



Spanish Immersion

by Margaret Johnson

Theology II seminarians arrived at the airport ready to begin a two-month Spanish immersion program in Querétaro, Mexico.

Ten Theology II seminarians spent the summer in the city of Querétaro, Mexico, three hours north of Mexico City and even further outside of their comfort zones, where they lived with host families and attended daily Spanish classes. They had no idea what they were getting into, but they left with greater knowledge of the Spanish language, culture and faith.

Each day, the men attended five hours of tutoring, and then spent the afternoons with their host families. This included John Hayes and Paul Hedman who were paired for their home stay. With four years of Spanish in high school, Hayes could hold conversations with the host family from the beginning. Hedman, who departed for Mexico with no experience in Spanish, could carry on basic conversations with confidence at the end of the two-month stay.

However, this experience was not just about the language. Being immersed in a different culture allowed the seminarians to get to know the Mexican people. With Hispanics as the fastest growing Catholic population in the United States, Hayes and Hedman realize the value of one day being able to minister more effectively by understanding the language and culture.

A brother leads the seminarians on a tour of the Convent of Santa Cruz (Holy Cross) in Querétaro.





Hedman added, “We also experienced being a foreigner in another country and being lost. We gained a greater appreciation of how the Mexican people might feel coming to the United States. I pray that this will help me to be a better minister to others.”

A highlight of their immersion experience was a trip to Mexico City to visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. They walked to the Basilica early every morning for Mass and quiet prayer before tourists arrived. Hedman was comforted by the message of Our Lady to Juan Diego: “Am I not here who am your Mother?”

“It was very comforting to receive that message while I was in Mexico and remember that I can always go to Mary,” he said.

A takeaway for Hayes was the acknowledgement of poverty in Mexico. John questioned his reaction to the homeless and beggars: “How do I see this person?” “Can I see this person for who they really are?” He hopes this experience provides him with the empathy he needs to reach the poor and help them however he can.

This fall, Hayes and Hedman enjoy sitting at the lunch table where only Spanish is spoken. Another step outside their comfort zones; another step closer to ministry.

Fr. Allen Kuss, kneeling front and center, joins the seminarians at the top of the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan.