Hurricane Mitch hit 3½ months ago and life here is still a disaster!

Nueva Vida, the refugee camp one kilometer down the road from us, is growing. The city of Managua may buy another 60 acres adjoining the original 80 acres with the existing 12,000 refugees. The city is planning to relocate another 8,000 people who supposedly live in the “flood zone” of Lake Managua, but who do live within view of the new Presidential House. Gee!

We have worked hard trying to coordinate efforts of NGO’s (non-governmental organizations – like us) so that aid can go the farthest. Through these efforts we learned that US AID was granting materials for relief aid. We got materials from them for 100 roofs and support poles so that 100 families can move out of their black plastic tents. We got funding from a church’s Christmas giving to do another 22!

Organizing, as well as coordination of efforts, is the best way to move from relief work to development work – to make a long-time difference. To do this, we’ve gotten block and neighborhood leaders elected and meeting together to discover needs and determine priorities (we’re looking for community organizer funding). We’ve given out food, organized equitable food distributions, and done health clinics. We’ve seen sicker, more shell-shocked, and hungrier people than in the past, and dirtier wounds because people have no soap.

Seeing the distress and poverty prompted us to take a representative health survey of 20% of the people in the most recently settled area of Nueva Vida. Two volunteer public health workers trained health promoters and took them from house to house. (If you are interested in their findings we’ll send them to you.) They also trained the promoters in weighing, measuring, visually noting, and recording children’s development (61% were malnourished). From these surveys we have also identified eager candidates for our surgical sterilization program.
The health clinics and promoter trainings were held at a new church who were willing to postpone worship so that people could receive health care – wow! In return they asked for help getting Bibles, and a church in North Carolina gladly purchased 100 for them!

We are working with the Ananda Margas, an NGO, to get latrines for each family in the city of Mateare’s resettlement camp of 120 families. (Posts, roofs, and latrines cover our yard.)

People are desperate in these camps, especially Nueva Vida – “New Life” indeed! One of the community leaders came recently with the message that his wife had been kidnapped. Obviously he had an “in” with the gringos. (We think things are working themselves out.)

Our organic sesame, grown by more than 2000 growers, is barely holding its own. The hurricane caused major crop losses. Trying to break even is going to be tough, but all are working as hard as they can to salvage what they can.

The soy crop we planted is hopefully going to break even, if we locate a buyer. Nicaragua doesn’t have a big soy market. The organic honey is doing fair. Some of the beans replanted for in-country markets are maturing. Some plants have dried up, while some beans are just now going into the ground in places where the flooding is finally receding.

Everything sounds dismal, but we do have shimmers of hope here and there. Las Parcelas, a community with whom we have worked for two years, has new help promised from some French sources. Because of our work there, these French are willing to help financially. They may help Las Parcelas get a community well, a passable road, and food.

Mirma, the famous mother of twins, laboring – remember? Well, she labored off and on for another three weeks and birthed a beautiful, healthy boy named Miguel (after Michael). Mother and child look quite content nursing.

Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, brought a group of 17 down. They worked hard and the shelters in Nueva Vida began going up.

Sister Preschools and Schools have begun relationships with children here and, as a result, the U.S. children feel the sorrow of the hurricane more profoundly. Building relationships makes a difference.

We have three construction/health brigades coming. One is from Winston-Salem, NC, of nine people arriving on Valentine’s Day for two weeks. The other two are both coming on March 6 – a group of 28 from Bucknell University in Lewisburg, PA, and another nine from the Northeast. We will have 37 people here at once!

People care. You care.
We are so grateful that you do.
And the Nicaraguans?
Well, multiply the gratefulness– oh, say – by about a thousand....

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Yes! I want to help support the work of the Center for Development in Central America.

☐ Enclosed please find my tax-deductible contribution of $__________________________  
(for a minimum gift of $25.00, you may request Grits, Greens, and Gallo Pinto, our unique and versatile cookbook. For a minimum gift of $50.00, a hand-thrown pottery mug especially designed for the CDCA; please specify right/left-handed mug handle.)

☐ Yes, please send me the cookbook.  ☐ Yes, I would like a mug... ☐ Right-handed. ☐ Left-handed.

☐ Enclosed is $25.00 for membership in the Friends of CDCA, our U.S. support group.

☐ Enclosed please find $__________________________ specifically for disaster relief after Hurricane Mitch.

Please correct my contact information as follows:
(Mail to CDCA, 2425 Spicewood Drive, Winston Salem, NC 27106-9768.)

