



**MERCY MINISTRIES
OF LAREDO**

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Press Release

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For Immediate Release:

New Dental Clinic Expands Mercy Ministries' Laredo Legacy

There's something special to smile about in South Laredo today. Mercy Ministries of Laredo (MML) has opened a new dental clinic dedicated to those who quite often let others smile first.

MML CEO Sister Maria Luisa Vera said a spirited combination of partners and shared visions lead to the day's smile-filled event at 2500 Zacatecas Street.

"For over 100 years, the Sisters of Mercy legacy has helped to insure that Laredo can count on the Sisters for assistance with primary healthcare and basic needs. The Mercy dental clinic allows us to expand on that legacy. We'll offer a basic program to include cleanings, fillings and simple dental extraction ser-

Mercy Ministries of Laredo is the only faith-based provider of primary health-care services for Laredo's uninsured and underinsured residents.

Mercy Laredo operates an effective, comprehensive and culturally-sensitive primary healthcare clinic in South Laredo at 2500 Zacatecas Street.

MML also operates Casa de Misericordia, the Lamar Bruni Vergara Education Center and Mercy Casita, its faith-based food bank.

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vices. Our clients are our uninsured adults residing in Webb County and adjacent colonias. They often take care of others, but have limited resources to care for themselves," Sister Maria Luisa said.

"This is something our primary care patients have been needing for so long and it gives us all great joy to see it come to reality through the efforts of so many. Before the clinic, we were blessed to offer a neighborhood-based promotora program that presented dental hygiene classes. The dental clinic will truly take our efforts to a new level," Sister Maria Luisa noted.

One of the program collaborators is volunteer organizer Dr. Carmen Rathmell, a local dentist in practice for over 25 years.

"Dr. Manuel Gonzalez and I along with members of the Laredo Dental Society have long recognized that there's a need for dental care for underinsured, economically disadvantaged adults who place their families' needs before their own -- often resulting in their own compromised dental health. We decided we wanted to do something about it," Dr. Rathmell explained.

The group approached Mercy Ministries of Laredo, a non-profit outreach ministry dedicated to a variety of community needs led by the Sisters of Mercy. The Sisters were eager to convert some available space at their South Laredo clinic and add dental services for their large and growing client base. And they had some strong grant opportunities they were ready to explore.

"The site seemed destined to serve the community's needs," said Dr. Manuel Gonzalez, fellow organizer who also helped to secure the clinic's radiology permit.

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"Mercy's south Laredo site was perfect!" echoed Dr. Rathmell. "In the meantime, MML talked to local dentists about volunteering services. One retiring dentist, Dr. Carlos Vela,



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offered to transfer his existing equipment from his practice. Dr. Jae Ho Chun kindly offered an x-ray machine. Kevin Ward of Patterson Dental in San Antonio has been a real champion in moving and installing the equipment," Gonzalez noted.

"Most importantly, the Sisters were able to secure a special grant from Methodist Health Care Ministries of San Antonio for \$75,000 to fund additional equipment purchases. It was a windfall!" Gonzalez recalled.

A generous four-year gift of \$50,000 for dental equipment was provided by the A. R. "Tony" and Maria J. Sanchez Family Foundation," said Gloria Canseco, MML Development Director. "Fellow Laredoan and president of University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, Francisco Cigarroa, also helped us to identify collaborative educational opportunities for UTHSC dental students through Dr. Elaine Neenan there," she continued.

And now, there's something to smile about in South Laredo.

"We now have a state-of-the-art facility. We have three operatory rooms, new chairs, a gorgeous X-ray machine and digital, networked computers," Rathmell explained.

"We'll start small, limiting services to Mercy's current client population, expanding as we add additional volunteer dentists who are interested in helping us. Mercy Ministries of Laredo has a large client base and I think they'll keep us pretty busy," she noted.

Rathmell said the primary focus of the new clinic will be its most important: education.

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"With this clinic we have the potential to change our community's dental IQ. We will focus on helping our adult clients to understand, practice and model good dental health



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for their families. I think the potential we have will be tremendous," she affirmed, "...we won't just be impacting individual patients, we'll be impacting our entire community. And THAT's something to smile about," she beamed.

Mercy Ministries of Laredo (MML) is a non-profit outreach ministry dedicated to a variety of community needs. Inspired and led by the Sisters of Mercy, its mission includes 14 primary healthcare, healthcare education and social service offerings for Laredo and surrounding rural communities. Its ministries address the needs of all people, with special concern for the poor, marginal, women and children.

In addition to the new dental clinic program, among its most visible programs are Casa Misericordia, a domestic violence shelter, and Mercy Casita, a food distribution center.

Through collaboration and visionary philanthropic partnership, it works to share its mission and values daily and seeks partnerships with all who can assist.

For more information, please contact Sister Maria Luisa Vera at MML at 718-6810, visit offices at 2500 Zacatecas, email mlvera@mercy.net or click on www.mercylaredo.com

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