Feast of the Holy Trinity Kip Hargrave

June 14 & 15, 2014 All Saints Church, Syr., NY

**Villanueva Report**

Man, was it hot. But, boy, did we like what we saw.

On April 21, four of us from St. Lucy's and All Saints parishes visited our Sister Community of

Villanueva, Nicaragua. Geri Hall, a Nurse Practitioner from Lucy's, Charles Clinton and Kip Hargrave

from the project Steering Committee and Charles' daughter, Sophie were sent by the Steering

Committee to assess the *Brigadista* program and to begin the planning for a much bigger group visit in early 2015.

The four of us spent three days meeting with the *Directiva* which is the group that coordinates the

health provider program and traveling the highways and byways to see the project up close. The

*Directiva* is made up of Candida, Maria Antonia, Lucas and Jaunita, all people I wish you could meet.

They are the most committed and gracious people.

Let me reiterate how the project works and what our financial assistance is used for. Villanueva is a

rural town of about 15,000 people. It is surrounded by some 35 communities of between 5-150

people each. The communities are very poor, with very little medical, educational, social services or

transportation infastructure. In the early 1990's two Maryknoll Sisters began to train some of the

villagers so that they could help in their home communities. The Sisters came to St. Andrews Parish looking for financial assistance to build a small facility to be used in the training process. Almost 20 years later, and now as St. Lucy's and All Saints, we are still helping.

There are now almost 150 volunteer health promoters (*Brigadistas*) who provide excellent health

services to their communities. These volunteers work in close connection with the Nicaraguan

Ministry of Health (MINSA) through its clinic in the town. Anything the volunteer *Brigadistas* can't

handle, they send to the clinic. If the clinic can't handle the medical problem, they send the patient to

the hospital in the bigger city down the road.

It is a good system but it still needs some grease to keep it working well. That is where you and I come in. The *Brigadistas* need to attend monthly trainings. They receive no stipends, not even

transportation costs, but the *Directiva* does give them some breakfast and lunch. They are also given a basket of food and surprises at Christmas. We would also like to see that they were given educational materials as more of the Brigadistas learn how to read. There is also the expense of the *Casa Materna* (House for Mothers) which provides a place for expectant mothers to stay in the town before they give birth. The *Casa* is a simple place with a dorm for five women and two small bedrooms. It also has a small kitchen and a patio where the women can sit and eat. The *Casa* is across the street from the Clinic and has helped enormously in the prevention of both child and maternal deaths. Our contributions pay for all of the *Brigadista* program and part of the expenses at the *Casa Materna*.

The first day we spent with the *Directiva* was at the *Casa*. At the last visit by a team from Syracuse in

February 2013, the House was barely functioning. There wasn't enough money to keep it stocked with food and the *Directiva* felt it was too much to ask the women to bring their own (stays are from 2-14 days). At that time, we asked the *Directiva* to use $150/month of our money to improve the situation.

We found the *Casa* functioning much better this time. But we had some interesting conversations with

the women staying there. They had nothing to do but sit and wait. They were bored. These women are used to working long days. The women felt that they could be helped with a functioning television, a small library, some games and, most importantly, a nurse who could both monitor their health and

coordinate their activity. They also need sheets, pillows, blankets, silverware, a refrigerator and a new

stove and some help to clean and paint the inside.

One of the *Directiva*, Maria Antonia sits on the Board of Directors of the *Casa* and is the coordinator in her spare time. She liked all of our ideas but does not want to jeopardize our relationship with the

training of the *Brigadistas* by asking us to take on the new responsibility. She would prefer that we

find another institution, group or parish to take on this project. She will be sending us an estimate of

what it might cost/year, but doesn't think it will be over $5,000. Do you have any suggestions of

groups we could contact?

The next day we spent in the countryside (the *campo*) visiting several of the communities. Geri who is

a Nurse Practitioner at UHCC also has worked in the rural areas of Sudan and Peru. She did an

excellent job of both supporting the Brigadistas and finding out how much they knew about western

medicine. Speaking for her, I can say that she was very impressed. Geri wanted to know what diseases they were seeing, how well they understood how to treat them, and whether the people in their villages respected them as medical practitioners. She liked the answers she got.

Most of the *Brigadistas* work out of their own houses but some are seeing so many people that they

need a facility in their village. They asked if we could help them build some small houses in the larger

villages with a room for seeing patients and another for keeping people who were sick. We will look

into that.

The *Directiva* would also like help purchasing an Ultra Sound machine for the clinic in Villanueva.

Most expecting mothers do not receive ultra sounds unless there is a problem and they are taken to

Chinandega. Saving a woman a day or two travel and having a machine to do ultra sounds on most of the women seems like a good idea. We would have to see if the government could send the radiologist from Chinandega to Villanueva on a regular basis. We are looking into the prices for such machines now.

The last day was spent talking about our next trip. It will probably include some young people and we

wanted to talk about possible projects for them. There is plenty of painting and cleaning to do but we

wanted our kids to be able to interact with their kids. We talked about having a group of high school

students from Villanueva work with us. Antonia suggested that it might be a better idea to have our

youth work with a group of young people from the *campo* communities. This is where the project

takes place. They are the people who best understand the Sister Community relationship that we have.

Finally, we had hoped to meet with people from a Baptist project called Amos who may be able to

help us in the future. They are a much bigger project than ours but work in the training of Brigadistas

much like we do. Maria Antonia and Candida know them very well and respect their expertise. They

also staff a house in Managua that we may be able to use in the future. Now we have to stay in a motel for two nights on each trip. It is expensive.

If you would like to get involved in the next trip or would like to help us raise money and awareness,

please get in touch with Ana Fernandez at humacoa78@gmail.com. Put Villanueva Trip in the memo

line.