

# NTCARAGUA

## Christ United Methodist Church

*It's About Relationships!*



## The Nicaragua Project

*Making A Difference*

by Gene Cotton

Over a year ago Christ United Methodist Church first started talking about the possibility of organizing a work project in Nicaragua. There was a fund-raising concert, a silent auction, a bake sale by the children's department, generous donations by way too many people to name them all for fear of missing someone, and a lot of personal sacrifice by those who chose to give up their Christmas Holiday Season with family to spend

it painting, fixing doors and windows, repairing toilets, wiring plugs and switches, and just generally getting dirty all over.



*Arriving in Managua*

But alas, it has come and gone and it doesn't seem possible that we have just returned from one of the most amazing experiences we have ever had in our lives. There is no way at this moment to measure the impact or the importance that this experience will have on our lives. Only time will tell. However, having been involved with numerous similar undertakings, I can only surmise that most of us will be different people for the rest of our lives. We will re-think who we are, we will look at our priorities differently, we will look at our careers in a different way, and in fact, some of us will alter our life direction, and, we will surely not take for granted the passing of another day.

This project has its origins in the "Outreach Committee". It was decided last year that Christ United Methodist Church would participate in an effort to help a school in Managua, Nicaragua. The school is "Centro Alternativo Proyecto 19 de Julio". Our first task was to fund the salary of Roger Gonzalas as the director of the school. Within a week of announcing our intent, Roger's annual salary of \$3,600.00 was raised through members of our congregation.

The second phase of our commitment was to organize a work project to rehab the entire school. The school was in need of major repairs, and they simply did not have the resources to do it themselves.





A team of 18 people was organized and a nine day trip was planned for December 26th, 2006 through January 4th, 2007.

The school in Managua has two buildings; one with 6 classrooms and two bathrooms, and the other that houses the office, kitchen, library, a dance room and several other classrooms. The building with 6 classrooms was the one that the school felt was the priority to tackle first.

Before arriving, we thought that the building had basic electrical service and only needed some

plugs, switches, and lights. Little did we know that the entire building would have to be completely rewired. None of the wiring was usable and many of the breakers were defective. Lewis Bumpus, director of the Williamson County Solid Waste Department, was on the trip with us and led the charge to see that the job was done right. With Doug Fuqua as his able bodied assistant they, along with several others, including some of our Nicaragua friends, completely rewired the entire building. All of the classrooms now have new



switches, receptacles, and light fixtures. All of the outside switches and lights were replaced as well.

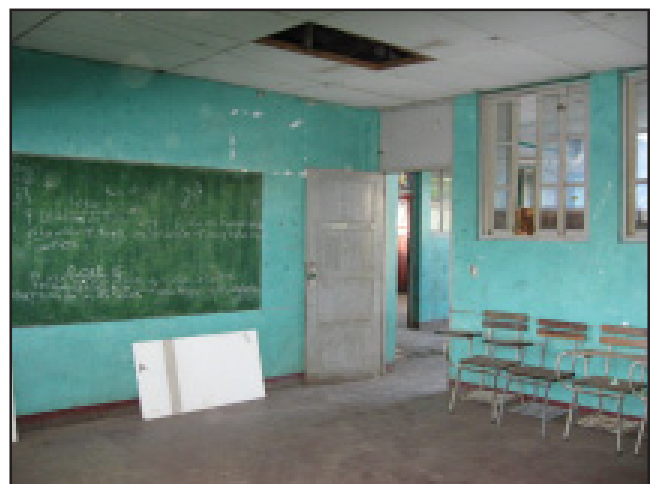


We replaced over 150 window panes that were broken and we were able to buy expanded metal and place it over the entire window areas to protect from future breakage. If Paul Bonner ever decides to leave the ministry, he could have a career in windows.

All of the classrooms were thoroughly cleaned and painted including trim and windows. Only one of the classrooms had a whiteboard. The other five had green chalkboards that were very worn out. We were able to replace all of the greenboards with whiteboards and leave them with an ample supply of dry-erase markers and erasers.

