



Report from the Anglican Church of Mexico

I am going to start with a short introduction to Mexico and its people, then a short introduction to the Anglican Church of Mexico, and finally a look at some of our environmental problems.

Mexico has a land surface of 1,964,375 km² and is the 5th largest country in the Americas and the 14th largest country in the world, exceeded in size by countries represented at this meeting: Canada (no. 2), USA (no. 3), Brazil (no. 5), Australia (no. 6), and Argentina (no. 8); Peru, by the way, is no. 19 in terms of land mass. It is bordered on the north by the United States with a frontier of over 3,000 km; to the south the border with Guatemala is almost 1,000 km and there is close to 200 km of border with Belize.

Mexico is bounded to the east by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea and to the west by the Pacific Ocean, with a total of 11,122 km of coastline. That is a lot of beaches! And during hurricane season the country can be hit on both sides by violent weather.

Ranges of mountains rise virtually from the coastlines on the west and east, gradually coming together in the southern part of the country. It is said that the King of Spain asked Hernán Cortés what Mexico (called New Spain at that time) was like. In response he picked up a piece of paper, crumpled it, and tossed it on a table saying, "That, Your Majesty, is New Spain." A large part of the country is a high plateau between the mountain ranges. Despite the fact half the country is in the so-called Torrid Zone (south of the Tropic of Cancer), the high altitude helps keep temperatures from being excessive. The large desert areas in the north do have scorching hot summer weather. Nineteen of the thirty-two state capitals are 1,500 m in altitude (that's a mile high, the same as Denver, Colorado). In contrast, seven state capitals are at sea level. The principal lowland is the Yucatan peninsula in the southeast.

The climate varies with latitude and altitude: hot and humid in the lowlands, warm on the plateau, and cool with cold winters in the mountains. The north is arid, while the far south has heavy rainfall. From June through September, except for the arid north, the country enjoys a rainy season, and the almost daily rains during the summer keep the temperatures down.

There are three perennially snow-capped volcanoes over 5,000 meters high: Citlaltepētāl (also known as the Pico de Orizaba), Popocatepētāl (that still spews out smoke and ashes), and Iztaccihuatāl.

Mexico City is the second largest conurbation in the world and the country's center of trade and industry. Its altitude is over 2,500 m (1 1/2 mi) and the city is built over a lakebed in a valley totally

surrounded by mountains. All of this leads to major environmental pollution. The second largest city, Monterrey, is also heavily polluted.

Agriculture involves a fifth of the workforce; crops include sugar cane, grasses, grains, coffee, cotton, cacao, and fruits and vegetables. Mexico is rich in minerals, including copper, zinc, lead, tin, sulfur, and silver, where it is the second producer in the world, after the leader, Peru. It is one of the world's largest producers of oil with vast oil and gas reserves in the Gulf of Mexico. The oil and petrochemical industries dominate, but a variety of manufactured goods are now produced including iron and steel, motor vehicles, textiles, chemicals, cement, and food and tobacco products. The tourism industry is important, although it has been hard hit by the bad news reports about narco massacres. Over three fourths of all trade is with the USA. Following income from petrochemicals, the second largest source of income is the money sent home to Mexico by the undocumented (and documented) workers in the US and Canada. Over 70% of the population has cellular telephones.

The current population is over 111 million. The native language is Spanish, but one in six, or over 6 million Mexicans speak an indigenous language. In my diocese of Southeastern Mexico there are more than 3 million speakers of indigenous languages. In the state where I live (Oaxaca) more than 40 languages are spoken. The median age is 26 and life expectancy is 76 for women and 73 for men. Average scholasticity is 8.5 years, and over 90% of the population can read and write. The average number of children per woman is 2.1. This figure has been steadily decreasing (in 2005 it was 2.5), despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of Mexicans are Roman Catholics. Mexico is the country with the largest number of Roman Catholics in the world. Mormons and evangelical Christians have been steadily increasing their ranks. We Anglicans are a really tiny minority. In fact, we do not have accurate figures as to how many of us there are.

Mexico is immensely rich in wild life. Around 10% of the world biodiversity can be found in Mexico. It is number one in the world in species of reptiles, number two in mammals, fourth in amphibians, and fifth in plants. A system of Protected Natural Areas covers 15.9% of the entire country.

So much for the good news. Now, the problems. Recent drought in the north has hit hard. In the south there is considerable deforestation, largely by livestock owners who destroy patches of tropical rain forests to make room to graze their cattle. Almost all electricity is generated by oil and coal. There is only one nuclear plant and very little hydroelectric generation. Recently an effort has been made to generate electricity by wind. We have plenty of wind, but the local farmers have held up the project demanding large payoffs for the use of their land. Solar generation is expensive and also in its infancy, mostly used to power emergency telephones along the highways and an occasional solar water heater.

Recycling is in its infancy. In 2008 only 3.6% of urban solid residue was reprocessed. Mexico is the world's major consumer of Coca Cola, not to mention other soft drinks. (It is not surprising that diabetes and its complications is the number one cause of death.) Drinking water, even though it has been purified is not safe to drink in most places direct from the tap. An immense amount of bottled water is sold, so you can imagine what a huge problem all those plastic bottles create. Although excellent

legislation is in place to protect and improve the environment, there is not much social awareness of what people can do to alleviate the problems.

