



Backpacks, Blooms, & Border Crossings

By Vivian Ernst

What do 27 people from Iowa with 27 backpacks equal? The answer: 27 missionaries! The destination: Southern California and Mexico.

The group's first stop was Pasadena, California, where they served as Petal Pushers, working alongside volunteers of all ages to decorate the Lutheran Hour float for the Tournament of Roses Parade.

LWML Vice President of Christian Life Vivian Ernst shares: *We did a variety of jobs — peeling petals off gladioli to cover the butterfly wings, gluing flowers, filling water vials, pushing wood picks into carnations, and then pushing thousands of flowers into the floats.* Entitled "God's Great Nature," the float featured a church with detailed stained glass windows surrounded by trees, lampposts, and swans. LCMS President Gerald and Terry Kieschnick, who were among its special passengers, also helped to decorate. The float won the Princesses' Trophy for the most beautiful entry under 35 feet in length!

Many seeds were planted through their efforts, and it is our continuous prayer that the Holy Spirit will touch the hearts of those

who came in contact with us or through the viewing of the float in the media, said Dick Gast, the float's organizer.

The group's next stop was Tijuana, Mexico. Vivian says: *We were quite a sight as we walked into Mexico carrying backpacks filled with school and health supplies and 575 pairs of socks for a local mission.* Under the guidance of Melissa Salomón, Director of Lutheran Hour Ministries in Mexico, the group painted the church and parsonage, did yard work, cleaned and organized their offices and storerooms, and sorted and counted supplies.

The group's final stop took them back to the U.S. where they met Pastor Arthur Porter who shared the challenges he faces as head of the Nehemiah Project — a mission outreach program for 11 inner city Los Angeles Lutheran churches that is funded by Iowa District West, the group's home district.

As the backpackers' eight-day mission trip came to an end, Vivian added: *It was especially meaningful to serve the Lord through mission work. We agreed the experience was spiritually enriching for each of us.*

Vivian Ernst of Ida Grove, Iowa, serves as LWML Vice President of Christian Life. She lives on a farm and is married to Rev. Gene.