Most of the toilets had no seats and many of them were leaking or had other problems with hardware. We were able to replace all of the seats and get all of the toilets in full working order.

Almost all of the doors on the classrooms were severely damaged and had structural problems. None of them had working locks or handles. We replaced all of the doors with new ones including all new handles and locks.





We purchased 3 new 8 foot long white plastic tables and folding chairs to set up a computer lab in one of the classrooms with the 6 computers that were donated, along with all new monitors. This lab is in the other building in which we did not do any work.

A new fiberglass basketball backboard and pole were purchased for the school along with 6 basketballs and 3 soccer balls. They were being installed on the day we had to leave.



We purchased a new microwave oven for the kitchen, brought with us a brand new 21 inch TV with built-in DVD and VCR players, and we were able to leave the school with some money. There were many tools that were purchased or donated that were also left there for future use.

On Saturday before New Years, we visited a volcano near the town of Masaya. It was an awesome experience.



We also were able to connect with a group of Methodist high school students from the Northeast Jurisdiction who were on a “Mission of Peace”. They visited our work project and helped us for several hours before we ate lunch together. Having an extra 24 workers (including the Bishop) was a great asset to our project. It was like having an extra day of work accomplished. We met with them again several days later for an evening of pizza, singing, and fellowship.



On one day after we had finished working, we visited a very poor “barrio” or “neighborhood” where Hazol, the 18 year old daughter of Felipe Hidalgo lives. Felipe and his wife Teresa live in Nashville and have visited our congregation several times. He hasn’t been able to see his daughter for almost 15 years and he has never seen any of his grandchildren. We were able to deliver a package of things from Felipe and also gift her with \$200.00. She has a two month old baby boy named David, and has no source of income. It was one of those “God moments” where there wasn’t a dry eye on the bus.



Many of us feel like the highlight of the trip was staying in the homes of the Nicaraguans. Their hospitality was wonderful and we all feel like we have another family in Nicaragua.

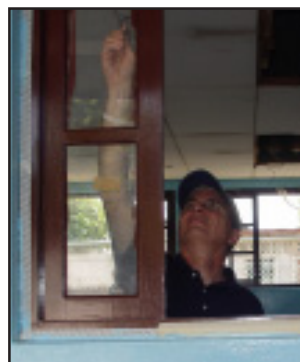
There are too many stories to tell and many of us have different interpretations of what we experienced. What we can tell you is that we made an incredible difference in the school. The group worked amazingly well together and we accomplished far more than any of us ever dreamed was possible.

We surely felt the power of your prayers and support. This is an

amazing congregation and together we have been the presence of Christ to our sisters and brothers in Nicaragua. Rosa Amanda, the president of the board that runs the school, could not thank us enough. On the last night she told us that she has been struggling for several years with what to do about the school and the many challenges they face. She shared with us that she finally told God that she could not do it by herself and needed some help and an answer to her prayers. She assured us, that we were that answer. I kind of think, maybe we were.

On Sunday, February 18th during the Sunday School hour, we will share with the congregation about the trip. There's nothing like a good "first hand" story, and we've got a bunch of them to tell. God is alive and well in Nicaragua. God is also very alive and well at Christ United Methodist Church in Franklin, Tennessee.

Stay tuned. The story has just begun!



**Bishop Pete Weaver**  
**N.E. Jurisdiction**



“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!” *Isaiah 6:8*

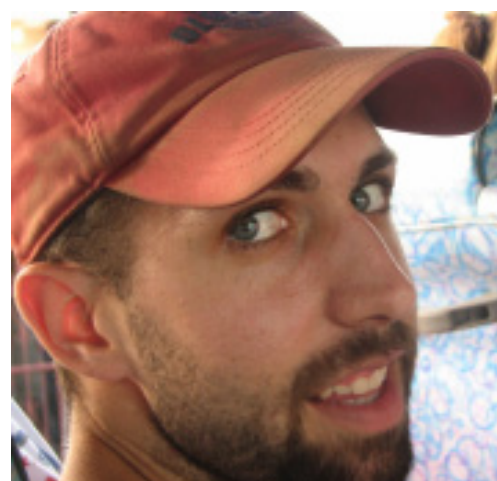
Danny Bonn • Paul Bonner • Amy Bonner • Lewis Bumpus  
Gene Gotton • MARNIE COTTON • Christopher Davis  
Doug Fuqua • Jennifer Fuqua • Blair Hamburg  
Whitney Lovell • LAUREN MASON • Farrah Myrick • Susan Nail  
Sarah Polycarpou • SCOTT WOFFORD • BETTY WHITE • Les White