Heavy rains and flooding during the rainy season wipe away precious topsoil and carry waste matter to the few rivers that we have and eventually to the ocean.

Genetically altered seeds are a huge problem, especially corn that is one of our major crops and along with beans and chilies is the staple item in the Mexican's diet. The farmers who plant native varieties are constantly threatened by cross-contamination. The farmers who use the altered seeds have to use more (chemical) fertilizers and have to buy new seeds for each crop as they do not reproduce themselves.

Widespread poverty is the rule here. The immense majority of the wealth of the country is in the hands of only a few people. The middle class exists but is far outnumbered by the destitute. There is basic medical care for most people, but with few resources. There are virtually no ways a person can get a handout from the government such as unemployment insurance. The decision to go north to the United States and attempt to become an undocumented worker there is taken by many people. There are entire villages without any men in them under 50 years of age. They have all gone north. The money they are able to send back is life-saving for the family but takes its toll on the family's stability.

Good laws are in place concerning social and environmental issues. But there is insufficient vigilance regarding their application. The Mexican mindset leans towards trying to circumvent the law rather than trying to uphold it, and that in itself creates problems. Greed is another problem. Here I am thinking especially of the people who clandestinely collect turtle eggs because they can be sold for a large amount of money and are purported to be aphrodisiac in nature. But, fortunately, hundreds of volunteers swarm to the beaches to help protect the baby turtles and direct them to the water after they hatch.

Now a few words about the Anglican Church of Mexico . . .

The Anglican Church of Mexico goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century when British and American citizens who were working in the mining and railroad industries sought church services in English. The first service in Mexico City was held on Christmas Day, 1869. In 1882 Christ Church was organized as the first permanent Anglican Church in the country. After 1884 other English-language churches were founded in other cities and they all joined together in 1904 to found the Missionary District of Mexico. The name was later changed to the Diocese of Mexico and covered the entire country.

In parallel, among Spanish speakers the following was happening. The Reform Laws that drastically affected the enormous land holdings of the Roman Catholic Church were promulgated, and a new constitution was issued in 1857. A small group of Mexican Roman Catholic priests supported the new laws and were consequently excommunicated. However, they joined together to form a church that was independent from Rome in 1861. In 1872 they adopted the name of Iglesia de Jesús (Church of Jesus),

which later on was changed to the Mexican Episcopal Church. From the outset these priests were in contact with Anglicanism through the Episcopal Church in the United States. In 1875 a formal relation of intercommunion and collaboration between both churches was formalized. The Mexicans learned more about the Anglican traditions and decided to completely become a part of it. In 1906 the Mexican priests and people were received into the Missionary District of Mexico by the first bishop sent to Mexico from the United States. The church in Mexico thus became Spanish speakers and Mexicans in the majority, as it continues to be today.

The first Mexican bishop was elected in 1931 and he continued to serve the entire country of Mexico. In 1972 the country was split into three dioceses and a further split later on resulted in five dioceses, which is the situation today.

Since 1995 the five Mexican dioceses became an autonomous province of the Anglican Communion when they became independent from the Episcopal Church in the USA. The Episcopal Church has continued to offer steadily decreasing monetary aid, and the Mexican clergy and church workers continue to be a part of the Church Pension Fund in the US.

The Anglican Church of Mexico has mostly Mexican clergy, including a number of women. There is one national seminary in Mexico City. There are five active diocesan bishops, one of whom is also the primate and three retired bishops. At the moment one of the seats is supplied by a retired bishop from Panama acting as interim bishop. The general outlook of the Church in Mexico is liberal.

Most of our congregations have a small church building. All the priests are paid the same salary throughout the country. Most congregations are lower middle class, but there are about 10 English language congregations in Mexico that are totally self-supporting, although their numbers do not qualify most of them for parish status. There is rural work in some areas; in the Diocese of the Southeast most of the work is in villages and the economic level of the congregations is at the poverty level.

Some churches have resorted to setting up small businesses to help make ends meet and to provide a small income for some of their members. There are tortilla factories, bread shops, water purification facilities, cattle ranches, taxi cabs, and probably other businesses I am not aware of. I know some of the women do embroidery that is sold in the US through a companion diocese. The companion diocese movement has greatly benefited Mexico. Visitors from the US work hand in hand with the Mexican congregations: building, painting, gardening, etc. Some dioceses send a yearly medical mission to Mexico, especially to the rural areas.

The distances in Mexico are great and not everyone has the benefit of the Internet. Every diocese has its yearly synod, but most of the church activities are organized by the individual missions. Some effort is made to get young people together, but, again, the distances are a problem, as the bus fare is prohibitively expensive for many people. Whatever is done in matters of caring for the environment is largely up to the initiative of the local churches under the leadership of the priest in charge. By way of example, the congregation I belong to is a city church and therefore has indoor plumbing. We use low-water-use toilets and only flush them when absolutely necessary. We do not use plastic implements or plates for our fellowship hour, rather crockery that we wash and use the dishwasher to water the garden

when we are through with it. We collect batteries and cellular phones for recycling, also plastic bottles and paper. We use long-life, low-energy light bulbs and generally try to be a good example to the community regarding things we can do to help the planet.

Mexico is a developing country and lags behind the industrialized world in many ways. Awareness of the environment and how to care for it is just one example of our backwardness. However, there are movers and shakers out there who are doing a good job of getting the word out, although it is an uphill job. I hope the Church will be among those movers and shakers.

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