



Development: Another Name for Peace

In fifteen years of grassroots community development work in Latin America, we have seen almost everything. We have been there to experience the human tragedy of civil war and banditry in the mountains as well as the pain of natural disasters in hurricanes, earthquakes, and tidal waves; perhaps more than enough for any one lifetime. But another year is coming to an end with the realization that each new year will bring a new challenge. The task is to stay relevant to our original goal of fostering peace and development

through planned projects that cooperate with the authentic hopes and aspirations of real people in need. It is indeed a privilege to share their pain and to feel the triumph of the human spirit over the forces of despair and depravation.

Poverty of body and mind can smother the creative spirit that dwells in each human person. The senselessness of it all can be overcome by a sensitivity like the tide that embraces the shore. We are confident that the spark of hope and the flicker of light will ignite a surge of solidarity and common decency. We

have seen it happen in many quiet but powerful ways. The silent explosion of good will and grace envelops the emptiness to dispel the despair. Sometimes a great loss is an emptiness that reacts like a lightening rod to move the flow of favor that opens the door to great expectations of something more.

During the past two years, the Alliance has been working to integrate a new bicultural thrust into its development programs in Nicaragua. This approach utilizes the high skills and

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Brother Ed with Sr. Theresa and orphans



Dr. Ramona comforts sick child



Community Development Continues

The Alliance for Communities in Action has been working with the people of Rivas for the past eight years on a wide range of programs. At the outset, our help consisted in shipping containers of medical supplies and used clothing. Subsequent shipments included basic educational supplies, tools, and recreation and office equipment.

Our participation in the distribution of these materials enabled us to develop working relationships with grassroots and community representatives and

their organizations. This helped us to better understand the people's problems and needs.

We learned that there were three basic needs: potable water to outlying areas, roof repairs to existing sub-standard housing, and facilities for pre-school children's feeding programs. The Alliance, over a period of three years, provided the tubing required to extend the city's water mains to five adjacent communities; the local people performed the work. Water is no longer

a problem.

The demands for roof repairs and feeding facilities is more extensive and on-going. Funds from the Alliance and solidarity groups in Germany have been provided to local self-help groups organized to address these needs. To date, 150 roofs have been completed.

The feeding program needs a one-room facility, large enough to serve as a classroom and eating area. Funds for this program are coming from the sale of

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Window to Another World

This past summer we had a new addition to our volunteer staff, Br. Edward J. Lis, OSA. Ed is an Augustinian brother and fourth-year ministry student at the Washington Theological Union in D.C. A Philadelphia native, Ed had previously worked in college teaching and administration at Villanova University, where he met the Augustinians. He recently completed a pastoral internship experience with the Alliance by working for ten weeks in Nicaragua, dividing his time between activities in the sister parish and CENFAMA. Upon his return, he has chosen to continue working with the Alliance in various administrative capacities, and to promote the work of the Alliance. He will be returning to Nicaragua in late December as a leader for a group of Villanova undergraduate students whom he helped to recruit as a work brigade to construct additional classrooms at CENFAMA. Following are his reflections about his summer experience in Nicaragua.

There is a wonderful line from the movie *The Sound of Music* in which Julie Andrews is told by her superior in the convent that "Whenever God shuts a door, he opens a window." This certainly applies to my experience of going to work in Nicaragua for my pastoral internship. After four years of formation and theological study, I felt a real desire to work in a developing country in Latin America. My primary motive was to prepare myself to work with the growing Hispanic community in the U.S. Church. I had planned to go to work in our missions in Peru, but at the last minute that plan fell through, and I needed to find another option. Within two weeks I discovered the Alliance and literally stumbled upon the opportunity to work in Nicaragua. It was nothing short of a life-changing experience, and thus really was a window that God opened to a new world of possibilities for ministry and service.

When I arrived in Nicaragua, I had no idea what I would find in the barrio of Monseñor Lezcano, where the sister parish of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús is located. I had a number of things to learn rather quickly. For instance, the parish is considered lower middle class, but by our standards the vast majority of the parishioners are really quite poor. Most do not have jobs, or are underemployed. Many houses have no

adequate protection from the elements, and some streets are not paved. The poorest area, called Edgar Lang, is where the health post is located, and houses there are little more than huts. Most of this constituted the worst poverty I had ever seen, and I would have expected to find a great deal of despair and hopelessness among these people given their circumstances. To the contrary, I encountered a sense of community and readiness among the people to serve and help one another that was remarkable.