It was an awesome experience and although I was away from my wife and kids for 9 days, which was hard, I was able to make friendships with both people from Nicaragua and those that went from the states that will last a lifetime. I may have missed my family back home but the people of Nicaragua made me feel like I was part of their family. **Danny Bonn**

The experience I had in Nicaragua was incredible. It is not something you can sum up in a few sentences...too much was done and too many experiences were had, however my favorite part of the trip was feeling as if I had truly become a member of our Nicaraguan host family. To be accepted into another family and welcomed with such open arms was an amazing feeling...especially in another country.

**Amy Bonner**



When I think of Nicaragua, I see the faces of my new friends and family. I feel the warmth from their embrace. I hear the joy from their laughter as we play, sing, and dance. I remember their hospitality and love, their patience and courage, their humble gratitude, strength and hope. I see their tears. Most of all, I remember their faith... the faith we share along this difficult journey. **Paul Bonner**



Since I am a Second Grade school teacher, working on a school was extra-special to me! It felt so good to see the clean walls, gleaming white boards, and the lights bright and cheerful. The children's joy, as they went from room to room, was so rewarding. But, my heart broke when I saw their library...they had so few books. They all could be placed on one small shelf. It is very hard to instill the joy of reading without books. My next goal is to collect more Spanish books for our special school.

**Marnie Cotton**



Every time I go to Nicaragua it is an amazing experience. The power of love overcoming the most difficult of circumstances. It's a wonderful place and the people are incredible. I am convinced that if we are to hope for a better world, we must go and be present to hurting people. **Gene Cotton**



While in Nicaragua, I was impressed with the hospitality of the families we stayed with, the support of the school, and the local church. Several of the local family members and church members worked together in the team to complete the mission. They gave of their time and talents to the project for the betterment of the youth of their community, even though they have no one attending the school. I was also very impressed with our group. Some of the group had never met yet we became an instant family and team. We worked very well together on each of the project's goals. Some worked on specific goals while others had the talent to jump in on any of the goals which needed assistance. The total project was so great it moved the school administrators to tears of joy. I was amazed at the team effort of all us together could make a major difference in such a short time. Thank You for the opportunity. **Lewis Bumpus**

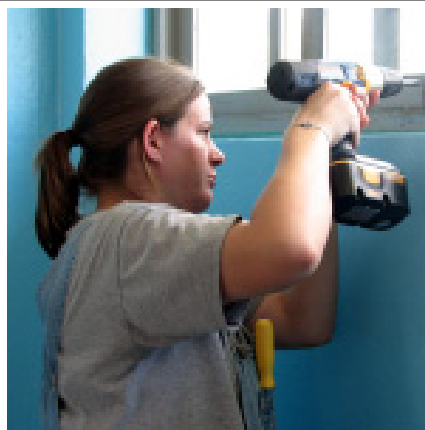
The recent trip to Nicaragua was an amazing experience on so many levels. The people are some of the most welcoming and hospitable people that I have ever met. The faith expressed by all parties involved in the project was inspiring. The work that was accomplished in 9 days was incredible. I am so blessed to have been a part of such an experience. I can't wait until the day I get to see my new Nicaraguan family again!!! **Doug Fuqua**



