



(A reflection from Padre Alejandro Martinez Kemp, or “Padre Alex” about the Los Embajadores experience and its impact on youth. Translated from Spanish to English)

LOS EMBAJADORES

We are children of our time and many of our attitudes are molded (or formed by) the customs and values that are prevalent in our society. It’s evident that in these days our lives are influenced by consumption, fashion, individualism, selfishness, and hedonism. The more we possess in our society, the more value we supposedly have.

In this globalized cultural environment, words like solidarity, generosity, sharing, submission, and sacrifice seem strange. It seems crazy, even, that someone would give his/her time generously to help those in need. For those of us who dedicate our lives to these ideas, we face a great challenge in inventing new ways of passing on such values so as to create a utopia; a civilization of love. How can we help young people today experience values for a new society?

Fortunately, the world is full of hope. We are witness to some amazing educational efforts that are worthy of being imitated. One of the projects that helps youth have a life-changing experience in holy values is *Los Embajadores*.

Within this movement, I have discovered various ideals that are worthy of taking into account.

PARTICIPANTS

The young people that partake in this project belong to the middle class in the U.S. and Canada. This means that they are accustomed to a lifestyle that is comfortable. All their needs are met and they are left wanting nothing. What amazes me is seeing the ability the *Embajadores* program has to motivate these youth to live out an experience such as this.

FORMATION

The youth who live this experience do not arrive unprepared. Their readiness is thanks to a long developmental process. Approximately one year is spent learning, with adults, about what they

will be doing when they arrive. The program is highly structured and the students spend a long time preparing for it.

COMMITMENT

This movement requires that students be heavily involved in the details of making their trip happen. One way in which they are involved is by fundraising the necessary money to pay for their trip. Aside from that, and more importantly, participants are required to raise enough money to help the community in which they will be working.

Anyone who works so hard to create this opportunity will no doubt make the experience his/her own.

DESTINATARIOS

This movement has also done great things for the poor, regardless of their condition. The most important thing is that participants choose to work with the poorest, most suffering people who are in need.

INSERTION

Within this experience, participants are not allowed to behave as tourists, as they live lives similar to those who they are helping. Because of that, they arrive willing to sleep on the floor, eat at homes in the community with the people, play with children, and even teach a little English.

THE MAIN PURPOSE

Hard work. It's amazing to see young women, who seem delicate and gentle, carry heavy sandbags, or professors, accompanied by their students, working hard under the hot sun. They want to finish projects, even when it means being sore and extremely tired. That is just what we see, these *Embajadores* excavating dirt, mixing cement by hand (and then transporting it in wheelbarrows), painting, making tire walls, stacking sandbags, cleaning garbage, etc.

EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

Working side by side with *Los Embajadores* fills us with joy and we are proud to maintain long lasting friendships. When saying goodbye, we are sad (as are the participants, who often have tears in their eyes) yet happy to know that this experience has changed their lives. Many have said that a light has been turned on in their lives that can never be turned off. Among us, the Mexican educators, we dream of one day being able to implement a program similar to *Los Embajadores* for the youth. That is, we hope to plan a project that helps youth live an experience with a long-lasting mission. We hope to provide an experience that turns youth into renewed people, ready to truly value solidarity in their lives.