

**MEET VICTOR**

Among the students at the Theological Community with whom I have enjoyed working over the past several years is Victor Ochoa (below, with me and Anabel, another student). Victor was born and raised in Chimalhuacán, a poorer area on the outskirts of Mexico City, and grew up in a Pentecostal church. After becoming a youth leader, he decided to study seminary and was first assigned to work with an indigenous evangelical community.



In 2008, Victor began to help out at an Independent Methodist congregation about 1½ hours east of Mexico City that had gone through some difficult times. Shortly thereafter they asked him to serve as pastor, even though he had not yet concluded his seminary studies. There Victor has been active especially with the youth and in leadership formation.



Victor is a person who embodies God's grace in many ways with his constant, contagious smile and his friendly and caring attitude toward all. He has been a wonderful student to work with.



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**EDUCATION IN MEXICO**

This past August 18 the school year began in schools throughout Mexico. It is a long school year, since the students won't get out until next July 14. By Mexican law, there must be 210 days of classes every year.

While there have been some important advances in the Mexican education system in recent years, it remains plagued with problems and challenges. Of every 100 students who begin primary school (grades 1-6), only around 80% finish. Though in urban areas things are more modern, in many rural areas, the conditions are very precarious, with a lack of teachers and tens of thousands of children meeting in makeshift "school buildings" often made of sheets of tin or cardboard or abandoned buses, trucks or train wagons. The average years of schooling per person is 8.7, although this has risen from 7.6 per person since 2000.



Obligatory education runs through secondary school (9<sup>th</sup> grade), yet only about 60% of children finish that level. About 40% of youth finish the equivalent of 12<sup>th</sup> grade and about 10% finish a university degree.

Many factors contribute to the problem of education. These include a high absenteeism by teachers, who earn only about US\$500 per month. The student-teacher ratio is 28/1 (compared to 14/1 in the U.S.). About 30% of students who wish to study at a university are unable to do so due to a lack of space or funding.

Naturally, all of this has serious social consequences. Approximately 24% of Mexicans between the age of 15 and 29 neither study nor have work. This leads to high immigration rates and greater participation in criminal activities, including especially drug trafficking.