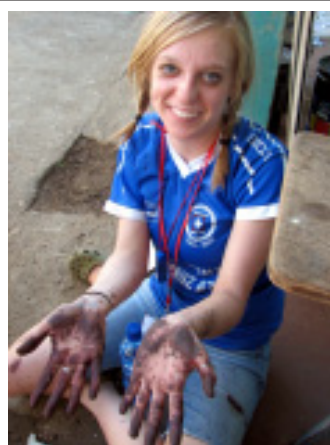
This was my first mission trip ever, so I was very anxious as to what to expect. I knew we would work hard and give to others...what I didn't expect was to get back the love, hospitality and memories that will last a lifetime. We gave them hope for their future. They gave us hope that everyone can make a difference, including us. Amazing. **Jen Fuqua**

To fully describe what I experienced and felt in Nicaragua would take up pages and pages. But to sum it up, I had an awesome time. It truly was an opportunity of a lifetime that I recommend everyone try to experience at some point in their lives. The teamwork and relationships built were wonderful, as well as the friendliness and hospitality we received by our host families and the community. But what I appreciated more than anything above all of the experiences was what I learned. While over there it became apparent to me that love and faith should be the main drives in our lives. The families and children (although poor from external views) were full of love and faith which truly enriches everyone's life who comes in contact with them. With genuine love and faith, everything will be the way it is supposed to be. People's lives are different but we're all in it together. **Chris Davis**





I really loved getting to know and be apart of my host family. The people of Nicaragua are so hospitable. Our host family gave Lauren and me their only bed and their nicest room. They took us in and made us feel apart of their family. I am so thankful for the Nicaraguan people and the love they showed to me. I had a great time with my friends, made many new ones, and learned about the culture of Nicaragua. But most importantly, I was able to help other people, and show God's love. **Whitney Lovell**



Traveling to Nicaragua was an eye-opening experience. There were many frustrations along the way; however, seeing the hope in the eyes of the children and school administrators was truly unforgettable. **Blair Hamburg**

Nicaragua was my sixth mission trip. After every mission trip you feel moved and changed because you have a new experience that has changed your life and your opinion on life but none have affected me as much as Nicaragua has. The people are all friendly. I was welcomed immediately by our host family and they never stopped asking if there was something else they could do for us.



On most mission trips you work as your group and that's all, but having the Nicaraguans work with us, made the experience worth so much more. I knew I was helping for a good cause and you could tell they were so happy we were there. Even with the language barrier I was still able to communicate with the director, Rosa Amanda, and the custodian, Ricardo. On the last night when all the work that could be done was done, Rosa Amanda talked with us, and I realized what a rewarding experience I was having and was grateful to have been able to go on this trip. I will never forget the memories I have with my host family, the group from our church, and many of the other people who helped us. **Lauren Mason**



My experience in Nicaragua was one of both joy and of sadness. I enjoyed so much going into a school that was so run down, and in the end making it into something so beautiful and safe for the kids of that neighborhood. The experience that touches my heart so much was when my roommates and I were sitting around in the evening conversing with Lula and she was talking with us (through Leonardo, our translator). She told us that even though there is a language barrier that separates us, she felt so close to us and we have touched her heart so much because we cared so much to include her and to actually talk to her and her son. Every moment in Nicaragua was so enjoyable, but it was really when I got back to my home that I really came to the appreciation of what I have right now in my life and the many opportunities that I have in the United States. **Farrah Myrick**



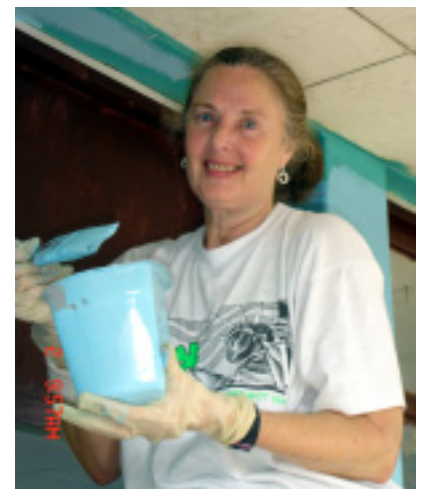
Nicaragua was AWESOME ! It was definitely an experience I would recommend to everyone. Getting to know the people, their culture and trying to speak the language was something I'll never forget. Being able to see the faces of those we helped and those lives we touched (I believe that was every Nicaraguan I came in contact with) was a life changing event for me. I hope to return to see my "family" and "friends" very soon. It's amazing how much everyone connected to each other (both Americans who went and the Nicaraguans there). It really felt like we "ALL" were family! It was a wonderful experience and I thank you for letting me be a part of it. **Susan Nail**

