



JOYFUL REFLECTIONS

Every person you help...makes ripples in society.

VOLUME 43 – MAY/JUNE 2026 • OAXACA, MEXICO

TASHINC.ORG

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

Clinica Del Pueblo
"Anna Seethaler" A.C.
EST. 2000

Dear Friends:

A few years after I got involved with Oaxaca, I received a letter from my brother who lived in Florida. He wrote that the travel section in his Sunday paper featured a long article about **Oaxaca**. The article described all the **beautiful places**, the **great food** (fried grasshoppers) and the **excellent alcohol** (Mezcal). He wrote that nowhere in the article was there mention of the **poverty** that I write about. He wondered if I was exaggerating.



The entrance to La Clínica del Pueblo.

I wrote back saying I was sure that when an article about his city appeared in the travel section of a newspaper, there'd be no mention of poverty as the point of the article would be to encourage people to visit. Here, **poverty has been brushed aside**. Of the many things Oaxaca is famous for, the impressive ruins of **Monte Alban** - an archaeological site above the city - has attracted both visitors and explorers alike. Originally, visitors to the site had to navigate their way up a rugged dirt road filled with twists and turns. **Many poor people lived in primitive structures on this road**. As Oaxaca welcomed more and more visitors, the government decided to build a modern road to Monte Alban on the other side of the mountain so that the visitors did not have to witness the poverty.

I can assure you that there is a lot of poverty in Oaxaca. Having visited it twenty-five times, I have seen for myself the poverty, the hunger, the sick people, and the hopelessness. Sometimes people will misquote Scripture to make a case for their argument, citing sayings out of context relating to Jesus. For example: "The poor you will always have with you." The context of this saying is this: when a woman came to wash Jesus' feet and anoint them with costly perfume, Judas said, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?" Referring to his death, Jesus said, "Leave her alone, the poor you will always have with you."

A person of integrity would never use Jesus' words to justify not helping poor people. We have a mandate from Jesus to help the less fortunate (**Matthew, chapter 25**). When I first became involved with TASH in 1998, it was to help less fortunate people in Oaxaca. Over the years, we have helped many people through your generosity. Not only does our ministry to the poor help us to get to heaven, but your support, which gives us the ability to help the poor, will help you get to heaven.

God bless you!
Fr. Scott



Father Rentería and his team at Santa Cecelia have transformed the community over the past 15 years through a compelling narrative emphasizing commitment to excellence.

What Narrative Are You Telling Yourself?

There is a well-known fable, often referred to as **“The Three Bricklayers,”** that emphasizes the importance of the narrative that we tell ourselves.

The parable relates that a traveler comes across three bricklayers working side-by-side on a large construction project. The traveler asks each man in turn the same question: **“What are you doing?”**

The first bricklayer answers, “I’m laying bricks, just like I was told.” The second bricklayer replies, “I am building a wall to make money to feed my family.” The third brick-layer says, in a voice filled with passion and energy, “I’m building a cathedral.”

How can three workers performing the same task at the same job have such dramatically different attitudes about the work in which they are engaged?

The difference lies in the story that each worker told himself about **why** he was doing **what** he was doing.

Storytelling is a fundamental component of human existence. For as long as humans have walked this earth, stories have been told. Stories are powerful. They change

attitudes and behavior, and motivate action. When people see themselves in a story, they are more likely to adopt new perspectives or behaviors that correspond to their role in the story.

Stories also clarify complex processes by highlighting what is essential. They convey meaning rather than just information, providing context and emotion that facts and figures lack.

A **narrative** is the story that we tell ourselves to make sense of the situation in which we find ourselves.

One can imagine that, for the first worker, each hour on the job passes slowly. He views the work as tedious and revels in opportunities to miss work. This is no judgment against him; these behaviors correspond to his personal narrative.

The third worker, on the other hand, probably **can’t wait to get out of bed in the morning** so he can continue with the grand project in which he is so engaged. One can imagine him **full of gratitude** for the opportunity to contribute to the construction of such a magnificent structure. Again, these feelings and actions flow from his narrative.

It is easy to forget we have the freedom to choose the narrative that we tell ourselves. Indeed, many narratives are formed automatically without our realizing it, which is why we have to ask ourselves, **Are we simply laying bricks, or are we building a cathedral?** The choice is ours. And in fact, there is great power in choosing a narrative that’s constructive, positive, and full of gratitude and purpose.

During one of my first visits to Oaxaca, Father Scott and I visited the home of a patient who had undergone **successful cataract surgery** at La Clínica del Pueblo Hospital. The woman concerned was profoundly grateful for her restored vision. She was able to resume meaningful work and contribute positively to the welfare of her family, which which had a powerful impact on her. During the visit, **I was overwhelmed by the level of poverty in which people lived**—the dirt floors, crowding, stray animals, poor housing, and oppressive heat and humidity—along with the absence of basic necessities. Despite the severity of their circumstances, however, the family had extended the **warmest hospitality** to both Father Scott and me, using the little that they had at their disposal.

Despite the many positives of the visit, **I left that day feeling just a little dejected.** Without a doubt, the physicians at La Clínica had helped this patient, but so many problems remained. What future did she and her children have? How could they make improvements to their house? And, more concretely, would there be anything to eat for dinner that night?

Without realizing it, a negative narrative had been forming in my mind, though I was not fully aware of it nor its influence over me. Essentially, I was telling myself that the situation was hopeless and that the efforts of TASH were not enough to move the needle for this family.