Name and Address: __________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Phone/fax/email: ________________________________
1999 marks the Community’s 20th anniversary.
20 years! This was going to be an issue reflecting on those 20 years but the situation here doesn’t allow it, so we’ll only write a bit.

Back in 1979, five of us chose to move in together and share the common purse and the common life that we understood was how the Church was to live.

We looked for a common ministry, a way to work with the poor. We bought a house on the “wrong" side of the tracks in south Statesville, North Carolina. We committed ourselves to staying put for 10 years. We began working with a summer program for poor kids.

After 10 years of living and working in south Statesville we had founded three shelters — one for people in a housing crisis, one for battered women, and one for the permanently homeless. Through the 80’s we had seen poverty increase many times. We had helped to found a Habitat for Humanity chapter and a soup kitchen and had absorbed the rape crisis line. We had gone from a budget of $20,000 to $250,000 although staff salaries stayed at $5,000 a year.

Our Community grew as well. At our height we had 23 members. We’ve always had children in the community to keep us sane. We’ve had people from Japan, Morocco, Germany, and Bolivia. We’ve had more women than men. We’ve sung and celebrated often as a Community. We’ve rejoiced as community members married and had children and grieved as members divorced and lost parents. We feel an “extended family” love with our members, and as in all families we’ve had the feeling of betrayal as well.

In 1989 we regrouped and set our eyes to the next 10 years ... Central America was always close to some of our hearts and so we pledged to come here.

In 1990 we turned the Statesville work over to another non-profit and searched for a new home. In 1993 we established the CDCA as a project of the JHC, and in 1994 we moved to Nicaragua. We packed up most of our stuff, loaded a bus, trucks, and a van, and headed out on a trip that makes wonderful stories but was hell to live through!

Our work here has changed and grown as it did in Statesville. One of our gifts is being able to say, “Well, this has fallen through the cracks — why don’t we do it?” Our budget here has grown as it did in Statesville. We still know how to pinch a penny and staff salaries continue to be low.

Our Community constantly changes. We’re eight permanent members with three being kids and an additional two in college who drop in for visits. We’ve had wonderful people volunteering and joining us for various times and they, too, feel like “extended family.” We also have the Nicaraguan staff and their families who are a part of us now. Unfortunately, we celebrate and sing less and less. It’s hard “to sing a song in a strange land”.

Over the 20 years we’ve watched three children grow into wonderful adults. One got married recently and all the “JHC kids” were together. We’ve watched another three children born into the Community.

20 years is a long time for even a marriage these days. We think it’s pretty good for a Community. It amazes us!

All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people.

Acts 2:44-46
You are invited to the annual meeting of the Friends of CDCA, Saturday, May 8th, in Asheville, NC, from 3-5 PM. Sarah will be with us sharing Nicaraguan slides, crafts, and the latest news. Plan on staying through the evening for a benefit concert.

Also, the Friends of CDCA have set up an account to be able to accept gifts of stock for the work of the CDCA. For more information on making this kind of tax-deductible donation, or more details about May 8th events, please contact Kay Richey at (336)593-2969.

Reflection...

What’s in a name? Jubilee House Community.

I can remember in those early days all those countless times clicking through slides trying to raise support for the work. I remember the slides we used to explain our odd name which we chose 20 years ago. In 1979 we explained about the Year of Jubilee and Community - calling for a new way, a just way, a way to be together.

Today is our name still meaningful here in Nicaragua as it was in Statesville, NC? Probably even more so.

Leviticus 25 calls for the Year of the Jubilee to be proclaimed every 50 years. In that year all land was to be returned to the original owners, slaves set free, and debt forgiven. In a country where people have been permanently dislocated (using Hurricane Mitch as an excuse), people should be allowed to go home. People work as slaves in torturous jobs. Free them – pay them livable wages! And in Nicaragua the international debt is strangling the country, starving the people. The debt should be forgiven. Proclaim Jubilee!

Community is a concept that is becoming foreign here. In Nueva Vida we are organizing to bring people together in some semblance of community. Trying to bring people in the US into a relationship with those in Nicaragua is our goal to broaden a sense of world community. I mean, we really are on a ball spinning fast in space, and it’s in all our best interests to help one another. All religions foster community; and all sins, weaknesses, and bad forces break community down.

Jubilee House Community – Not a bad name for 1999.

(What about “House”? Well, in ’79 it helped the name “flow.” Little did we know that in Statesville we would end up “housing” thousands of homeless people and building houses, to then move here and end up building houses after the hurricane!)