

New face, new attitude for Hoffman

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A La Ronge youth has learned a lot about herself as she undertakes missionary work in Mexico

Tortillas for breakfast, a handshake or a kiss at every door, and the irrelevancy of clocks: such were the adjustments La Ronge's Candy Hoffman had to make in Mexico City.

However, what she learned about the ways of old Mexico paled next to what she learned about herself and her role as a foreign evangelist.

As the eldest daughter of Crystal and Dan Hoffman, pastor couple for the La Ronge Alliance Church, and as a student at Canadian Bible College, Hoffman has had plenty of exposure to Christian ministry work. Her younger sister Carrie has worked in both Latin America and China, while Bible college friends have brought back stories from their own missionary journeys. Plus, looking through the eyes of her American-born father, Hoffman realizes that even northern Saskatchewan can be seen as a foreign mission field.

But the 21-year-old budding missionary had yet to put her own hands to such work. As Hoffman explained during her recent Christmas break in La Ronge, she'd had the impression that her shyness and fears about approaching complete strangers to discuss her Christian faith would somehow vanish once she stepped into a foreign environment. What she found was that in fact, it was even harder. "You have to know the language, and know what is appropriate," Hoffman said.

The opportunity for Hoffman's ministry came through Spearhead, an inter-church agency in Latin America whose programs to train young evangelists include a 14-month stint in Mexican cities. Youth like Hoffman start by spending a summer with a Mexican family, taking a 40-hour Spanish course, and doing ministry work with a team of fellow volunteers. In the fall, they work in teams of two with a Mexican church in the surrounding areas.

After Christmas break, the participants are moved to a different city to work more independently. The program wraps up with another summer



Candy Hoffman (back right) hams it up with fellow youth missionaries after finishing a clownish skit in Mexico City. As part of a Christian ministry, Hoffman is conveying God's word with a wide array of techniques, from street performances to knocking on the doors of complete strangers. "It's been good, to be pushed out more and more, and not relying on the people around me," she says.

of street evangelism, with the experienced participants leading a new crop of volunteers.

"It's kind of like a process they're taking us through," Hoffman explained. "It's been good, to be pushed out more and more, and not relying on the people around me. ... I've learned a lot about ministry, and how much work it takes." In Hoffman's first six months in Mexico, that work has taken many forms: going door-to-door with local believers, working with youth from a local church, doing evangelistic skits in clown costumes on the streets of Mexico City, or simply learning to sit longer at the dinner table. As Hoffman discovered, a meal in Mexico — whether it's beans and tortillas at 8 a.m., "comida" at 2:30, or cinnamon rolls at 9 in the evening — is never dictated by the constraints of a clock.

"Mealtime is very, very important to them, because that's when you socialize," she

explained. "You just have to be content to sit at the table for two hours." That same leisurely pace applies to most other activities too, said Hoffman, who learned to arrive 45 minutes late for her own youth group activities, since the youth themselves weren't likely to arrive until an hour or so after the scheduled start. Even showing up for a church service after it was over was okay — at least you were there, Hoffman said.

"It's like northern time, but even more," she said. "It doesn't matter. I never saw my 'mama' rush — ever."

Now back in Mexico, Hoffman is working in Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city, with a "cell group" of a dozen young people to do Bible studies.

In this intimate church setting, Hoffman will be largely on her own, teaching the basics of Christianity to newer believers and modeling her faith to young Mexican Christians.

Six months ago, the very idea might have freaked out the young missionary. Now however, she's learned a few things — including the notion that ministry isn't about how confident you are, or how innovative your tools for evangelism are, Hoffman said. "A lot of it is just being there for the people."

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