



Homes of Hope  
INTERNATIONAL

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## The Founding of Homes of Hope

THE FIRST HOME OF HOPE WAS BUILT IN MAY OF 1990, yet the story really takes shape a few months before in January. My wife, Janet, and I were part of the staff of Youth With A Mission, Los Angeles, and our ministry director was Dave Gustaveson. Dave had an impression from God that we were to start off the New Year with what he called an "Offering for Jesus." He explained to our 50 full-time staff members that "Jesus needed an offering" and he set a date for the end of January to have a special meeting in which all staff members would present their offerings to Jesus.

AS STAFF, WE WERE ALL CHALLENGED BY DAVE TO GIVE THE MONEY AS IF WE WERE GIVING IT DIRECTLY INTO THE HANDS OF JESUS. The plan was then to pray over the offering and ask God to bless it and seek His will as to how to use it. To be honest, this seemed to be a very backwards approach to me. I thought, "Why not pray first and find out what Jesus wants, and then have everyone respond?" Dave was resolute in his thinking though, declaring, "We need to take the offering first and freely offer it to Jesus for whatever He wants." So an offering was taken and several thousand dollars were raised; an astounding amount in 1990 considering all the staff members contributing were non-salaried missionaries.

After the offering, a few of us were assigned to prayerfully consider what to do with the money. Several months went by in which no clear idea surfaced as to how to use the funds, so we kept waiting, trusting God to speak to us. During this waiting period, I met a short, burly man named Sergio Gomez who lived in Tijuana, Mexico. Sergio had been raised in an orphanage. As evidenced by his large biceps, he had been a boxer in his youth and had a prominent gold tooth. Sergio had a huge heart for people, particularly the poor. He frequently built houses for needy families. He told me several stories about families who lived under blue tarps or in cardboard shacks. The more he talked, the more I cried inside. One day soon thereafter, he took me on a tour of Tijuana, and I saw for myself how just a few miles from the United States border, thousands of people were living in dismal substandard housing. I suddenly found myself asking Sergio if it might ever be possible for me to bring a group of people to build a house for the poor. He said, "Yes, I will help you!" At the next leaders' meeting, I confidently declared,

"I KNOW WHAT THE OFFERING IS FOR; IT'S FOR THE POOR... WE NEED TO BUILD A HOME FOR A NEEDY FAMILY IN MEXICO!"

In May of 1990, a group of twelve of us traveled from Los Angeles to Tijuana to build one house for a needy Mexican family. My three-year-old daughter, Andrea, came along; she was too young to help, but for some reason I took her anyway. As we painted and hammered the wood, I could not help but notice another family nearby watching us from an old abandoned bus pitched on a hill. Since the engine and hood were gone, the family was using that space to cook their food. Andrea soon connected with the children living in the bus and came over to me with a concerned look, saying,

"DADDY, ARE YOU GOING TO BUILD A HOUSE FOR THE BUS PEOPLE TOO?"

Her words touched my heart and echoed in my head all the way back home. When I got back to Los Angeles, I began calling various youth groups who were scheduled to join us in Tijuana that summer for outreach. One of groups accepted my challenge and we built a second house for the "bus people."

Over the next few months, more groups joined our efforts to build homes for the poor. During the first year, we built twelve houses, and during the next year we built 25, calling the program "Homes of Hope." It took 12 years to see the first 1000 built, only four years thereafter to see the next thousand built, and as of January 2013, 4300 homes for the poor had been built in 16 different nations. We have also begun to do research and identify the many long-term benefits of helping a poor family with a home. Giving a family a home is more than just showing mercy to them; it's a multigenerational transformational act that can help break the cycle of poverty in that family's life.