



Be there! Be light!

MISSIONARY LETTER

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United Methodist Church Missionary and Volunteer

*“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”
(Matthew 5:14)*

Dear friends, brothers and sisters:

Greetings from Nicaragua in Central America!

It was the end January 2015 when we got established in Managua, Nicaragua. It is a year! It is a year we started a new adventure to meet a different culture, new people, new challenges and new blessings, this is what we will be sharing this time. We are now serving in the Women and Community Association, an ecumenical social organization in the rural area of Nicaragua.

This newsletter is being prepared for all of you that have supported us with special prayers, birthday's cards, emails, contacts, skype calls, covenant support, offerings but prayers during the transition time and these past year. May God fill your hearts with love as much as you have made us feel closer to His love through each one of you during this journey.

Different culture and new people

Our primary goal this year was to get to know the country, the culture, the social environment, the people and mainly the project we are serving in. The culture, life style is all new to learn for us. Even the language, do they speak a different Spanish here? Well at least to our ears it sounds different and the phrases, slangs and the meaning of some words have become a whole other educational class for us.

This country of over 6 million people, has the majority of habitants living under the basic economic levels and poverty. Transportation access, access to education, potable water and even electricity are services not available for all people and you can still meet illiterate adult people.



Figure 1: Woman Rights Legal Promoters training May 2015

News challenges

The project works with women and youth in the rural area two hours from Managua the capital. Women represents the 51% of the population. Discrimination and mistreatment are the daily challenges for the women, who are seen as inferior to men and as somebody not expected to do more than housekeeping roles and having babies in a context of high gender differences and inequities. Few opportunities to access or improve formal education and difficulties to find a job are the main challenges for the young people.

Even with this panorama, we were able to find in the women and youth very strong people, who don't give up, who find hope and trust in God every day.

News blessings

Even though Nicaragua is diverse and represents a big context to understand and where to learn from, Women and Community has allow us to see parts of the reality of the rural area where they work and serve. This project represent the result of over 20 years of work on how women and youth can get organized against the darkness of the daily life and reality.

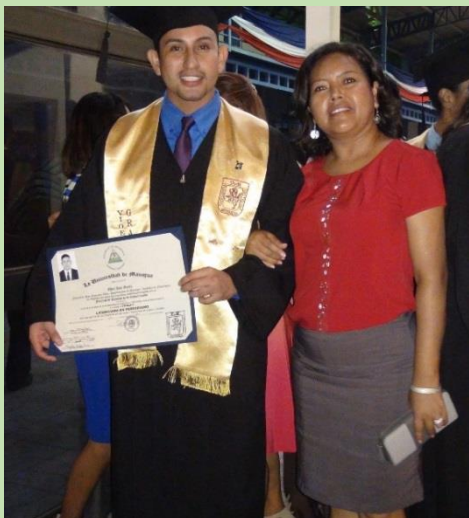
That is how in the middle of the darkness we started to find hope, we found **light**:

We found light in the **strength** of women who wake up as early as 3 am to take the only truck that leaves the community to be able to participate in a workshop, after they had already left food cooked, clothes clean, house clean and all ready for the children to go to school.

We found light in the **solidarity**, when Maria Luisa told us how much it means for her having her own small business to sell food close to the school and being able to get some profits after recovering what she invested. The meaning of being recognized and capable, but also how important is to be also in solidary with other women who also sell food and how this had make her grow in value and good relationships with her clients and community: *"I can cook more to sell but what I will gain from that, the others also have needs like I do, my daughter says don't send the clients there, but I say no God will not want me not to share"* Maria Luisa Espinoza, 50 years old. Revolving Loan program beneficiary.



Figure 2: Maria Luisa Espinoza, Revolving Loan Program, Oct. 2015



We found light in the **happiness** of a smile, the smile of a graduated student along with the smile of their families and friends. *"Graduating at 28 years old with my first degree for many people is very late. Society, friends, family and the same academic institutions hope that at least you graduate at 21 or 22 years old, as normal. But for someone like me, who comes from a poor family, where the head of household is a woman, who had to feed and provide for studies (as much as she could) for 6 children; being able to graduate at 28 year old is just a blessing, an honor, a great success, a dream come true, a conquered goal"* Elder Garcia (Scholarship program student, Journalism)

Figure 3: Elder Garcia, Scholarship Program student, Graduation day August 2015

These are some examples of what we have found in the people this year, people who had touched deeply our hearts and are changing our minds to see life in a different way. We have many more stories to come, we are sure others will encounter us.

Our main objective of this year to get to know Nicaragua and its people still has a long ways to go, but getting closer to understanding the meaning and goals of the work that is being done at Women and Community as a countryside ecumenical organization of women, through its 5 programs is still in process. Currently there are five main programs: Women Human Rights Program, Integrated Women Health Program, Development of Youth Leadership Program, Youth Scholarship Program and the Revolving Loan fund Program.

Since our arrival we were able to accompany in training events, share workshops with program beneficiaries, share workshops and devotional with staff members, train staff in good administrative practices, accompany and train the Executive Coordination team with information, tools and on work experiences on how to make better organizational decisions to strengthen their project and community leadership. The current staff is compounded of 8 brave, courageous, smart and noble women and three brave men. Also part of our work has been to continue the contact and link with friends and supporters of the project as well as promote it and make new project proposals to sustain current programs. As you may imagine we have been quite busy!

Thank you to each one of you for the ongoing support to make this missionary call an incredible journey!



We feel very blessed and challenged in our faith by the experience in this project, this mission call is taking us further than we ever imagined to deepen our faith, our trust in God, our acknowledge of the good news, but specially is challenging us to understanding what *Ministry with the Poor* would mean: to be with them, to learn from them, eat with them, share with them but specially grow with and thanks to them. Be there! Be light!

Thank you for allow us to be here in mission with you,

Be blessed!



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