

# NICARAGUA

## *Opportunity For Missions*

by Gene Cotton



The Nicaragua Project is a Christ United Methodist community to community ministry that seeks long-term involvement from individuals to be participants in on-going projects in Nicaragua that foster life, give hope, and help to bring about a world where peace and justice are attained in tangible ways.

Past projects have involved outfitting a dental clinic, eye glasses for underserved communities, on-going scholarship funding for students to go to primary and secondary schools, as well as college, drinking water wells, self sustainability loans for micro-

businesses such as a bakery in Posotega run by eleven women, on-going medical supplies for a rural health care organization, computers for schools, and other self sustainability projects.

The current effort is a four year project to rehab a school in a poor neighborhood in Managua, the capitol city. The school is **“Centro Alternativo Proyecto 19 de Julio”** and serves mainly poor children, grades K thru 12, many who are street children who are offered full scholarships. We are currently entering the fourth year of this project. Three teams have gone down for the past three years to rehab the two buildings at the school.

The teams stay in the homes of Nicaraguan families. Many of the family members, as well as teachers from the school and other people that we have built relationships with over the years, work side by side with the teams on this project. The host family experience and the joint working effort have done more for breaking down walls and barriers and building relationships than any other aspect of the project.

Before we talk about the possibilities of a work project in Nicaragua, I think it’s important for us to have a sense what the county 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.



*Typical rural village home*

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 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.



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



*Sunday morning worship service*

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 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.

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Most of the fighting ended with the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, which resulted from 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 who go to school, 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.



*Children help take care of children in Nicaragua*



*Centro Alternativo Proyecto 19 de Julio*

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 life in a new light, as I have gotten to know the people of this wonderful country.

After many trips and experiences, I felt like there was still something missing in our relationship with the people we were working with. No one actually said this to me, but what I interpreted from conversations that I was having was, "You people always come down here and

*do these work projects and bring all these wonderful gifts, and don't get us wrong, we love what you have done for us, but nobody ever comes here just to visit or just to be with us".* The next trip we made, my wife Marnie and I spent the Christmas and New Year Holidays with our friends. No agenda, no work projects, and it was the most amazing experience we have ever had!

People have asked me, "Do I have to be a member of a church to go on one of these trips?", and the answer is no. Although the Nicaragua Project is a faith based organization, no one is ever excluded. We have taken many people who have no relationship to a church or community of faith.

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## *The Nicaragua Project*

*For All That Is Possible*



● 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*

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



- The Nicaragua Project has an opportunity to make an incredible difference in this school.



*Young girl works cleaning windshields*

### **December 2009 Trip**

As I mentioned, the current project is rehabbing a school in a poor neighborhood in Managua. The trips that we have made the past three years have really made a huge difference in the school. We have re-wired both of the buildings at the school, along with new plugs, light switches, and fixtures, painted all of the classrooms, new doors on all classrooms, installed white boards in the classrooms, installed new roofs on both buildings, created a library, provided over \$45,000.00 in scholarships, funded the salary of the school director, provided numerous college scholarships, set up a computer lab, purchased uniforms and shoes for students, tooth brushes and dental supplies, eyeglasses for students and people in the community where the school is located, provided sporting gear, a new basketball backboard and pole, clothing, office equipment and supplies, prepared a room for an Internet Café, as well as contributing thousands of dollars to the local economy.

This year we will be painting the exterior of the building, landscaping, repainting any areas inside that need touch-up work, complete the installation of the Internet Café, installing a new roof on the home of one of the school's administrators, as well as other small maintenance projects.

### ***Making The Commitment***

What our brothers and sisters in Nicaragua don't need, is someone who is going to flash in and out of their lives for 15 minutes so they can feel good about "*having done something*". What they do need is people who are going to enter into long term partnerships that are going to make a real difference not only in their lives, but in life of their country. This is why the Nicaragua Project has been creating possibilities since 1990. We are in it for the "long haul".

### ***Trip Information***

We plan to leave **December 26th and return January 3rd**. We would love to take 15 to 20 people this year. Some people will come for the entire trip, while others will only stay 4 or 5 days. Several people will stay a little longer. We will take you for whatever amount of time you can give.

We stay in the homes of Nicaraguan families, and we eat breakfast and dinner in the homes. We eat lunch at the school. We will probably go out to eat together as a group several times. We give the families \$10.00 per day that we stay in their homes. This helps with the food they provide, as well as give them some extra money. Everyone contributes \$5.00 a day towards lunch food and \$50.00 towards the bus that takes us back and forth each day. We will also do a day trip to a volcano, and that will cost approximately \$20.00.

Below is a good estimate on what the trip will cost:

Airfare .....	Depending on departure, somewhere between \$650 and \$ 1,000.00
Food and Lodging in homes @ \$10.00 per day X 10 .....	100.00
Day Trip .....	20.00
Misc. Expenses, souvenirs, etc. ....	75.00
Bus .....	50.00
Lunch \$5.00 per day X 10 days .....	50.00

So roughly somewhere between \$945.00 and \$1,295.00 would be your total cost for the trip.

If you want to go on this trip, you need to contact me as soon as possible to work out the details. My contact information is as follows:

Gene Cotton  
3411 Sweeney Hollow Road  
Franklin, TN 37064  
(615) 794-5712 (Home)  
(615) 804-0153  
gene5712@aol.com

Please feel free to contact me at anytime. Also, be aware that the longer you wait to purchase your ticket, the more expensive it becomes. The rates are always higher during the Holiday Season.

This is an exciting life-changing possibility for your life. There have been few people who have made this trip whose lives have not been profoundly changed. I have been going to Nicaragua since 1990, and I know the difference this is going to make in the lives of the children at the school, as well as the difference that it is going to make in the lives of you who make the trip .

For those of you who will go on the trip, there is further information that you need to know in terms of what kind of clothing to bring, contact info in Nicaragua, etc. You will not need any special shots or visa, but you will need a passport. If you plan to go and don't have a passport, I would urge you to apply for one as soon as possible.

### ***What Else You Can Do***

Whether you can go or not, there are other things that you can do. You can make a donation. All gifts are tax deductible. Checks should be made out to The Nicaragua Project and sent to:

Gene Cotton  
The Nicaragua Project  
c/o Christ United Methodist Church  
508 Franklin Road  
Franklin, TN 37069

Please email me if you are making a donation, so we can keep track of your gift.

Every single dollar that is donated, goes towards the project. There are no administration fees or other costs associated with our work in Nicaragua. 100% of the money goes to Nicaragua, and I



must tell you we work very hard to turn a nickel into a dollar.

There are other needs as well. We need computers for the school (ones that run at least Windows 2000 or Windows XP), flat screen monitors, computer networking gear, school supplies, children's clothing, especially white blouses, white shirts, blue skirts and blue pants (this is the school uniform), office supplies, musical instruments, any kind of

childrens books in Spanish, and any kind of kitchen utensils, plastic or metal.

And most importantly, you can pray. Pray for the people of Nicaragua, pray for our team members who will go this year, and pray that as we share God's love through this ministry, people will be drawn to Him.

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



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



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7.

- 1. Typical village home on east coast
- 2. Old church in Managua
- 3. East coast Miskito Indian woman
- 4. Leonardo Montenegro, one of the students we have put through college
- 5. Typical rural village home
- 6. Woman doing laundry in river
- 7. Typical rural kitchen
- 8. Girls carrying water from river to home

8.