When I first signed up for the trip I had no idea who was going, what we would be doing, or where we would be staying. All I knew were the dates and the destination. Now, the trip is over and I am so glad that I chose to spend my holidays in Nicaragua. In such a short time I learned so much about Nicaraguan culture, I made so many personal relationships with fellow mission trippers and Nicaraguans, and we made so much progress on the school. This trip was my first exposure to poverty and it was very eye opening to see that none of the people we talked to had the things we take for granted in the US. In Nicaragua they don't have good healthcare, free education, a real justice system, or police force. We should be more grateful of such "necessities", instead of having the mindset that we deserve certain things. I am so grateful for the amazing experience I had in Nicaragua including all my new friends and the hard work and memories we shared together! **Scott Wofford**



What an experience of a life time..... Nicaragua. I had no idea what a humble, caring, and grateful people I would meet while in Nicaragua. What an experience having the opportunity to travel to another country to help people in need, with people you didn't know who became people you will never forget. Challenges like breaking the language barrier, which proved to be complicated and comical at times, learning to try new foods you would never have tried before, and never really knowing if you were going to have running water, all made the trip that more exciting! Helping transform a school into a place where kids and teachers are excited and proud to come to is heart warming. The power of the human touch by a group of people from Williamson County will never be forgotten by the people of Nicaragua we helped. It was a trip of a lifetime!! **Sarah Polycarpou**

I feel as if a small pocket of my life escaped to another time and place—Nicaragua. The people I met (especially Rosa), the school renovation, the church we visited, basically all the sights, sounds, and smells of Nicaragua hold memories I'll cherish forever. Most of all, though, the graciousness of the people and the sense of hope in the children's eyes fill me with joy and a longing to return. Truly we experienced the greatness of God's love and the truism that "with God all things are possible." **Betty White**





I have tried to come up with the right adjectives when a friend or coworker asks me about our mission trip. I think it goes without saying that one word or words alone cannot describe everything I felt and experienced. I was impressed by our group as I have never done any project where everyone was as focused and hard working. I was overwhelmed by the hospitality and acceptance of the families we stayed with, their feelings were very genuine. I felt most touched by what we had accomplished when we were standing in the school yard on our last night and I saw the tears rolling down Rosa Amanda's face. And yes, I do want to return. **Les White**

.....and the beat goes on.....

**A**s you can read, this trip has really had a profound impact on our lives. Many of us want to go back again. We will continue to have creative discussions as to how we can best serve the needs of the school and our new community in Nicaragua. There are a few things that need to be finished on the classroom building that we worked on, and there is another building (2 stories) that needs a similar facelift.

There is also a tremendous need for scholarships for students. The school currently has an enrollment of 161 students. They have the capacity for 139 more. It costs \$300.00 to send a student for one year. This includes tuition, two sets of uniforms, and two pairs of shoes. Because Christ United Methodist Church is supporting so many projects and, currently undergoing a capital campaign for our new building, I am looking outside our congregation to try and fill this need. We will talk further about this in our committee meetings.

We will hold an Outreach Committee meeting soon and we will set a time when the Nicaragua Committee can get together. We will then begin the process of setting our short-term and long range goals and plans. If you are reading this and you are currently not involved with the Nicaragua Committee, but would like to be, please contact me at 794-5712 or email me at [gene5712@aol.com](mailto:gene5712@aol.com).

