

All Saints Mission in Nicaragua

While I trust most of you know me as Meg – a member of the Parish Staff – today I am here as “Margarita,” representing our Nicaragua Mission Team and it is truly my privilege to share with you a little bit about the Mission Trip to Nicaragua back in February.

I was part of a team of parishioners – representing the All Saint’s, St. Lucy’s and the former St. Andrew’s Parishes – who made the trip to visit our sisters and brothers in Villanueva. Others from All Saints who made the journey were Dale (“Julia”) Avers and Charles (“Carlos”) Clinton



Our Mission Team

While we’ve been eager since we returned, to report to you and to share our experiences, fitting a time into our always vibrant and changing schedule here at All Saints, has been a challenge. However, when we finally set this date and I first read our Scriptures for the weekend it was clear to me – as it always is eventually – that the Spirit ***IS*** running the show...and she is indeed wise! Both the 1st reading, from the Book of Kings, and our Gospel, focus on situations of affliction represented by the heartbreaking stories of dying children and their grieving mothers, AND: of God’s direct intervention to reverse the tragedy. God sends a prophet, a representative – Elijah in the Old Testament and God’s own Son, Jesus, in the New – to visit the women and to bring *life*! Our 2nd reading reminds us – at least it reminds me, as St. Paul so often does – that God’s way of intervening involves calling *us* (even the *least likely* among us!) “to reveal God’s Own” and “to spread Christ” throughout the world.”

Here at All Saints we talk about this Mission as being “the hands, the feet, ...the compassion of Christ” to build the Kingdom of God locally and globally. (I did notice that Paul was inspired to go off on Mission, before he spent any time visiting the hierarchy and getting involved in the matters of the local church!)

So here we are in the year 2013 as All Saints Parish – “*Todos Sanctos*,” with roots deeply in the former St. Andrew’s Community and in collaboration with the Parish of “Santa Lucia” – as St. Paul says: “called by grace, choosing to reveal God’s own... that we might spread Christ throughout the world,” in a very direct way by supporting the Network of Brigadistas (Health Care Workers) and Parteras (Midwives) in Villanueva, Nicaragua – a program specifically focused on reducing maternal deaths, enhancing healthy births and supporting healthy children! [See what I mean about the Spirit choosing the right weekend...?!]

Let me say just a little about the history. The program was started in 1986 by the Maryknoll Sisters and continued by Frank Woolever (who many of us knew and loved dearly as a prophet among us), supported by the St. Andrew’s Community. More recently, as perhaps one of the most positive outcomes of parish reconfiguration, the program has now been adopted by St. Lucy’s and All Saints Parishes.



Program Logo



Frank Woolever

Now, just a bit of context: The country of Nicaragua is one of the poorest in the Western Hemisphere



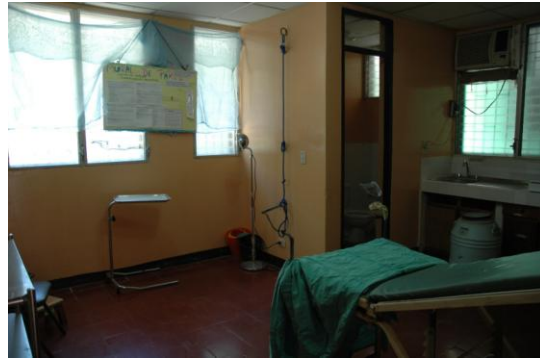
Close to half (43%) of the people in Nicaragua live in rural areas. 2 out of 3 (68%) struggle to survive on little more than one US dollar (\$1.) a day.

Access to health care is a core challenge.

What the Program we support does – is train and equip over 250 volunteer health care workers and mid-wives who connect with women in rural communities, provide prenatal care, ensure that they are able to travel to the hospital before they go into labor so that they and their infants do not die from preventable causes, and then to follow-up with regular health-care for moms & kids..



Maternity Center



Hospital Labor & Delivery Room

In addition to direct maternal and neo-natal services, health care provided by the network includes providing vaccinations, adolescent health care and education, nutrition counseling, safe drinking water and emergency medical care.



Kip Hargrave consulting with a *brigadista* about one of the wells the program has helped fund

And here's the real "good news;" Since the program began – not a single mother has died in childbirth! It occurred to me while there, that practically every young person and child we met was empirical evidence of how effective the program is! And, having personally witnessed the program: met the women who voluntarily run the program (all of who do this in addition to having full-time jobs and families), met the all volunteer corps. of *brigadistas* and *parteras*, held and played with their children, I know that all on our Mission trip can testify that God has surely visited this corner of Nicaragua!



So: this is where all the wonderful supplies and funds you so generously donated have gone and are going.



While in Villanueva, our time in addition to delivering the supplies was spent connecting and sharing with our sisters & brothers, learning about their lives, their faith and how much we share in common;



witnessing the work of the program: visiting the health out-posts. Dale ("Julia") – a Physical Therapist by Profession – went on home visits and "laid hands" (gave treatment) to a numbers of elderly folks out in rural areas and shared therapy techniques with the Program Directors;

introducing our young folks to a new culture: several big-time pick-up soccer and basket ball games took place in the town square with equipment donated by our communities;



and planning for ongoing collaboration.



Having embraced this program as part of the global dimension of our Parish Mission, our on-going commitment is to

- strengthen and grow the bonds between our communities;
- provide regular, stable financial support,
- send medical supplies on a regular basis & help to acquire additional needed equipment

In the near future, we will be hosting a gathering at which members of our extended team will share in a more detailed manner about our experiences, answer your questions, and together brainstorm about ways in which you may want to become involved. A number of ways to be involved include:

- helping to incorporate more faith communities into our mission team;
- continuing to offer support through prayer, communications, donations & fund-raising activities;
- perhaps, by visiting Villanueva & bearing witness to the good work being done; and by working together with our extended community to find ideas & resources to help the Program and to assure our brothers and sisters there of our continuing care and concern as – together – we work to build the kin-dom of God on this earth.

In closing let me share with you several tokens of gratitude sent – with most sincere love – to you by our friends, our sisters and brothers, in Villanueva.

1st: A mixture made from local grain – corn, I believe – that, when dissolved becomes a drink called “Pinolillo.” While the local folk were quite fond of the concoction (in fact: one of the brigadistas rode his horse for three hours to bring us this homemade gift – leaving his rural home well before dawn to get to us before we had to leave for the airport), we *gringos* were less taken with it (I heard at least one comparison to Metamucil...) – though I was also told it improves significantly when a measure of alcohol is added to the mix! We’ll make sure you can taste this when we gather together!

2nd: A painting of the local Catholic Church – significantly, named, as is our Cathedral here, in honor of the Immaculate Conception. We had the privilege of attending Mass here while in Villanueva, where our Kip Hargrave was invited to proclaim the Psalm during the Liturgy. This painting was especially “commissioned” for us from a sort of street artist, who created it, along with as a matching one for St. Lucy’s... over night!

Today a number of members of the Mission Team will be available after Mass if you’d like to hear more about the trip and talk about how you might get involved.

In closing, let me say: for all the members of our Mission Team and for all our sisters and brothers in Villanueva: *Muchas gracias y que Dios los bendiga*. Thank you very much and may God bless you!



Hasta Luego!