

2016 Annual Conference Report

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The seeds for the Nicaragua Covenant (NC) were planted with a Mission of Peace 30 years ago when a few of New England's United Methodists were emboldened by the Holy Spirit to travel to a then war torn country and witness for themselves what they could do to help our neighbors in Nicaragua. Friendships were made, partnerships were formed, and mission programs were planted from these relationships. The Nicaragua Covenant's oldest partnership is with the indigenous *Iglesia de Cristo de Nicaragua (AICN)*. In 2005 we began to engage the emerging *Evangelical Methodist Church of Nicaragua*. Today we are blessed to play a supporting role in nurturing the rapid growth of the Methodist Church in Nicaragua, while still supporting many of the legacy AICN programs that serve to meet the vital needs of the poor.



For those who have not yet engaged with God's children in Nicaragua, let me briefly share what your church can witness, or how they can serve the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters in Nicaragua. At any of our three feeding programs in poor barrios, you can witness your Conference's work of feeding children's bodies and minds. Generous donations from your churches allowed the NC to serve 55,000 nutritious rice/soy meals to hungry children in 2015. The Nicaragua Covenant also provides food supplements to a program (*Mercy Plate*) that serves food to the elderly and homebound.

In an effort to empower women and offer a path to self-sufficiency, our two remaining legacy sewing programs are a source of hope for many women, and a few young men, in the communities they serve. Two years ago, the young woman looking at the camera in the photo below had just started attending the sewing school at the La Colonia AICN Church. She had been abandoned by her husband and left with her two children and she hoped to start her own business. This picture was taken in April of this year, she is smiling now because she is operating a small seamstress business from her home, and is able to provide for her family. In a spirit of gratitude to give others the same opportunity, she now volunteers as a teaching assistant at the sewing school.



In the area of education, your donations helped equip 11 teachers to serve 227 children in 4 very poor communities this year. We have had three mission teams in recent months, and two more scheduled for the summer of 2016 that will be working to improve the material conditions at the schools we support. This type of volunteer in mission labor, has helped us defray costs, and more importantly it has built stronger partnerships.

The flagship program of the NC is Amanecer Mobile Health Clinic (AMHC). Your Conference operates the largest and most far reaching Mobile Health Clinic in Central America, serving a population of 45,000 with more than 22,000 medical and dental patient contacts in the past year. The mobile clinic is



the organizations primary focus for funding and operations. The NC board of directors are confident that this program is meeting the most urgent needs of Nicaraguans today. Numerous sources, and reams of data, have validated the life-saving, and positive impact of our clinic on the 30 communities it serves.

The Nicaragua Covenant's holistic approach to health care includes fixing the cause of so many illnesses that our medical professionals treat in the field. With the help of churches like Trinity UMC, in Springfield, MA extensive, and often expensive, clean water and sanitation projects have been completed in several rural villages.

Unfortunately, more than half of the villages served by our health clinic still drink, cook, and bathe infants in water that is polluted with E-coli, parasites, and other contaminants. The NC has been purchasing Sawyer water filter systems (\$47 per kit) as an interim solution to well drilling. The filters provide families with safe drinking water. In April of this year, the Aldersgate UMC of Chelmsford, MA purchased, assembled, and delivered 101 Sawyer filter systems to the rural community of La Conquista. Thanks to the efforts of these New England Methodists, every family in the community now has a source of safe drinking water. Our hope is to provide safe drinking water in all 30 communities that our clinic serves.

In the past year-and-a-half eighteen Mission Teams, or nearly 300 people have been hosted by the fantastic staff in Nicaragua. All visitors have been kept safe and healthy, and the vast majority had an amazing short term mission experience. One recent traveler shared this, she said,

“I want to thank the Nicaragua Covenant for the experience. I looked in the mirror tonight and the face that looked back at me was not the old one. As I have been told at the start of this trip, Nicaragua changes you... and indeed it has.”

The projects completed by working 50-50 with our Nicaraguan brothers and sisters are too numerous to mention, but they included: major water projects, the building and installation of dual pit sustainable latrines, manufacturing and installation of low-fuel wood stoves, reforestation projects, and construction, and repairs of schools and church buildings.

The beautiful Quinta Amanecer mission house was purchased for us by a wealthy donor in 2014. It offers a very secure and comfortable location for our staff to work, and it can accommodate groups as large as 23. The house is currently on the market, and the NC hopes to sell it soon. In January of 2015, the NC lost the clinic's largest donor, this left us with a large funding gap. We



We have narrowed that gap through austerity measures, and finding some new sources of revenue, but would like to use the proceeds to provide a more secure foundation for our mission programs. We feel that our opportunities for grants are very good in 2017, and we plan to use the money from the sale of the house to buy the time needed to obtain more sustainable sources of revenue.

We need your help! If every church in the New England Conference could find a way to donate to the Nicaragua Covenant in 2016, we would be able to keep providing this quality of medical care and programs in 2017 and beyond.

As trees during a drought, we believe that our roots have grown deeper and our programs are better than ever. Many thanks to our past donors, current donors, and new donors... as we are the arms and feet of Christ serving our oppressed neighbors in a distant land. Please help us continue to serve.

You can learn more, or donate to the Nicaragua Covenant's GBGM Advance at www.nicaraguacovenant.org