I was particularly interested in working with the youth of the parish. What I discovered was indeed astonishing. Not

only was there active participation of the youth, but the very life-blood of the parish seems to be their young people. I was especially impressed by the young people's role in contributing to vibrant and enthusiastic worship through their choral group. Through weekly practices and informal social gatherings during which they play, sing, and even compose their own music, these committed teens are prepared to energize the Sunday afternoon liturgy. The gift of their time is a great service to the community, and their genuine joy in being together and offering their talents is a powerful testimony to the life of the Spirit active among them.

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Leadership and music workshops at CENFAMA



Legal Aid Nicaraguan Style

At a time when legal assistance programs for the poor are under siege in the United States, it is surprising to find a successful model in the second poorest country in the hemisphere where over two-thirds of the working population is unemployed. Yet the Legal Clinic of the Casa de la Mujer in Rivas, Nicaragua has stretched limited funds to provide critical legal services to over 600 needy clients in 1995.

The Legal Clinic is located inside a renovated theater with its waiting room beside what used to be the stage. The drama that unfolds in the small office of attorney Marlon Jose Gazo, however, is pure reality. Mr. Gazo, who frequently labors without remuneration due to the poverty of his clients, personally assisted 637 such clients in 1995.

The economic crisis is reflected in the types of problems that are handled by the Legal Clinic, which serves as the lawyer of last resort in Rivas. Nearly 72 percent of the clients had domestic problems. Almost 47 percent of the clients were seeking child support.

Of those cases, the Legal Clinic was able to secure child support for 127 families, benefiting 194 children. In addition, over 15 percent of the cases involved domestic violence. These types of cases are similar to what legal aid offices throughout the United States experience. Mr. Gazo also found the time to attend to many routine matters that are nonetheless necessary even in

Nicaragua, such as correcting a birth certificate and preparing a power of attorney. Reflecting the importance of agriculture and livestock in Rivas, which lies in a fertile area 120 kilometers south of Managua and 30 kilometers north of the Costa Rican border, Mr. Gazo even handled three cases of cattle rustling.

To sustain itself, the Legal Clinic offers a modest fee schedule: a consultation for less than \$1.25; \$18.00 to file a petition for child support; and \$37.00 for a divorce. The fees can be paid in installments and in some cases are waived, depending on the financial means of the client. Mr. Gazo emphasized that even a nominal fee is important so that the client does not feel compromised by a

free handout. Small donations from the Alliance for Communities in Action have helped defray some of the overhead costs for the Legal Clinic.

A former deadbeat dad showed up at the Legal Clinic early one morning with freshly picked mangos and farm fresh eggs to honor his child support obligation to one of Mr. Gazo's clients. This dramatizes how perseverance and resourcefulness have enabled many Nicaraguans to survive the economic nightmare of the 1990's. Perhaps a better appreciation of how legal assistance programs for the poor can evoke these qualities, the United States Congress would reconsider its plans to cut such programs here. □

Attorney Gazo with client



Nicaraguan Parish Video Project

Given the challenge for most people of experiencing Nicaragua firsthand, the Alliance has undertaken a video project that could assist others to appreciate the spirit and gifts of the people who live in this wonderful but very needy country. Working with a Managua-based video production team, the Alliance went to a parish in Managua, Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, with the intent of capturing on film the patterns of community life present via church and school activities. The parishioners were sincerely honored to be the object of attention, and the school children clearly felt proud and special in being asked to share about the history and culture of their country, especially through folk songs and dances.

Another video shoot included a trip to the Center for Children and the Family, CENFAMA, in Veracruz during one of our day-long music seminars with children from the parish. The enthusiasm of the children in discovering and expressing their native creativity and vision is something precious to behold. How exciting it is to think that many others will have an opportunity to witness the wonderful dynamics present in these seminars.

