Church Together

**Truckee Lutheran Presbyterian Church returns from a mission partnership in Nicaragua**

It was one of the most inspiring ten days of our lives. Our 2020 Nicaragua Mission Team of 21 strong flew to Managua and spent the night at the Nehemiah House, home of our Nicaraguan Ecumenical Partner CEPAD. Founded in 1972 after the 6.3 earthquake shattered the nation, CEPAD showed the world the power of the Christian Community. In four days after their founding, volunteers were feeding over 30,000 people. In the ensuing decades, CEPAD has supported schools, colleges and agricultural programs throughout the nation.

On day 2, we drove to our village in San Francisco Libre, the high desert countryside registering the highest on the poverty index in a nation that is the second poorest in our hemisphere. Our village has no running water, and the women cook over open fires. This is our 6th year in partnership with the village and our friendship runs deep. Children had walked 5 km to stand on the dirt path that serves as the road to the village with a huge sign that read Bienvenido! We stayed at homes with dirt floors swept immaculately clean, Baby chicks scurrying under tables in the kitchen areas, dogs and cats wandering in and out. It is a bit like Eden, with all the animals seemingly to live in harmony. Leanora cooked for us all, delicious plates heaped with rice and beans and huge slices of fresh papaya and mango, all cooked over an open fire. Angelica made her honey cheese cornbread in her beehive oven, all with ingredients from their Finca. Donald brought over a huge bucket filled with Guavas, each carefully wrapped with newspapers to keep them from getting burned by the tropical sun. Words cannot describe the generosity.
We visited the two small schools in the village bringing huge duffle bags of school supplies, learning that the government was not able to provide the schools with their yearly box of supplies, the teachers were teaching with no books, papers or pens. We donated a new white board to each school and to the joy of the children, a huge bag of sports equipment, bats and balls and baseball gloves. Recess was immediately called, and our team all joined in the fun. We learned that you never outgrow recess!

At one of the schools we discovered that the well was broken, and the children had no water. No water at a school was unacceptable and even harder to imagine. One of our members went into action, driving miles to a nearby town and purchasing a new pump. The local well mechanic donated his labor to help the school. Following our school visits, we grabbed pickaxes and shovels and joined members of the community digging two new water reservoirs providing catch basins for precious water during the rainy season. Our Nicaraguan hosts were very gracious, giving us a turn at the shovels even though they could dig faster than all of us.

At the meeting with the village Elders we were formally greeted by Community Leader, Erasmo. Nicaraguans are a very formal people, and sitting under a tree, with herd of cattle sauntering by, we were given a heartfelt welcome speech. Last year, the Elders had shared their vision for our partnership and this year our team presented shoes for the youth of the village, 7 bicycles so students could ride the 15 km to school, 5 stainless steel latrines and $1000.00 toward building a community well for the 6 families that have no water. And just on cue, our two trucks arrive, loaded with the lumber and tin to build a much-needed shade pergola addition to the Community House.

The next morning, villagers arrived ready for work, and our Contractors plans were put into action. We worked side by side digging post holes, hauling sand from the river for the cement, and the new addition began taking shape!

On Wednesday afternoon, we all took a break, chased the cattle out of the field, set down bases and with our youth on the pitching mound we played Ball, the national sport of our two nations.

On Thursday we had a tearful goodbye to our Brothers and Sisters and boarded the bus for the second chapter of our mission trip, our partner school in Leon. The school had a beautiful Assembly for us with students reciting poems by National Poet Ruben Dario and dancing the traditional dances of Nicaragua. We were able to go to classes and enjoy teaching songs and interacting with the students. The next morning, we brought out the paint brigade and painted all the upstairs classrooms and hallway downstairs, fixed the fans and spiral staircase and turned to our Computer expert Danny to fix all the laptops we had donated four years ago.

For the first time we invited four of the students from the village to join us in Leon, and the friendships between our youth and the youth of Nicaragua was an absolute highlight. We spent a beautiful
afternoon on the beach supporting and releasing baby sea turtles from a Turtle Reserve. Watching the tenacity of the baby turtles as they crawled across the sand to the safety of the waves is a feat of hope.

It is a rare gift to have such a long term and trusting relationship with a community that is so different and yet so connected by our shared love of God. It is indeed a joy to say "Here I am Lord, Send me!"

Pastor Jeanie Shaw

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**Learn more about the Lutheran Church in Nicaragua**

Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to [mic@spselca.org](mailto:mic@spselca.org).

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The Sierra Pacific Synod
9985 Folsom Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95827-6628
916-756-1665 · 800-275-3522 · 888-789-6434 (fax)
500 Airport Blvd #442, Burlingame, CA 94010
650-590-0980 · 800-275-3522 · 888-789-6434 (fax)
[info@spselca.org](mailto:info@spselca.org) | [spselca.org](http://spselca.org)