night youth group slumped until one Sunday no one showed up but four of the leaders. (We reminded them that even this was progress because back during our first few years "no one" would have meant

not one person besides ourselves, four people would have been somebody, and now there are four really committed leaders.) When Veronica talked with the pastor he told them that the group just wasn't fun enough. He reasoned that if only the group meetings were more attractive, kids would show up again.

I happened to be working on the revision of the Foundations of Youth Ministry textbook, creating an instrument that walks leaders step-by-step through a process of creating a tailor-made strategy for their group. I sent it to Veronica for her feedback and she filled it out very carefully. The next time she met with the pastor she showed him her detailed evaluation. Not only was he impressed by the work and analysis she had done, but also he began to understand that the problem was not simply that the group wasn't fun enough.

The tool helped Veronica see, and explain to the pastor, that the Sunday night meeting is being undermined by a variety of issues. Many of the parents' spiritual commitment ends with the Sunday morning service and so, directly or indirectly, they hinder rather than facilitate their children's involvement in the youth group, planning family outings, requiring them to baby-sit younger siblings, or simply not giving them a ride. Then there is the educational system that overloads the kids with work. Because education is promoted as the chance to secure a good future, many high school and college students pour themselves into their homework.



The tool also helped Vero look beyond the attendance of the weekly meeting and identify other indicators of spiritual growth in the kids. One of the things she had to quantify was her personal contact time with the students. She realized that she has regular contact with many of them, which gives her a chance to get to know their needs, encourage them, pray for them, and speak into their lives. As she looked over the past year, she saw that the "gangbuster" time laid the foundation for these relationships, as some of the students she is in regular contact with now would never have opened up with her a year ago. And many of the students have made great strides in their relationship with God, even if they aren't at youth group every Sunday night.

So Veronica was encouraged. She saw that her efforts have not been in vain and the evaluation helped her identify ways she needed to shore up the strategy she had created. And I was encouraged because I got a glimpse of how my work on the new edition of the textbook could really help a youth pastor.

Tim & Annette