The first six months of each year are filled with delegations. Since February 1st we have hosted six delegations all working either in the health clinic or on building the third clinic facility and we have seen progress!

In February, we had three overlapping delegations! Lopez Island (WA) High School’s Spanish Class came first. Not only did they learn and work hard on the third clinic building, but were also generous enough to be our guinea pigs to try a local hotel instead of living in our International Training Center (ITC).

As the staff ages… those of us living in the main house a few yards from the ITC are 62 years and older… we have had to figure out how we can possibly continue providing education through delegations. Hosting groups in the ITC involves extensive food shopping, cooking, and a feeling of always being available which leaves us old farts exhausted!

This hotel allows delegations more access to Ciudad Sandino life. While being close to the police station and the hospital, delegation members can, if they choose to, avail themselves of the market and street life giving them more of a feel of Nicaraguan culture. We know it is a change for folks, but it is a viable way for us to continue to host delegations.

Housing Lopez in the hotel also allowed us to host Haverhill Unitarian Church (MA) combined with a smaller group from Western Boulevard Presbyterian Church (Raleigh, NC) for this year. They worked really hard on the third clinic building as well as learned.

For 13 years we have hosted in our clinic the Boston College nurses, headed up by Dr. Ronna Krozy. This year was Ronna’s last delegation as she is retiring from the project.

Ronna has been instrumental in not only broadening her students’ education and world view but has taught us as well. Ronna helped foster our home visits with patients, our HIV education and outreach, and our community outreach with health promoters. We will miss her but will be delighted to hang a plaque in her honor in our health education center in the third building… when it is completed.

The March Bucknell Brigade (Lewisburg, PA) continued the work on the building as well as brought an ob/gyn, Emily. Emily is a Bucknell Brigade alumna. She told us that her work in our health clinic years ago influenced her to enter medicine. She embodies the hope of the educational aspect of our projects… working to change perspectives and lives.

Thankfully, Emily was here to teach our staff how to insert subdermal implants. For years we have longed to be able to buy this kind of birth control method because it is safe and lasts 3 years but it was cost prohibitive. Now we are working with another NGO, Profamilia, who sells them to us at cost.

The outlay of the initial funds was and is high for us, but with help from donors, we bought ten implants and whoosh! We had women lining up for them! We bought 19 more, now gone! As fast as we can buy the implants we have women wanting them.

$50/woman provides three years of protection which allows families to limit the number of children they have. This means they can better care for the children they have. It also gives researchers the time to develop and distribute a vaccine for the Zika virus, which can cause birth defects. And of course, it means that women have more control over their lives, their families, and their bodies… too often they are worn out from many pregnancies.

Abortions of any kind are illegal in Nicaragua. These implants are safe for teens and can protect them from unwanted pregnancies, even if they are sexually assaulted… which happens here and around the world. At least with protection, they only have to deal with the rape and not the responsibility of another life.

With Profamilia we can also offer tubal ligations (a surgical procedure) for $160 to a woman who already has all the children she wants to have! We have a growing list of women waiting for us to provide the funding.
For Mother’s Day, you can give a gift in honor of your mother that will give these mothers the chance to limit the number of children for whom they care. When a family living in poverty has two children instead of six, there is more food to go around, more opportunities for education, and less stress so more affection and attention.

Back to delegations…we also hosted the Post Oak High School group from Houston, TX. As with most delegations, they learned about Nicaragua and its history, culture, and people as well as made progress on the third building.

We really could use the third building. The week following this newsletter going to the printers, we are hosting a Rotarian group from North Carolina. They are bringing 10 dentists, 1 hygienist, 1 plastic surgeon, and 1 pediatrician! We will be squeezing dental chairs in cracks and crevices while the patients will have to wait outside…thankfully, we are still in the dry season, but the heat is now dangerously high.

The first clinic building has gotten a new drop ceiling! The bats were making the old absorbent ceiling their home. We love bats…bat guano, not so much. We are looking at how to provide the bats homes outside of the clinic.

While the medicine storage room was getting the new ceiling, it was emptied. Before restocking the shelves, the Bucknell students painted the bare concrete walls white, a great improvement!