Narratives are like trees; the longer they exist, the more deeply rooted they become in our psyche and the more difficult it becomes to change them. But it is never impossible. **The journey to a new narrative begins with an honest re-examination of the situation.**

Despite my initial shock, I continued to visit Oaxaca with Father Scott. After a number of visits, I realized much of my initial negativity was based on my own biases. Put simply, many things that bothered me did not bother Oaxacans. Yes, there are undoubtedly problems to address: heat, sanitation, nutrition. But these problems have solutions, and organizations like TASH actively work to help people

identify and pursue these solutions. **An honest re-evaluation of the situation led to the birth of a new, more positive narrative.**

In the 15 years since becoming involved with TASH, I've seen **the impact that TASH has** over and over again. Currently, TASH subsidizes care for more than a thousand patients per month at La Clínica, and it is improving the lives of many children through its support of scholarships, orphanages, and after-school programs. So the narrative I tell myself now is quite different!

I encourage you to ask yourself: are you laying bricks, or are you building a cathedral? Thank you for your continued support of TASH. God love you.

Charley Gates, MD
Board President, TASH

Witness to Oaxaca

In this issue's witness article I want to tell you about one of TASH's partners that is very near and dear to my heart. **SERCADE Mexico** is operated by Capuchin Friars to promote health and community development in the La Mixteca region of Oaxaca. This region lies in the remote mountains of northwest Oaxaca and is heavily populated by indigenous people. As a result, there is a lot of poverty, and access to health care is very difficult. TASH partners in several ways with SERCADE. In addition to providing financial support, **TASH coordinates with Clínica del Pueblo in order to provide direct medical care for the people served by SERCADE.**

Two Capuchin Friars have played important roles in TASH's relationship with SERCADE. The first is **Father Carlos Ceballos**. In addition to leading SERCADE's mission in Chalcatongo de Hidalgo, Father Carlos is also the president of Clínica del Pueblo's advisory board. Because he serves in these two capacities TASH has a very close, relationship with Father Carlos. The second Capuchin Friar is **Brother Justino Sanchez**. Brother Justino preceded Father Carlos as the leader of SERCADE's mission in Chalcatongo. Due to his immense talent and potential, Brother Justino was selected to represent the Capuchin Order in Rome, Italy. After a few successful years in that capacity, I am excited to report that **Brother Justino has returned** to Chalcatongo and has resumed his work with **SERCADE** serving the poor.



TASH Board Members Charlie Baker, Charley Gates, (left) and Duane Fahrion with Brother Justino Sanchez.

Last summer, during the TASH board member visit to Oaxaca, **Father Carlos celebrated Mass** at Clínica de Pueblo. **Brother Justino assisted.** It was a beautiful celebration in remembrance of the feast day for Nuestra Señora de la Soledad (Our Lady of Solitude), who is the patron saint of Oaxaca. It warmed my heart to see two of Father Scott's Capuchin brothers celebrating in the beautiful space that Father Scott built more than 25 years ago.

continued on next page

Witness to Oaxaca, continued

To highlight the Corporal Works of Mercy that the Capuchin Brothers at SERCADE Mexico contribute on a daily basis, I asked Brother Justino for a patient vignette to share. He sent me the story of **Martin Cortes Perez**.

Martín was a 52-year-old man who lived in the Vista Alegre neighborhood of Chalcatongo. Martín was identified by a volunteer team during a home visit, which revealed he had been suffering from an **advanced-stage nasal cancer**. Martín lived with his 82-year-old mother, Elvira, who is visually impaired. Elvira served as his primary caregiver, assuming this role despite her advanced age and impairment. **It was quickly determined that Martin's condition was terminal and SERCADE began to provide hospice care.** For seven months, SERCADE provided at least two home visits per week, with the participation of a multidisciplinary team of general practitioners, nurses, psychologists, and social workers. During this time, controlled medications for pain management were provided, along with nutritional supplements, always prioritizing his well-being and quality of life. **The care focused not only on physical attention but also on emotional and social support for both Martín and his mother.** Martín received this support until his death, navigating this process with the constant assistance of the team.

His case reflects the importance of palliative care in community settings, as well as the value of care that recognizes the dignity of the individual at all stages of life, especially at the end of life.



Photos of Martin in his home. He received palliative care through SERCADE that alleviated the pain associated with his terminal cancer.

The images of Martin that Brother Justino shared along with his vignette are shocking and pain my heart. It is obvious that he suffered greatly from his condition, and I pray that the care **SERCADE** provided gave some comfort. Eternal rest grant unto Martin, O Lord, and let Your perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace.

Please keep TASH, its partners, and the people we serve in Oaxaca in your prayers. Thank you for your continued support.

Charlie Baker
TASH Vice President



Left and center: Inside images of La Clínica. Right: Father Carlos, local board president, conducts a staff reflection in the outdoor space between the hospital and the family dormitory.

FUTURE EVENTS & UPDATES



The Ole 5k will take place on **October 3, 2026**. A private Mass, followed by brunch, will be held for Ole 5k sponsors on **October 4** at the St. Augustine Friary in Lawrenceville. Please visit <https://tashinc.org/ole-5k/> for more information.



To make a donation, please make a check out to "Tash, Inc." and use the included donation envelope. For more information, or to become a sponsor, please visit: www.tashinc.org

Transparency: Visit tashinc.org to learn how your donations support those in need in Oaxaca, Mexico. Contact us at admin@tashinc.org with your questions.