1994, twenty years ago, the Jubilee House Community moved to Nicaragua. The twenty years is a blink of an eye and a lifetime ago. In this newsletter we give you current news and the 20 highlights of those 20 years... to help you feel more of a part of this work, because you ARE a part of this work.

The agricultural cooperative COPROEXNIC together with the CDCA are refurbishing and running a sesame processing plant which provides 27 jobs. The plant is gearing up for our first season of processing most of Nicaragua’s 2014 organic sesame. In September, Lloyd Kirwan of Once Again Nut Butter came to help us with the sesame processing plant. He was pleased with the progress made since he was here in April. We’re expecting him back in December or January when the plant is full of product and running at optimal speed.

The plant still does not have electricity because the electric company is insisting that we pay $24,000 (this is down from $80,000 they originally wanted from the past operator of the plant who did not pay his bill). We are running the plant on a generator that is not strong enough to operate the whole plant correctly.

One note: the sesame plant is about an hour and a half from Ciudad Sandino, where the CDCA and COPROEXNIC are headquartered. Lots of driving to and from.

Becca participated in a round table discussion on maintaining the integrity of seeds at the Sustainable Textile Conference in Portland, OR. Seed integrity is a huge concern for farmers of organic cotton seeds and other organic crops as well.

Cross contamination can easily happen when a neighboring farmer plants genetically modified seeds. If a crop that is planted organically is contaminated by a GMO crop, then all crops grown from those seeds will be dismissed as non-organic. This would be devastating to the farmers. They are only able to make a living wage by selling their crops as organic. Organics ensure that the farmers receive higher prices and gives them a chance to not just eke out a small profit from their hard, hard work.

One of the many things we have learned in our twenty years working with farmers is that weather is an all-consuming reality. If you remember from our last newsletter, Nicaragua was experiencing the worst drought in 32 years. Crops did not grow unless they were irrigated and most of our farmers have no access to irrigation...they are too poor. Food prices rose and the government starting importing food and subsidizing prices to help combat hunger.

Then the rains came, and in some areas too much rain caused mudslides that may well prevent what crops that did survive from getting to market. So far we have had 29 deaths due to flooding and mudslides. Over 6,000 people displaced. The government is building new homes for these people but the rains have been devastating in parts of this small country. And now the rains have stopped too early... farmers cannot catch a break this year!

We, with COPROEXNIC, are working closely with farmers to help them salvage what they can. We stand with farmers which means YOU do, too.

We work to add value to crops as with our cotton gin and the sesame processing plant, but more is needed. We hosted an industrial engineer, Jose Vallejo, who wants to help. He went to Colombia to examine some equipment for us; afterwards, he came here to discuss with us several new and exciting projects for COPROEXNIC like new crops and agro-industrial manufacturing opportunities. We hope we will have more information on these projects in the months ahead.

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We continue to listen to communities regarding health issues as well. One of our most valuable resources is the group of 37 lay health promoters in Nueva Vida: they have their finger on the pulse of the barrio. They sometimes do surveys. They help us recognize needs that the community identifies, all of which enables us to better address those needs with the appropriate doctors, medical professionals, and services.

One of the more recent needs identified is for a part-time ob/gyn. We host a women’s care professional about every four months. In November, we hosted an ob/gyn and a nurse midwife, as well as a pediatrician, a general physician, a lactation consultant, and a nurse. The ob/gyn, Owen Bell, has been coming each year for ten years and has helped us address the needs of women with knowledge, supplies, medicines, and equipment.

These volunteers taught classes to our New Mothers Group on breast feeding and labor and birth. They saw patients in the clinic, in homes, and up at El Porvenir, the remote coffee cooperative. They brought thousands of dollars’ worth of medicine.

We were pleased to have Nora Laws to help us with this brigade. She has supported us and volunteered with us since before we moved to Nicaragua and on through the many years. We are also happy to have Jolien Nolmans, a nutritionist from Belgium, to work with our patients individually on what they can do with their limited resources to improve their health through diet.

The clinic needs lots of support. Dr. Jorge Flores, our radiologist and only full-time physician, sees patients when our part-time doctors are not there and does ultrasounds in the hours they are there. Now he has appointments for ultrasounds a month in advance…too long a wait, so we are cutting his other patients to allow time for the ones who need ultrasounds. An ob/gyn would help fill this need immensely, and…

We actually have found a qualified ob/gyn but, alas, no funding. We also need more room for trainings, an x-ray room, exam rooms, etc. We are only lacking the funding to build.

All the staff work as a team making decisions on the future of the clinic, including the third building for which we are raising funds.

Las Lobas (She-Wolves), our support group for pre-teen and teen girls, is working to show the girls a bigger world and a better future than just getting pregnant so young and landing a man to support them. Recently they toured a university campus, had arts and crafts, and role-played how to say “no”. Several of them are not in school and we are helping them to get back into school. The biggest deterrent to teen pregnancy in Nicaragua is hope.

Hope… hope is needed to keep on surviving and to actually thrive. Hope that someone has your back when crops fail. Hope that employment can be maintained and a paycheck will come regularly. Hope that your children can see a doctor. Hope that your babies will grow and not sicken. Hope that you get the life-saving medications you need… Hope.

