



# TASH TIMES

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## ■ GREETINGS

Dear Friends:

One of the first booklets that I wrote was a Lenten reflection called L.E.N.T. (Let's Eliminate Negative Thinking). Each day, as I reflected on the meaning of Lent, I ended with humor. At first, one might think that humor is incompatible with the meaning of Lent. I do not believe this. **Lent means springtime.** I believe that 40 days without laughter can invite sadness and even scrupulosity.

The Church, in its wisdom, realizes this. On the Fourth Sunday of Lent, it celebrates **Laetare Sunday**. Laetare is Latin for **rejoice**. On this Fourth Sunday, the Church takes a breather from all the penances people do during Lent and spends time rejoicing, which includes humor.



*Father Scott shares a moment of laughter with several children from the parish of Santa Cecilia in Oaxaca after he celebrated Mass there in August 2024.*

**Humor is pain turned inside out.** It is the shock absorber of life's hard knocks. It is internal jogging. It is a connector between people that makes them relax. Throughout my 56 years of ministry, I have used humor to relax people, to gain their attention and to make a strong connection with them. However, I fear that humor has now become "politically incorrect." I say that because much of humor is about human foibles and idiosyncrasies. More and more it seems like people can no longer laugh at themselves.

Some years ago, **I found a picture of Jesus laughing.** I really liked it so I bought some of them, and I began to sell them to people who attended my parish missions. Within a few months I got a letter from a lady who was upset because I told people that Jesus laughed. She wrote that Jesus did not laugh because His life was filled with difficult ministry followed by suffering and death. She wrote that He never had time to laugh and I should quit telling people that He laughed.

I wrote the woman back and told her that during all the time I was in the seminary, I was never told that Jesus did not laugh. None of the writings of the popes referred to Jesus not laughing. **So Jesus did laugh** and I am going to continue telling people that He did. A few months later she wrote again strongly expressing that Jesus did not laugh. I did not respond. I felt sorry for her. She did not understand Jesus' humanity.

Humor can hurt people. Some modern comedians use humor to insult people and make fools of them, which is what the Roman soldiers did to Jesus. Nonetheless, humor can be a strong remedy for people who feel overwhelmed by news of war, poverty and political arguments. We should never forget the **"Eleventh Commandment."** **"Thou shalt not take thyself too seriously."**

Whenever I visit **Oaxaca** and walk around the main plaza, **I see humor at work.** I see children laughing as they run after balloons. I see couples strolling hand, in hand smiling and laughing. I see grandparents playing with their grandchildren. These moments allow people to forget for a while the harshness of their lives, their poverty, their unemployment, and their worries and fears.

A sense of humor is very important in the senior years. I have often said in my preaching that if seniors wake up in the

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*Father Scott, continued*

morning and nothing hurts, they are probably dead. **Life is too short to get upset about every little thing.** However, in the senior years, the little things can become the big things because the world has shrunk. When seniors are joyful and have a sense of humor, it gives the younger generation the ability to face their senior years with peace. *Remember you don't stop laughing because you have grown old. You have grown old because you stopped laughing.*

*God bless you!*

Fr. Scott

## ■ Take the First Step! *by Charley B. Gates, MD*

“Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, magic, and power in it.”

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

On October 13, 1972, Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571 bound for Santiago, Chile, **crashed** in the Andes mountains. The inexperienced co-pilot misread the instrument panel and began the initial descent amidst heavy cloud cover towards what he thought was the airport in Santiago. By the time visual conditions improved, it was too late. **The aircraft struck the mountain** at a speed of about 220 mph, immediately killing five persons and stranding the remaining 40 passengers and crew.

**Joint search and rescue efforts** by the Chilean and Uruguayan governments were **halted after eight days**. The harsh conditions and desolate alpine environment gave the rescuers little hope that they would find anyone alive.

For the next 60 days, the survivors waited at the crash site, enduring unspeakably difficult conditions. They were freezing and starving. Cannibalism set in. On the 61st day, three of the men made the decision that **their only way out was to climb over the mountain themselves**. They were exactly right. Ten days after they started to walk, all the survivors were rescued.

During their trek over the mountain, the three men faced all sorts of challenges: an avalanche, sub-freezing nighttime temperatures, no map, no climbing gear, no compass, and no climbing experience. Yet they solved each problem as it arose. One of the men explained that, **at the moment of total commitment to the venture, they felt an energy and an ingenuity that they were not aware that they were capable of**. The mountain that had initially seemed insurmountably tall diminished in stature the closer they got to it.



*Jesús, aged 16, has thrived since his arrival at La Ciudad. He has the grades and the work ethic that support his aspiration of becoming a physician.*

The key to their success was mustering the courage to **take the first step**. By beginning their journey over the mountain, the men gave themselves the opportunity to succeed.

So often, fear prevents people from beginning the most important work of their lives. **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (1749–1832) was a Renaissance man who is widely regarded as Germany's most influential writer. **His quote above implores us to begin the journey** – not to finish it. Once a project is started, it often takes up a life of its own, propelled forwards by its own momentum.

During a recent visit to Oaxaca, I was a witness to the power of the first step when I met Jesús Reyes Luis, one of the young men in residence at La Ciudad de Los Niños (La Ciudad). La Ciudad is one of the orphanages in Oaxaca that TASH supports. Jesús is from an isolated indigenous community in the mountains, located about six hours from Oaxaca. Unfortunately, Jesús' biological father was an alcoholic who subjected the family to frequent verbal and physical abuse. **Given the isolation of the mountain community, there were few resources to turn to for help**. Most of the neighbors turned a blind eye to Jesús' dire domestic situation, in part because the pattern of patriarchal domestic violence is a common one.