The goal of the video is to give a greater understanding of other cultural expressions of faith, and to present the invitation to more faith communities to become involved in fraternal relationships with communities like Sagrado

Corazón de Jesús. To that end, the video includes an interview with the archbishop of Managua, Cardinal Obando y Bravo, in which he warmly invites such interaction and relationship between the parishes of his country and those of the United States. When completed, there are plans to distribute copies to those who might have interest in presenting this possibility to their parishes, as well as to elicit interest from diocesan peace and justice offices. We also hope to gain some additional funding to do a broadcast quality final edition of the video that could be viewed over religiously-oriented cable channels. □

A Song Springs from the Hearts of Children

As we gathered early Saturday morning in the school play area, the energy and anticipation were already so tangible you could practically scoop it up with your hands. The faces of 15 children reflected an excitement that was truly contagious, as they readied themselves for a trip out of the stuffy confines of Managua's crowded barrios to a place they had never seen before, but had heard from some of their classmates was like a little paradise. Our destination that day was CENFAMA, our Center in Veracruz, which truly appears like a tropical paradise to city dwelling children not accustomed to the beautiful plants and flowers and fresh air of this rural village, located some 15 kilometers south of Managua.

It was a special pleasure to have three of the Dominican sisters who teach at the school join us for the day, and the children took great delight in having their principal, Sr. Zoraida, join them in the back of the pickup truck for the sometimes bumpy, fun-filled ride out of the city and down the highway to Veracruz. Their faces in the rearview mirror spoke volumes as we drew closer to the rural enclave, with eyes opened wide to expansive fields, cows and horses, and the large volcano in Masaya towering above the landscape. By the

time we drove through the streets of the small town of Veracruz and arrived at the Center, the children were singing songs so vibrantly that one couldn't be sure who was going to give the music workshop, them or us!

The workshop began with a beautiful time of prayer together, in which I had the opportunity to use my limited but growing capacity with Spanish. After inviting all present to give thanks to the Lord for this day together, I asked the children to remember in their prayers Edward Coogan, the recently deceased brother-in-law of Florence Fiscella. The Fiscella family is a long-time friend of the Alliance who had helped us establish our presence in Nicaragua. What a response came forth from the children, as one after another gave thanks for the day and this beautiful place, and then offered caring prayers for "Señor Eduardo Coogan y su familia." His name remained on the board for the day, and I am sure in their thoughts as well.

Once again, José Palacios was our workshop leader, and his warm and engaging style immediately drew forth the smiles, laughter and free participation of the children. An accomplished musician and dedicated educator with much leadership development experience, his goal in these workshops is to help

children to identify their inner strength and grow in their self-esteem through various exercises that challenge the young people's minds and hearts. The medium of expression is music, and as José guides these young ones through various activities, the fun is complemented by important lessons of respect for self and others, teamwork, gratitude for all God's gifts seen in and around us. By the end of the day, the children have a song of their very own, composed together as a means of creative self-expression and shared feelings. This group's song was appropriately entitled "Gracias Señor!"

Of course, there was another reason that the children enjoyed the day so much: the opportunity to splash and swim in the wading pool amidst beautiful trees and flowering plants. The squeals of delight and incredible smiles that permeated the grounds of the Center are truly a blessing to behold. As the cameraman of a video crew that was present at our previous workshop in July said while witnessing the pool time: "If we adults could only learn to once again take such great joy in such simple pleasure, our lives would be so much the better for it." We can learn much from the children. □

*Song composed by the children
at CENFAMA music workshop*

"Gracias Señor"

Thank you Lord, for nature
Thank you Lord, for giving us a roof and bread
Thank you Lord, for giving us life
Thank you Lord, for the air we breathe!

Thank you Lord, for the sun and the moon
Thank you Lord, for the sky and the earth
Thank you Lord, thank you Lord,
for the whole universe
Signs of the love that you have given us.

José enjoys teaching music at CENFAMA





Eager to participate and learn at CENFAMA



Enjoying the pool at CENFAMA

Thank you for helping
us challenge young
people's minds and hearts
to grow in self-esteem

Arriving at CENFAMA with joy and anticipation



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competent services of volunteer students, lay missionaries, and professionals. Frequently we receive inquiry from young and old for information about job and placement opportunities in our community development projects. Many university graduates seek work in underdeveloped countries to get the practical experience to learn language and organizational skills in another cultural setting. The growth of fundamental human organization for self-improvement and a better quality of community and family life is essential for any society to alleviate poverty.