This is what you have helped to make happen in the last 20 years. Here are our 20 highlights:*  

1) Aided 3,000 farmers with capital, certification, marketing, and tech support
2) In 1999 started the Nueva Vida Clinic and since opened charts on 20,462 patients, treated 210,694 diseases/conditions mostly with part-time physicians (before 1999 we saw an additional 4,700 with medical brigades)
3) Have made loans of $5,342,000 to small businesses, start-ups, and farmer co-ops
4) Started the organic agriculture cooperative with 16 farmers, which now has 3,000 farmers
5) Started a cotton gin and were an integral part of starting the world’s first clothing line certified fair trade, organic from crop to consumer

Dr. Jorge Flores, 2001
6) Hosted 163 delegations with 2,500+ people and hosted 670 individual volunteers (of the over 3,000 people, around 400 are medical professionals)

7) Started the world’s first Worker-Owned Free Trade Zone

8) Provided emergency aid to flood refugees from Hurricane Mitch including housing, medical attention, food, clothing, latrines, grey water catch systems, and community organizing

9) Started a dental clinic in 2007… we have charts on 4,675 people and have seen 9,835 patients (with only a half-time dentist until a little more than a year ago)

10) Exported over 3 million lbs. of organic sesame, almost 1 million lbs. of organic peanuts, almost 300,00 lbs. of organic coffee, over 450,000 lbs. of organic cotton, plus cashews, black beans, honey, soy, mung beans, and dragon fruit in years past

11) Sponsored 4 water projects in 3 Ciudad Sandino barrios and 1 in a remote rural community

12) Operate a sesame processing plant

13) Spoke about the CDCA in 37 different states and 10 different countries

14) Operate a cotton gin that employs 25 seasonal workers and supports 800 agricultural jobs

15) Since 2011, have supported a network of 37 lay health promoters in neighborhood of 12,000 people and 3 surrounding rural communities and have done 256 trainings

16) Used appropriate technology in building eight CDCA buildings for clinics, co-ops, and education

17) Built a primary school in a remote rural area and a preschool with feeding center in a barrio of Ciudad Sandino

18) Started a co-op to make effective water filters

19) Built 3 health clinics in rural areas

20) Built solar composting latrines and efficient wood cook stoves

Or in other words… you have helped bring hope.

*We have written blogs about each, with some history and future plans. See all the links at: http://jhc-cdca.org/2020-life-giving/ counting down through these top 20 accomplishments of the past 20 years, in which you have played a vital role!

**JHCommunity:**

Sarah is back from her September speaking trip in Florida encouraging new people to get involved in this work. She also visited family. Pat and Kathy spoke in several places in November while they spent time with their mother.

Kathleen and Joseph are back from looking at colleges for Joseph (for 2015). While there, they were thrilled to see Jessica perform with Voices of Hope. Becca and her daughters are back from visiting with their family while Becca attended the Sustainable Textile Conference.

The Community went en masse to the National Theater to watch Coury, Daniel, and Joseph in a production of The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Coury was the Hunchback; Joseph, the gypsy king; and Daniel, a gargoyle… they made us all proud.

**Reflection:**

I was one of the founding members of the Jubilee House Community 35 years ago… I was 24 years old and fresh out of seminary. Now I am 60 and there is nothing young or fresh about me, but I am still a member.

For 35 years people have asked us to explain, “What motivates you to do what you do?” Another question asked is “Why do you live in community?”

To the first question some of us would say that we were called by God to work with the poor… which we have been doing for 35 years: in the States and now here in Nicaragua. Others of us would say that it is simply the right thing to do. In our eyes as community members neither response is in conflict with the other.

Jesus was born poor and under the oppression of the Roman Empire. He consistently taught his followers about their responsibility to the poor and the oppressed. James, the leader of the original church, said that unless we helped the poor we were not followers of Jesus, his brother. Both men were Jews who believed in the Torah and the teachings of the prophets who called for the caring of the poor and oppressed.
If you are Jewish or a Christian, then you ARE called to work with the poor. If you are not, but just want to do what is right… then, correcting all the injustices done to the poor, lifting oppression, and freeing people who live in slavery, poverty, and imprisonment is the humane thing to do… the right thing to do.

So many of us think that if a person works with the poor day in and day out then there is something special about them because most only remember the poor around Thanksgiving and Christmas. Which comes to the second question, “Why do you live in community?”

Well, to do what we are called to do… to do what is right… we all need support in many forms. This is where community comes in. As a community, we not only comfort, support, and love each other, but we challenge each other as well… to do more, to be more aware, to look at problems in the world and see how WE fit in as a solution.

Sometimes when we get bogged down in the day’s muck and mire, the poor start blurring into random faces. It is then that we remind each other that the poor carry the face of Jesus. We remind each other that the poor are people like us, like you.

These are our brothers and sisters, and they live under the crushing weight of poverty. These are mamas and daddies, who birth their babies into poverty and oppression… just like Mary and Joseph. These are teens, who struggle and will do anything to get out… no matter how unwise.

The poor are part of us. We, who are wealthy, have a responsibility to them. We use their labor for cheap food and products. We are part of the crushing weight that holds them down. And we should never, ever, forget.

As a community, we call each other to never let the faces blur into just one giant mass of poverty.

We are not good people… we have many faults. We are not all that gifted… we have to struggle to learn and relearn things. We are not honorable or noble people…. we are just folks. We are not special. We are no different from anyone else… but…

We do have each other… to call us to be better.

- Kathleen

We want to thank you all for all your support to this work and to the staff of the CDCA.
We hope your Holy Days / Holidays are filled with joy and love and that you have a wonderful New Year!

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