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*Take the First Step!, continued*

With few options, **Jesús made the bold decision to flee the home.** One can imagine some of the questions that must have flooded his mind. What would he eat? What was his destination? Who would receive him when he arrived? He had no immediate answers to these questions, but he knew the first step that he had to take: he had to leave that toxic home environment.

One evening, Jesús fled after his father passed out. He alternately ran and walked all night, putting as much distance between himself and his village as he could. When he reached the main highway, he hitchhiked and bus-hopped his way to Oaxaca city. There, he encountered a kind physician who directed Jesús to La Ciudad.

**Since his arrival at La Ciudad, Jesús has flourished.** With the support of a social worker, he worked through the trauma that he had experienced in his home. He has applied himself in his studies and is doing well in school. **He is thinking of becoming a physician** in homage to the physician who aided him on his journey. Jesús loves soccer; his favorite footballer is Ronaldo. He also enjoys going to the movies with friends. His life now resembles one of a normal teenager. Most importantly, he has a future that would never have been possible if he had not begun his journey on that fateful night in the mountains.

Thanks to the generosity of its donors, **TASH has supported La Ciudad with several capital projects** that have improved the infrastructure of the orphanage as well as **the salary of a social worker** who helps children like Jesús.

Your thoughts, prayers and financial support make this impactful collaboration possible. Thank you.

God love you.

Charley B. Gates, MD  
President, TASH Board of Directors

## ■ Witness to Oaxaca – “Bricks and Mortar” and “Flesh and Blood” - by Charley B. Gates, MD



*A group of children from La Ciudad pose in front of the new dormitory, whose construction was financed by TASH.*

Over the course of 25 years of work in Oaxaca, TASH has witnessed again and again that philanthropic organizations have difficulties in retaining good employees. The principal reason for this high turnover is the fact that these **organizations simply cannot afford to pay higher salaries.** These organizations depend almost entirely on donations, and donations can vary significantly as economic conditions change. Without a reliable source of recurring funding, organizations are not willing to commit to higher salaries.

In addition, many donors prefer to fund capital projects instead of staff salaries. Capital projects enhance the “bricks and mortar” of the organization. Examples include building

renovations and vehicle acquisitions. **These projects produce immediate and tangible results.** On the other hand, the impact of a higher salary for a staff member is more nuanced and takes longer to have an effect.

**TASH has a flexible approach to its donation strategy,** supporting both capital projects and salaries. TASH has funded many capital projects within the past five years, including the demolition of a condemned dormitory and the construction of a state-of-the-art, earthquake-resistant replacement at La Ciudad orphanage. At La Clinica del Pueblo, Anna Seethaler, two capital projects are in the works for 2025: (1) a major renovation to the operating room and (2) the installation of a best-in-class electronic medical record system. TASH is ready to support these important investments.

TASH also recognizes the primary importance of the **“flesh and blood” of an organization – its employees.** Staff are the

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*Witness to Oaxaca, continued*

heart and soul of an organization; they play a critical role in the ongoing impact that the organization is having. **At every organization with which it currently collaborates, TASH supports salaries.**

**At La Ciudad, TASH provides for the salary of a licensed social worker, Aimee Sierra Balbuena.** Among many other duties, she helps to find solutions to the problems that the children face in their home environment. She also conducts follow-up visits to make sure that the children are successful after they leave La Ciudad.



*Aimee Sierra, social worker at La Ciudad, plays a critical role in helping the children adjust to their new surroundings. She navigates the governmental social support system and provides follow-up visits after the children leave the orphanage.*

In December, **Dante**, a one-year-old, was left on the doorstep of La Ciudad. Aimee identified who the boy's legal guardians were. During her research into Dante's origins, she discovered that **he has no birth certificate.** This happens when a child is born outside of the official health-care system. With no official papers, Dante faces a major disadvantage because his rights as a citizen are dependent on the appropriate paperwork. **Aimee is working on resolving this in favor of Dante before too much time passes.** The older a child gets, the harder it becomes to backtrack and obtain official papers.

All of this is happening while Dante receives the love and attention of the staff and other members of La Ciudad. Jesús Fajardo, who has been the executive director of La Ciudad for six years, states that Dante is gaining weight and smiling constantly. He seems to love his new surroundings.

By supporting both the “bricks and mortar” and the “flesh and blood” of its local partners, TASH is optimizing its impact and giving children like Dante a fighting chance to thrive in their lifetimes.



*One-year-old Dante is delighted by his new surroundings at La Ciudad.*



## FUTURE EVENTS & UPDATES



The 17th Annual Olé 5k will take place on **October 4, 2025**, which coincidentally is the feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi. A private Mass for Olé 5k sponsors will be held at St. Augustine's Friary in Lawrenceville on **October 5, 2025**, at 11 am. Mass will be followed by brunch. As always, 100% of the race proceeds support the projects in Oaxaca.

**To make a donation, please make a check out to “Tash, Inc.” and use the included donation envelope.  
To donate securely online, please visit: [www.tashinc.org](http://www.tashinc.org)**

**Transparency:** Visit [tashinc.org](http://tashinc.org) to learn how your donations support those in need in Oaxaca, Mexico. Contact us at [admin@tashinc.org](mailto:admin@tashinc.org) with your questions. View TASH, Inc. ratings on the following third-party sites:

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