On the 20th of March the Nicaraguan National Police released 100 people from prison who had been arrested in connection with the political crisis beginning April 2018¹, and sent them to house arrest as a show of good faith before restarting the dialogues between the opposition and the government. On the 6th of April they released 50 more prisoners again to house arrest. Following the March 20th release, opposition leaders held a protest at one mall where 107 people were arrested and then released later on that same day. As a result of the international news coverage of these events, participants have been pulling out of volunteer delegations — so many that the few delegations we had planned have cancelled for lack of numbers.

Without delegations and the loss of $100,000 they provide in revenue and the average of $50,000 in donations raised by them per year, the **Nueva Vida Health Clinic** continues to chug along with great creativity from our administrator, Josefa Rayo. We have had Nicaraguan interns and volunteers to help us fill in services that we are now lacking.

We have a volunteer dentist who comes every Friday and works, mostly on adults. We have a volunteer therapist who comes Monday and Wednesday mornings to help fill the gap left by Pat, our counselor and member of the Jubilee House Community, when she died in December.

Two social work interns are working in the clinic full-time for three months helping any way they can, but mostly talking one-on-one with patients and leading classes for different support groups.

We continue to receive some donations from the American Nicaraguan Foundation. We recently received eight wheelchairs to give to patients. We coordinate closely with the public health centers in the vicinity to make sure we are not duplicating what they give out.

Nicaraguan customs finally released medical and dental donations from October and November 2018. In the future we are being VERY particular about dates of receiving paperwork from donors, making sure all "i"s are dotted and "t"s crossed.

The clinic has tested 250 people for **HIV** in the last two months, thanks to a donation of rapid tests made to us. Out of the 250, we identified three patients with HIV, which means they can now start treatment and not spread the disease.

During March our 30 lay health promoters with our doctor, Elizabeth López, saw 240 children and 200 adults in their homes. Dr. López is also teaching the promoters skills to use in identifying which patients need to see a doctor or go to the hospital immediately.

We continue to give out equipment donated to us through Peaceworks in New Jersey. This little girl, Sugey, has cerebral paralysis and received an orthopedic bed so she does not have to lie on a concrete floor anymore.

Because our radiologist does not have working radiological equipment, he is seeing mostly adult patients all day in the clinic while Dr. Elizabeth López goes out into the community. Dr. Jorge Flores is sought out by our patients for his care and attention. In the mornings we also have a pediatrician, Dr. Victoriano López, who treats **asthma** in about 12% of his patients with maintenance inhalers.

Our support groups continue. **Las Lobas** (She-wolves), a group of

pre-teen and teen girls took English courses from Claudia, our human resources department…yes, she is the whole department!

Los Leones (The Lions) have split into two groups with one group studying English and the other doing arts and crafts, both taught by Andrea, our volunteer coordinator. They also had a party celebrating those boys who had birthdays in the first quarter of this year.

**COPROEXNIC**, the organic agriculture cooperative, is struggling financially due to the shortage of crops grown last year. The cooperative staff had estimated that they were going to get 20+ containers of organic peanuts, but with climate change we have wonky rainy seasons now. Periods of too much rain and then too little have hurt the organic sesame and coffee crops, but have really hurt the peanuts, which are particularly sensitive to water fluctuations.

We are looking at this year bringing yet another El Niño climate phenomenon which means drought for Nicaragua and the region. This includes the northern triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), the infamous “caravan” countries. While many of the migrants are fleeing the violence in these countries, others are leaving because the water instability is leading to famine. Most of the agriculture in these countries is made up of small farming families, and there is no support for them in times of climate hardship.

Nicaragua has been lauded for its support of small farmers and providing food during droughts so that farmers do not lose their land and so even poor Nicaraguans can eat. Now, however, with the NICA Act sanctions put on Nicaragua and the huge incurred loss in revenue, the government is having to tax goods, exports, etc., in a way they have not in the past, which impacts the organic agricultural cooperative.

Nicaragua’s gross domestic product (GDP) had been rising for the eight straight years prior to 2018, when the socio-political unrest damaged the country catastrophically. Whether you are for or opposed to the government, there is no doubt that the nation has been economically wounded, even more than originally projected, and the government’s social programs have been deeply impaired.

Instead of what was estimated to be a 0.2% loss in the GDP, there was a 3.8% drop in the GDP. It was a reduction of almost $1.5 billion dollars (US) in Nicaragua’s GDP, a country that was already the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere BEFORE the socio-political unrest. In a nation of high unemployment there was a loss of almost 300,000 jobs. With all the looting and burning of buildings the infrastructure damage was $204.6 million.

What does this mean for the farmers of COPROEXNIC? Their crops will now be taxed at several new stages along the production chain, increasing their tax burden many times over. Now add climate change… one farmer asked COPROEXNIC’s board member and former agronomist, Raúl, “What do we do now?”

Raúl said, “Well this is what I’ve told farmers for years… If you plant, then you’re f*#ked; if you don’t plant you are really f*#ked!”