This is an exciting time for Christ United Methodist Church. Our emphasis on reaching out to others and our theme of "It's about relationships", continues to keep us centered and focused on what is important; sharing God's love! This congregation is absolutely awesome, and the prayers and support we felt in Nicaragua were very real. As I held 2 month old David in my arms, walking down that dirt road surrounded by trash and garbage everywhere, I was reminded of another baby born over two thousand years ago under similar circumstances. As I stepped onto the bus to introduce David to our group, tears were flowing down my cheeks, and the cheeks of everyone on the bus. I was so proud and so humbled at the same time, to be a part of a congregation that cares enough about "the least of these" to send a group to Nicaragua to paint walls and ceilings, repair electrical lines and fixtures, clean and fix toilets, replace broken doors and windows, and yes, to hold a newborn baby for someone who can't. This, indeed, was truly a gift from God. Thanks to all of you for allowing us to experience it.

# NICARAGUA

## *Crisis In Education*

### *Opportunity To Make A Difference*



- Of those elementary school students that do attend school, 70% do not go beyond 6th grade.



- 15,000 children between the ages 7 and 14 live on the streets in Managua.

### **Education**

- 34% of Nicaraguans are illiterate, in rural areas this is 46%.
- The national average for years of schooling is only 3.5 years.
- Over half of school-age children do not (cannot) attend class.



*Centro Alternativo Proyecto 19 de Julio*



*Young girl works cleaning windshields*

- Six of every 10 urban children go to school, one of every 10 rural children go to school.



- The mission trip in December gave Christ United Methodist Church an opportunity to make an incredible difference in this school.



**It's about relationships**



# NICARAGUA

## *The People and Their History*

### *Opportunity For Understanding*

As we continue to create new possibilities of ministry in Nicaragua, I think it's important for us to have a sense what the country is like, who the people are, and an idea of the pivotal historical events that have brought the country to where it is today.

Located in Central America, Nicaragua is bordered on the north by Honduras, the south by Costa Rica, the west by the North Pacific Ocean, and the east by the Caribbean Sea. It is the largest country in Central America with a total land area of 129,494 sq. km (a little smaller than the state of New York).

Most of Nicaragua is rural with an agrarian based economy. Primary crops are coffee, bananas, sugarcane, cotton, rice, tobacco, soya, beans, beef, veal, pork, poultry and dairy products. Its main industries are food processing, chemicals, machinery, metal products, textiles, clothing, petroleum, beverages, and wood. The government of Nicaragua is a Republic.

When Columbus landed on the Atlantic coast of what is now Nicaragua in 1502, most of the region was inhabited by indigenous peoples. The Spanish founded permanent settlements in 1522, and within 30 years from this date, the aboriginal population fell from an estimated one million to a few tens of thousands. For 300 years thereafter, Nicaragua was ruled from the Spanish empire's regional capital of Guatemala. Independence from Spain was declared in 1821. Throughout its history, Nicaragua has been divided both geographically and culturally between East and West. The Pacific coast, where today about 90% of the population lives, was colonized by the Spanish. In the late 17th century, the Atlantic coast fell under the British sphere of influence and is mostly inhabited by Miskito Amerindians and English-speaking blacks. Most of the Atlantic coast was not incorporated into Nicaragua until the early 1900s, and no road connected the two coasts until the 1980s.

As the original site of the proposed trans-isthmus canal, Nicaragua was always carefully watched by the world powers.

U.S. Marines invaded Nicaragua on numerous occasions in the 19th century and again in the early 20th century. Beginning in 1927, General Augusto César Sandino fought the occupying



*Typical rural village home*

U.S. Marines until they left in 1933. Sandino was murdered in 1934 by the head of the National Guard, Anastasio Somoza. From then until 1979, Somoza and his family ruled Nicaragua like a fiefdom.

In 1978 and 1979, structural injustice and repression spurred mass insurrections which the National Guard brutally put down, killing 30,000 to 50,000 people.

Opposition to the Somoza regime was organized by the Sandinista National Liberation Front, which came to power in July 1979 after a brief war. The Sandinistas nationalized the land and commercial interests of the Somoza family and their close associates (roughly 20% of arable land and industry), and carried out extensive agrarian reform. Sandinista health and literacy campaigns in the early years of



*The main highway that connects the east to the west*

the new government won worldwide acclaim. From 1982 to 1989, Nicaragua was again immersed in war when the Reagan administration supported a heavily-armed counter-revolutionary movement. Though unable to win political power, the “contras” terrorized the countryside and inflicted great damage to the economy. A U.S. embargo brought further hardship to the country.