To date, we have placed four medical students from Georgetown University Medical Center in a regional hospital setting for an internship of one month. Both U.S. and Nicaraguan students were exposed to a challenging experience that was mutually beneficial. One fourth year medical student reported that the vision for her life and the expectations for her professional career had been profoundly influenced. A seminarian from the

Washington Theological Union did a ten-week pastoral internship in a sister parish setting. He experienced a fervent faith among the youth, who had important roles in parish activities such as service to the needy, liturgy, and catechesis.

Likewise, a core of dedicated adults live out their faith commitment in practical daily activities in the church and in the neighborhoods. Brother Ed Lis said his sense of mission and the social/pastoral service to the poor was deeply enriched. In December, he will lead a work team from Villanova University to Nicaragua to construct the foundation for two new classrooms at the Center for Children and the Family, CENFAMA, near Veracruz. The completed classrooms will let CENFAMA increase its services to children and parents. This will include seminars for personal and family education, individual skills and spiritual formation.

Our program plan for the next two years is to increase the participation of volunteers in expanded program

activities at CENFAMA and to facilitate placements of medical students and lay ministers in appropriate institutional settings. We have made arrangements with the Dean of two medical schools and the Ministry of Health for two prominent doctors to make speaking engagements for the medical and academic professions in Nicaragua. Dr. Edmund Pellegrino will address medical and bioethic topics and Dr. Joseph Bellanti will address topics of special interest in allergy, asthma and immunology.

As the program activities are expanded to provide more specialized services, the self-management and group performance by the participants will improve their leadership abilities and personal skills. I hope you will be interested in following the progress at CENFAMA and support its activities. I will keep you informed with progress reports by the children of how their learning is making their life much better. They need your moral and financial support. Thank you for whatever you can do. □

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used bicycles. Where the need exists, materials are purchased for the parents of the children who then work together for the construction of the unit. Two years ago we began shipping used bicycles to Rivas in conjunction with the organization Pedals for Progress. So far over 2000 have been shipped; they are in great demand and sell for about \$35 each.

For the past year we have been concentrating some of our funding to support the programs of the local branch of the national women's organization that was formed in 1979 for the purpose of addressing the problems of women.

The members are exceptionally hard-working in their dedication and commitment to improving women's lives. The

organization has a solidarity relationship with cities in Germany and Holland, which for several years provided funds to construct and equip facilities for medical services and vocational activities that include: a Health and Medical Facility which functions as a community HMO that provides services of specialists in pediatrics, gynecology, orthopedics and ophthalmology at a nominal fee. There is also a well-equipped operating room for minor surgery. Vocational and Educational classes are offered in typing, beauty culture, dressmaking, bookkeeping, computers (equipment recently provided by Germany) and English. Rural Health workshops are given by trained health promoters in various fields of family planning, primary health care, teen pregnancy, sexuality and AIDS. Community Outreach - The Rivas

Association has provided some financial and organizational assistance to the adjoining cities of Tola and San Jorge. The women of Tola have completed construction of their building and have begun classes in sewing. In San Jorge, the women have just begun construction on land given them by the municipality.

Funds from the European communities are designated for the construction of facilities and equipment only, but not for operational expenses. The Women's Association derives its revenue from the modest fees received from the vocational programs and medical services it provides. This puts a limit on the potential for community outreach programs and the ability to assist in the formation and growth of other centers. The Alliance will continue to support these community services. □

Drill Rig Project for Santa Cruz Nears Completion

AguaPura, the Water Institute of the Alliance, has secured a grant from the International Foundation and a commitment from Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to ship a cable tool rig to PRODEAS, the water well-drilling school in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. The grant application, made a year ago, captured the attention of the Foundation whose grants chairman visited PRODEAS last December. He was so impressed with the activities of the school that he recommended immediate approval of the grant. CRS, who has on-going projects with PRODEAS, agreed to ship the rig at CRS expense. The grant money will pay for out-of-pocket expenses for reconditioning and preparing the rig for shipment. Bill Skinner of Vineland, NJ, the driller who donated the rig, is providing the labor.

At a recent meeting of the New Jersey Ground Water Association, our need for a truck was discussed and an offer of a truck was immediately forthcoming. The resourcefulness of this group has been a great source of inspiration. Jim and Evelyn Dette visited the donor, Mike Assante, at his yard and inspected the truck. It is more than adequate for carrying the cable tool rig.

