

Marianist Volunteers' Program DECAMP - Mexico

History:

Since 1998 DECAMP has received youth from the USA that study at Marianist High School or from other religious orders. Students from St Mary's University in San Antonio, TX have also joined our program.

All these young people are looking forward to having an experience in a rural area in the south of Mexico, where the Marianists started developmental activities, such as DECAMP.

They all come in for a relatively short period of time, which goes from 6 to 10 days, and they join the group of Mexicans who are willing to share with the Americans. We run this program twice a year. One program at the beginning of spring, the other one at the end of the summer, dates which coincide with US students' spring break.

Later on, some youths keep in touch with us and are invited to live another kind of experience, which is much deeper.

To avoid confusion, I will refer to the first program as the first stage of volunteering, and the other one as the second stage.

Since 1998, for the first stage we have hosted over 400 volunteers, both from the US and from Mexico. They have taken part in different projects and in different communities.

Of all these people, over 50 have participated in the second stage, some have returned to work in development projects in aboriginal communities, to do social work, such as building houses, or running human development programs with women. Others help in fund raising, collecting furniture, clothes, in the US.

Motivation (of the program): To fully live out the Faith in Christ. The basis of all our programs is to help people deepen their understanding of the world and obviously grow spiritually. The methodology is by means of work projects. As most of our visitors are from the US, they have to cross the linguistic barrier, which is facilitated when working together.

Areas of work, responsibilities:

The areas of work is normally in rural communities in the south of Mexico, where DECAMP has worked for some years now. They are communities inhabited by aboriginal groups like zoques, chipantecos, totonacos, and some mestizos.

The responsibilities are very basic. We ask volunteers to be willing to live an experience of community life, as well as to become detached from the niceties of their every day life and to work in team with no language difficulties.

The kind of work depends upon the program, which ranges from construction work (of houses, a chapel, or a school) to development programs, like organizing a savings account (a group of acquaintances who get together to save money in order to finance loans).

Place of Work:

In the beginning we did it in my hometown, in all honesty because we did not have much experience at the time. The place is called Pueblo Nuevo and it is located in the north of Oaxaca (a Mexican state).

Eventually we moved into more needy places, and this is where DECAMP operates today. The place is called Valle de Uxpanapa, in the south of the State of Veracruz. It is a very poor area in economic resources, yet it is very rich in natural resources.

Time of Work: There are two kinds of program, one geared towards High School students, the other one to College and University students. For the first stage, the duration of the experience ranges from 6 to 10 days. Eventually, if any youth wants to return, we put a program together for them according to the needs in DECAMP, or to the volunteer's expectations, which may go from one month to two years.

Requirements: Basically, volunteers will be willing to live in community, to speak some Spanish, to have an open heart to learn and to share with people from other cultures. He will not be bothered by the intense heat, the dust, the dirt roads, and by the detachment from communication media, like newspapers and magazines.

Financial Arrangements:

In the first stage, volunteers are expected to finance their own experience, unless he may get some grant or scholarship to support their living expenses, which amount to \$15 American dollars per day.

In the second stage, DECAMP usually gives volunteers a stipend for their work. Such stipend will help volunteers pay for their meals, house, and other living expenses.

Living Arrangements:

For the first stage, the families who receive direct service from volunteers give them accommodation. This is where we can actually state that the youth can have a more complete experience, as the families host them with great hospitality.

In the second stage, DECAMP provides volunteers with a house, and if the program is not able to get it, volunteers will have to look for one on their own.

Size of the Program:

In the first stage, the number of volunteers ranges from 10 to 40 foreigners, and an equal number of Mexicans. In the second stage there is no limit, as the kind of volunteer is more special.

Formation:

The youth are expected to participate in different activities, which include reflection, pondering over the experience they are living, how it is affecting them, etc. All this is based on the experience as it is being lived, and from there we generate dialogue about the world we live in. We are not framed by any particular ideology, the poverty that surrounds us is devastating, and we seek to be creative and to solve the different problems we need to face. We are both capitalist and socialist at the same time, we respond to reality as it unfolds to us.

Deadline for enrollment:

As a matter of fact we already have an agreement with different schools and with St Mary's University, that is for the first stage. For the second stage, candidates are free to consult any time of the year.

Schedule:

As mentioned above, each program is negotiated with each school interested in joining us. We do not usually work with yearlong volunteers, but when a particular group shows interest we respond to them. Age is not an issue; young or old are all welcome.

Support:

In their schools, students have meetings to prepare them and their parents for the experience. Here the role of the accompanying teachers is very important. The DECAMP staff visits with them to answer all the necessary questions.

Evaluation:

Throughout the program there are different evaluations and assessments both about the volunteers and about the program.

These evaluations have helped us improve the program and better understand the expectations of the participants.

Contact Person:

For the 2003 program, it will be one of the volunteers Stephen Anton Berchelmann, whose E-mail address is Sberchel@hotmail.com.