The long struggle to get the lease for the sesame processing plant is still going. COPROEXNIC, the organic agriculture cooperative, has paid for the three-year lease and the 15% sales tax on that lease, but the government, who owns the plant, wants us to insure the plant instead of providing the cash deposit they required in previous years.

The problem is that the only insurance company willing to insure the plant wants $10,000/year to insure the facility which is way above what the market value is on the existing plant. All of this is to say we are making progress in finalizing the lease but the documents are not yet in-hand.

Because of the problems in obtaining the lease, COPROEXNIC could not access their full line of credit to buy sesame up front. This led to much of the sesame that was promised to their buyers instead being sold to middle men. Together with the cooperative, we are working with the buyers to locate more sesame to fulfill the contracts.

Because of farmers selling to others instead of honoring the contracts they had made with the cooperative, COPROEXNIC is broadening its base of growers. These new growers, instead of having their own certification, will be certified under COPROEXNIC’s organic certification. Having more farmers under one certification will hopefully ensure that the cooperative will not be faced with this lack of product again.

COPROEXNIC is now exporting peanuts to Once Again Nut Butter, Nuts to You, and a new customer, Nutrin. Please see the box and support these businesses that help all these small farmers.

Soon coffee will be exported from four different coffee cooperatives (El Porvenir is one of them). This is our first time exporting coffee other than just El Porvenir’s which means lots of learning.

The staff of the CDCA is working closely with the Ciudad Sandino Rotary Club to bring potable water to two rural communities. Engineers Without Borders from Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo, CA) came in March. They were hosted by families in the communities. They have committed to having a design for Phase 1 by May and the Ciudad Sandino’s mayor’s office is working with us for a final design. This will help us and the Rotary Club to look for funding. This project has been in process for three years now with little to show for it, but this brings hope to the communities.
JHCommunity:

Nicaraguan schools start their year in February. Eibhlín has begun her last year of primary school…the 6th grade while Orla is in the 5th grade in their local village’s school.

Sarah is in the Southeast of the United States on her spring speaking tour…missing the blazing temperatures of Nicaragua! She has about a month more so if you are the Southeast, look for her schedule on http://jhc-cdca.org/how-to-help/upcoming-speaking-opportunities/

The United Nations 2017 World Happiness Report has been released, with the news, surprising to many, that Nicaragua has grown in “happiness” more in the last 12 years than any of the other 155 nations included in the study. Our little Nicaragua!

How can that be? When one actually reads the report, “happiness” means satisfaction or contentment or hope. In a nutshell and vastly simplified, the measures used for the happiness report are GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, freedom, social structure, generosity, corruption (including government and businesses), and dystopia.

We’ve lived here the last 23 years and from our perspective, life IS much, much better for those with whom we work and serve.

Nicaragua’s GDP per capita has steadily grown over the last six years. Nicaragua still has a large population living in poverty (about 30%) but the middle class here is growing. Young people are going to public university, medical and dental schools, engineering… for free and with financial living support from the government.

Health care, though still greatly lacking, is guaranteed under the constitution and is free. I’ve been running our clinic now for 18 years; believe me when I say the access people now have to doctors, medicine, lab tests, hospitalization and surgeries is vastly improved and getting better each year.

When we had the horrible two-year drought, the government arranged for people to eat. Not only are public schools again free but they also provide food, books, and backpacks for free.

Though poverty stills limit the freedom of life choices people can make, Nicaraguans are dreaming again. There is a hope here that was not felt 12 years ago. Nicaraguans are more connected to the global world through their cheap smart phones and free access to internet in all public parks. More parks are being built and the older ones are being improved. Every week driving in Managua I see more parks and kids playing in them. There are even public water parks. The infrastructure is improving…roads, renewable electricity (and steady electricity), and much better public transportation.

The social structure is better. We see fewer tin shacks because access to housing is more available with government help with loans. Farmers have better access to capital through the government. Labor laws are better and more enforced (i.e., paid sick leave, paid maternity leave, paid one month vacations). Paternal support is enforced more.

