

### Miracle in Villanueva

The Gospel today emphasizes the inner conviction that physical contact accompanied by faith in Jesus' saving power could end in a cure.

The woman afflicted with hemorrhages is desperate for a miracle. She had suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had seen many doctors and spent all that she had, but the condition grew worse until she touched Jesus' clothes. Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. Her faith in Jesus not only cured her, but also saved her.



Let me tell you a brief story that goes hand by hand with the Gospel reading. I want all of you to look at this picture. This picture was taken in one of the communities in Villanueva, Nicaragua. The guy in the light blue shirt is Ramiro, one of the health promoters from our sister community in Villanueva.

Let me first explain briefly what a health promoter is. The health promoter is a volunteer position. They have the responsibility to know what is going on in their small communities: how many children there are, how many women are pregnant, how many people have chronic diseases, among other responsibilities. Health promoters are responsible for communicating with the main town, Villanueva, and for taking immediate action in case of an emergency. Most have minimal or no academic education, but they go through continuous training offered by the Community Network of Volunteers, which is the program that all of you support financially and through your prayers. This program is lead by four people: Candida, Maria Antonia, Lucas, and Juanita.

Now let's go back to the picture. A pregnant woman in Ramiro's community had intense labor pains and was bleeding. The clinic in the town of Villanueva was 16 miles away and no one in this small community had a car. Following his training protocol, Ramiro called the doctor in the town of Villanueva to inform her of the situation. As the ambulance was not available at that time (and yes, they only have one ambulance in the town), Ramiro knew he needed to mobilize the members of his community to respond. He crafted a makeshift stretcher of three limbs and a hammock and assembled a team of ten other men to carry the woman towards Villanueva until the ambulance could meet them. You can see that they are carrying her and one of the men is holding the IV bag to keep her hydrated during the journey under the hot weather.

Can you put yourself in the place of this pregnant woman and Ramiro? I am sure she was terrified and tired, but she had faith that Ramiro was doing the right thing and that God was going to do a miracle. I am also pretty sure that Ramiro was nervous, but his training, his faith in God, and his commitment to his community gave him the strength to overcome the challenge in front of him. The woman got to Villanueva, and both, the mother and baby, are doing well.

It is because of competent, committed health promoters such as Ramiro, and the community network of volunteers, that has been developed in our Sister Community, that not a single woman in the Villanueva region has died in childbirth in over 20 years!

Our sister community in Villanueva supports all the health promoters. But how? Well, thanks to the commitment of St. Lucy's Church and All Saints Church, we send \$12,000 a year, we actually provide their entire budget. This money helps them to basically run the program of health promoters. For example, they offer once a month trainings with lunch and transportation provided for current and new health promoters, provide food and medicines if any of the health promoters or anyone in their immediate family get sick, provide them with basic books and educational materials, maintain the center where they host the trainings (electricity, water, rent, educational material, equipment such as a computer and a copier), help support the house where the pregnant women from all the communities in Villanueva stay until they give birth (they are usually there for three or four weeks), pay their bookkeeper, transport midwives in case the pregnant woman requests one, buy incentives for the health promoters, such as: birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day, they give them food baskets at the end of the year for Christmas, and if the health promoter dies they offer a small stipend to the immediate family to cover funeral costs. They recently bought food for all the health promoters and their families because of the shortages anticipated as a result of the tense political situation that Nicaragua is going through.

Our churches also travel every other year to Nicaragua. Our next trip is in 2019. This trip is necessary to continue that close relationship with our sister community. Sometimes it is easier just to send money and not to get out of our comfort zone, but we are not looking for what is easier because Jesus never did. We are looking to build bridges not walls and walk their walk with them and **"walk our talk"** by being there present, physically, in their communities. That is our call. As Pope Francis said when he visited Mexico: "people should embrace a spirit of fraternity to avoid forces that try to separate us, making a divided and fractious family, a divided and fractious society". Our sister community looks forward to our trip every other year. During these trips they proudly show us their accomplishments and their challenges. It's just a beautiful opportunity to show one of our principles of Catholic Social Teaching, solidarity. We

are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our sisters' and brothers' keepers, wherever they may be.

How do we raise the money? We usually get our \$6,000 by doing three main activities: the wreath sale, Peg's craft sale (which takes place in late fall, but we have few samples of her work in the back of church today), and today's second collection. You all have envelopes around the pews, so feel free to use these envelopes today, or if you wish, you can take them home, bring them next weekend and put them in the collection basket. I want to thank you all for your continued support and generous gifts for our sisters and brothers in Nicaragua.

I'm going to finish today with a sentence from our second reading: "your surplus at the present time should supply their needs, so that their surplus may also supply your needs, that there may be equality".

And now, enjoy some of the pictures we took on our last trip in 2017.

Thank you!