Most of the fighting ended with the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, which resulted from a war weariness and political ineptness. The country had been ravaged and profoundly polarized by the long years of fighting. Today, Nicaragua is second only to Haiti as the poorest country in the western hemisphere. There is an astonishing unemployment rate of upwards to 76% and over 70% of the country’s children do not attend school beyond the 6th grade.

Between dictators, wars, revolutions, counter-revolutions, volcanic eruptions, an earthquake that nearly leveled the entire capitol city of Managua in 1972, numerous hurricanes (especially hurricane Mitch in 1998 that took thousands of lives and left the entire infrastructure of the country in rubble), it is amazing to me to find the kind of faith and spirit very alive in the people of Nicaragua. I am always humbled by their celebration of life in the midst of despair.

I have been going to Nicaragua since 1990 on various mission trips and work projects. At first it was to “help those people”, but early on, I learned it was me who got the help. I have come to understand the meaning of God’s love in a new light, as I have gotten to know the people of this wonderful country.

***(Psalm 41:1-3) “Happy are those who consider the poor”***

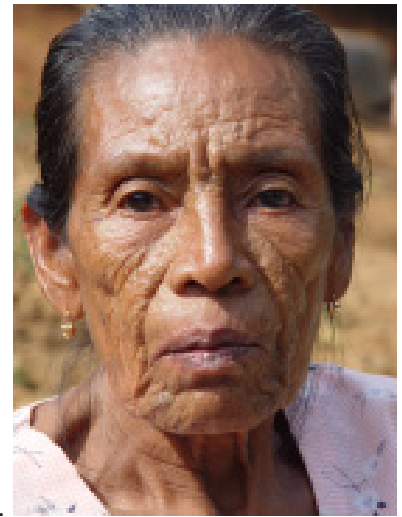




1.



2.



3.



4.

5.



6.

- 1. Typical village home on east coast
- 2. Old church in Managua
- 3. East coast Miskito Indian woman
- 4. Pastor Santos in front of church
- 5. Typical rural village home
- 6. Woman doing laundry in river
- 7. Typical rural kitchen
- 8. Girls carrying water to home

7.



8.



# Sign from God

*by Betty White*

Blotches of super glue and melted paper cascade to the floor  
after living on institutional green, concrete walls,  
replaced by sky blue, anxious for children to appear.

Shards of glass and wire and paper and tin succumb to the rake and broom  
outside the tired gate, renewed by strokes of mischief and love;

Electrical wires dangling from gaping holes in the jagged ceiling tiles  
give way to bright, energy-efficient coils;

Slick green boards encrusted with tape and math problems waiting to be solved,  
replaced by sparkling white boards, on renewed foundations, stretched free of  
bubbles framed in silver awaiting the delight of teachers;

Broken ceiling tiles replaced by new rectangles, or even a triangle,  
specifically created to fill that void, renewed with coats of white latex;

Worn-down, plugged toilets, barely hidden behind splintered doors,  
sparkle once more as patterns emerge on ceramic tile;

Scraping and scraping and scraping painted windows until they gleam,  
Painting and repainting as dust and dirt reappear;  
Painting and retouching and retouching again.  
Walls, sills, doors, windows, trim, ceilings,  
cleaning paint from the floor and the walk and the ground.

Computers connected with electricity magically installed  
in only the blink of an eye;

A solitary book resting on a small child's chair,  
joined by friends, still waiting for a home.

Pride and Humility

Recognition and Wonderment

Joy and Amazement merge as we know

*"We are One in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord"*

with the people of Nicaragua,

the children of the school,

the teachers and staff of Centro Alternativo

Los niños listen intently to Gene;

the school becomes theirs, their responsibility, their mission

Rosa's prayer is answered, a sign from God.

The Miracle of 9 days in Nicaragua