With this donation Evelyn Dette says they hope to have the rig in Santa Cruz by the end of the year. AguaPura is looking for a replacement, or preferably a larger rig to replace PRODEAS' inoperable rotary rig.

AguaPura has recently been contacted by James Harness, a former Maryknoll brother, who served many years in Bolivia. He has developed the Harness Human Powered Water Well

Drilling Rig (Harness Rig). It looks very promising for use by PRODEAS, to enhance their ability to drill smaller family wells. Harness hopes to demonstrate the equipment in the North Jersey area in the near future. Jim and Evelyn Dette are looking forward to evaluating its applicability firsthand and exchanging ideas with Harness. A video will be made to send to PRODEAS for their comments. □

Donated truck awaiting shipment to Bolivia



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Perhaps the most inspiring experience I had during my visit has been the time spent with the youth group at their Sunday morning meetings, which last for two hours. Led by Mercedes and Demaris, two young women from the group, the meetings consist of prayer, some ice-breaker games, and always a significant time of faith sharing. It is striking to observe in these meetings the depth of self-disclosure that occurs and the necessary level of trust and caring that such openness requires. For example, recently the group went through a process of constructing "a tree of life" in which these young people both challenged one another with the truth of their faults and "growing edges" and

encouraged one another with the identification of their gifts. Such freedom of expression and interpersonal care speak loudly of how concretely these young people try to live out Christian community. We could all learn from their example to risk being concretely involved in the life of our brothers and sisters.

I could share many more experiences about those I met during my visit, but I will limit myself to just one, Lucia, who provided me with a place to live during my stay in Managua. This woman of sixty-something had known her share of suffering, but her charity was such that she often gave out of her very sustenance to help others less fortunate. A member

of the parish's social action committee, she was like a magnet to her end of the barrio, having a regular stream of visitors who came for counsel, prayer, or a daily portion of rice and beans. She was a symbol of many others that I met, a clear indication of how special the Nicaraguan people really are. In the midst of great challenges and suffering, they are resilient, faith-filled, and joyous. As such, they deserve not only our prayers and material generosity; they also merit our admiration and imitation. I pray my life and yours may be so simply dedicated to love of God and neighbor. □

Meeting Basic Needs

Every week the women from the neighborhood named Los Torres (The Towers) gather at their community center. The simple masonry building is located in the center of a large urban area of low cost houses and makeshift shacks that many families call home. Our old Toyota bounded precariously over the gouged out and rain washed, dirt streets that channel the tropical torrents to nearby Lake Managua. The area is colorfully devoured with lush tropical growth that gives the illusion of being lost in a bucolic paradise. From the main highway, we followed the high tension lines, tower by tower, until we abruptly dead-ended at a major aqueduct that spewed its stenching effluent into the lake. Quickly retreating, we carefully avoided crying children, barking dogs and roaming farm animals.

Finally we found our way to the community center, a sturdy one-room house, filled with volunteer workers, preparing a meal for hungry children. The women meet there regularly to discuss problems that affect the community, plan activities, and prepare remedial recipes for the sick and elderly.

We were warmly greeted by the women who were busy cleaning and cutting vegetables, herbs and natural medicine ingredients for traditional

remedies and nutritional supplements for the malnourished children.

The community center and its activities are a dynamic example of our self-help development assistance programs. Several years ago we collaborated with a local organization to finance a roof top project for the most needy. Twenty families received loans to install new roofs and support structures for their makeshift shelter homes.

We contributed the coordination and technical assistance while each family provided their own self-help labor. The elderly, widowed and infirm received free labor from a volunteer construction team in the community.

The cost of the project was partially recovered by monthly payments from each family. Although the repayment was far from 100%, the collected funds were sufficient for the organization to purchase, improve, and equip the community center. The long-term development objective was achieved. The quality of family life was greatly improved and the center now managed by the women feeds malnourished children and organizes community health service on a weekly basis for the most needy families. The resourcefulness and dedication of the Mother's Group makes the center a source of hope and survival for many. □

The children look forward to a good meal each day



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The Alliance is a non-profit organization that links groups and individuals for self-help projects in economically disadvantaged communities primarily in Latin America. The Alliance assists these communities by securing funds and appropriate technology for projects in shelter housing, agriculture, potable water, health, cooperatives, and microenterprises.

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