Such is the life of a small subsistence farmer.
Getting water into two rural communities is about 65% accomplished, but the 510 homes awaiting water are still waiting. By April 22nd all the pipes should be laid and we’re halfway to finishing all the protective boxes around the valves. So close, they can taste the water—but not there yet.

**Casa Ben Linder**, a facility in memory of Ben Linder and many international citizens who worked in solidarity with Nicaraguans in the 1980s during the Contra War, has been slowly transforming into a hostel/hosting space. With the lack of tourism, our hope of a full guesthouse has been dampened but we are working on alternatives.

The facility has events on the weekends. We have hosted a clown from Europe to teach clowning. We have several art classes by Gerardo Arias, who painted the mural on the front of our clinic. And we have held ceramic classes by Nicaragua’s noted potter, Pedro Guerrero, who throws the pots that many of you have bought at events or even here in Nicaragua.

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### JHCommunity:

Many of you have given to the work of the CDCA in memory of Pat who died suddenly in December, and have asked about Kathy, her sister. Kathy is doing as well as can be expected. She misses Pat in big ways like Christmas, celebrating her 70th birthday with us in February, and this Easter; and in small ways like wanting to share something she learned that day with Pat. We all thank you for your gifts, thoughts, notes, and prayers.

Coury and his family came to Nicaragua in February, and we celebrated Kathy’s 70th and Coury’s 30th birthdays. We all enjoyed toddler Anthony and new one Alexander. Cassie took their friend, Julia who came with them, to the clinic to see where she has volunteered for many years.

As I write, Sarah is speaking and fundraising for the work of the CDCA in the Southeast of the U.S.A. She is making lots of new contacts, renewing older contacts and raising funds in order to meet our bills and payroll in March and April.

Also, as I write, Mike and I are working from Massachusetts and taking care of daughter Jessica and grandchildren, Elliot and Charlotte, after Jessica’s hysterectomy this spring. Sarah will come towards the end of her recovery and help her “catch up.”

So, at home while being frazzled with all the work…Daniel and Claudia are enjoying watching Samantha crawl and helping to hold down the fort. Kathy - when she isn’t working on financial work - is in the house alone, loving the space with her dog and cat she “inherited” from Pat. Becca and Paul are looking forward to a break during Semana Santa. Their daughters, Eibhlín and Orla, are both attending secondary school a few blocks from the CDCA which means they help with babysitting and some of the CDCA work.

### Reflection:

My mother has said over and over that one of the two things Jesus wished he had never said was “The poor you will have with you always.” Why?

Because so many Christians use that phrase to justify pouring money into church buildings and doing nothing

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3Matthew 26:11
for the poor. But what if we reexamined that phrase, and instead of looking at it as meaning an impossible goal of eradicating poverty, look at that phrase as an indictment of the rich?

It is true that “There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed,” a quote from Frank Buchman.4

Staying with Jessica and being in the Northeast, it is easy to let the poor slip my mind. As she recuperates, she is watching mindless television so she can crochet and heal. One of her shows is Top Chef. I have found it addictive but also, when I remember the poor in Nicaragua, nauseating.

In Nicaragua with climate change and with the socio-political crisis there, people are looking more and more at hunger. It is easy to forget that the Top Chef judges say to a contestant that the prime rib was not plated to please the eye.

It is easy for the wealthy or intellectual class in Nicaragua to create and foment crisis when their children will be fed and given medical care or even schooling if a new government comes in and discontinues social programs.

It is easy to forget that people are sweating and bearing unbelievable heat when there is cool air at a touch. When you have food to eat and can jump in an air-conditioned car, it is easy not to feel the urgency that climate change should be our top priority (when diesel prices had dropped one opposition leader said that the Nicaraguan government was doing the people a disservice by investing in renewable energy!)

A Brazilian priest, Frei Betto, helps those of us who would say we choose to stand with the poor by telling us that “The head thinks where the feet stand.”

He says that “It is impossible to be a leftist without dirtying one’s shoes in the soil where the people live, struggle, suffer, enjoy and celebrate their beliefs and victories. To engage in theory without practice is to play the game of the right.”5

Many tell us that our opinion of what is happening in Nicaragua is just wrong, and maybe it is; but Fr. Betto also says “Choose the risk of making mistakes with the poor over the pretension of being right without them.”6 And so, we risk the mistakes…

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4A Protestant evangelist
5Ten Suggestions for Leftist…Frei Betto  Posted 25 December 2013 in GENERAL (https://psmkajang.wordpress.com/page/10/)
6Same as above

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This Mother’s Day, help a mom make it safely through her pregnancy to the birth of her healthy baby: sponsor a pregnant woman in honor of your mother! $225 pays for 9 months of care: 
- doctor visits,
- laboratory tests,
- medicines,
- prenatal vitamins,
- monthly classes and
- home visits from our health promoters.

We will send your mother an e-card telling her of this gift in her honor. Go to: https://jhc-cdca.org/helpMD.html

Please note: email your mother’s 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:

Please include your correct name and current address from the newsletter label to avoid duplications!

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