Though we have found that most Nicaraguans don’t donate to organizations at the level that the U.S. population does, I find that Nicaraguans are generous to each other… and to us… with their time, concern and support.

Those are the positive aspects… the negative aspects that bring the rating of a country down are corruption and dystopia. Most Nicaraguans polled give their national leaders and their national police force high marks. Of course, there is corruption in business and government… where is there not?… but as our Daniel pointed out to us, there are no lobbyists in the Nicaraguan government.

The very poor do live in squalor and with great hardships. There is a gap between the rich and the poor… a very large gap. Without that gap, probably Nicaragua would be higher than 43rd out of 155 nations.

While witnessing and enjoying all this positive change over the last 12 years, it is concerning to know that the U.S. Congress is revisiting a 2016 bill to block loans coming to Nicaragua… the Nicaragua Investment Conditionality Act (NICCA Act).

Note: the U.S. has dropped from 3rd to 19th over the last 10 years in this U.N. report. Instead of trying to shut Nicaragua down… again… it might be wise for Congress to look at the progress Nicaragua has made and learn themselves how to serve their own people.
Reflection:
On April 22nd, there were marches around the United States and around the world in favor of science. THIS is the point in our lives when people are feeling the need to march in favor of science.

People who depend on electricity, running water, smart phones, computers, medicines, surgeries, cars, etc., etc., think that one “believes” in science. Though some may think so, science is not a faith system. Science is based on facts.

There are now four NBA players who say the world is flat. FLAT???? There is a huge population of the U.S., at least, that think the universe is 6,000 years old!

But the real reason - I think - people are not “believing” in science is the debate over climate change.

Many, who voted the current people into office in the U.S. government which now does not allow for people to even use the words “climate change”, voted on one issue alone… anti-abortion… the protection of the unborn.

In Spanish, aborto also includes miscarriage. So, for a brief moment, let’s look at protection of the unborn. If climate change does not slow down, the Pentagon has said that global stability will decrease and wars and violence will increase. Climatologists have already said that extreme flooding and droughts (like the one Nicaragua endured recently) will limit food production. More and more severe storms will increase.

Therefore, to protect the unborn we MUST slow the progression of climate change. Climate change is killing and will kill millions of unborn babies, not to mention the mothers, fathers, siblings, and on it goes. Right now, most of those babies are different shades of brown like the sweet Nicaraguan babies, but that will change.

Climate change has been verified as a fact. Some people debate whether it is human-made or not, BUT scientists tell us that if we do not slow climate change down… NO MATTER WHO OR WHAT CAUSED IT… the world is headed for disaster. They have also told us how to slow it… eliminating methane and carbon emissions. Pretty simple.

Science is not a belief system.

Faith is and here is where my faith addresses climate change. Whether it took trillions and trillions and trillions of years, I believe that the universe, the earth, and life on this earth… including us… were made by the Creator. I believe we as children of this Creator were called to protect and guard the Divine’s creation. I believe that all of humanity… no matter the color of skin and all other dividers we set up (i.e. religion, sexual preference, etc.)… are a family, and families protect and care for their most vulnerable and keep their homes livable.

Science predicts the upcoming doom of our world, but also offers ways to at least slow it down until we can eventually adapt and stop it. But it is the belief in the power of love and that gets me up in the mornings.

- Kathleen

This Mother’s Day, give a gift in honor of your mother to support mothers in Nicaragua: One Mother to Another! Donate $50 for a birth control implant or $160 for a tubal ligation allowing women to be able to have the size of family they want. We will send your mother a beautiful e-card telling her of this gift in her honor. Go to: http://jhc-cdca.org/helpMD.html

Please note: email her name and email address with your name to becca@jhc-cdca.org so we can make sure the card gets to her in time.

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

Enclosed please find my tax-deductible contribution of $__________.

Designation (if desired) ___________________________

Note: you can also give online via: https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/jhc-cdca or scan here:

I would like to receive an electronic newsletter instead of paper at this email address:

Name & Address: _________________________________________________________________________________

Mail to CDCA, c/o Donita Miller, 420 Longhorn Dr, Rock Hill, SC 29732-8886.