

Nicaragua Newsletter from Nan and Miguel

United Methodist Missionaries in Nicaragua; April, 2011

"It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously— take God seriously." Micah 6:8 from *The Message*

Dear Friends,

It seems to me that we are at a crossroad in our society – a time of deciding what kind of people, what kind of nation we want to be.

Here are a few examples of the brokenness in our world that are troubling me: The unfathomable death and destruction from Japan's tsunami leaves us with radiation poisoning that will still be around long after we are gone. We have an exponential increase in climate-related disasters like the tsunami resulting from overuse of petroleum and coal. Nicaragua is the fourth most vulnerable country to disasters in the world. Here we need *"Sight for the blind"*: To change the way we live as well as invest in exploring alternatives to nuclear power, coal and petroleum, which are killing us.

Our tax dollars funded \$1.12 trillion on 10 years of war in Afghanistan and 8 years in Iraq (*CRS Report for Congress, Sept. 2, 2010*). In the first few weeks of bombing in Libya more than half a billion tax dollars were spent. These wars caused great loss of human life and massive destruction of societies. Bringing just 5,000 troops home from Afghanistan would free money up for life-giving programs for children and the elderly.

We need to restore our relationships with the rest of the world. With the destructive power of arms today, it is unconscionable to try to make changes using violence instead of diplomacy. There is just too much fall out and too many lives lost. I am happy when our tax dollars promote life in the world: clean water, education, health, housing. Why is it we spend trillions on war in the world and nothing comparable on life and development?

"The community today can be no single tradition; it is the planet. Daily the world grows smaller, leaving understanding the only place where peace can find a home."
- **Huston Smith**

Our tax dollars have so far bailed out banks to the tune of 356 billion (take a look at this CNN money website: <http://money.cnn.com/news/storystupplement/economy/bailouttracker/>). We fund wars and bailout banks while children go hungry, millions of our citizens are jobless, have had their homes taken and are in need of healthcare.

Teachers and police are losing jobs, school and social services budgets are being cut and libraries closed. This is not exactly what Jesus meant when he showed us that we need to bring *good news* to the poor and release to the oppressed.

The disparity between the rich and the poor in my country is now similar to Nicaragua:

"There is plenty of economic activity in the U.S., and plenty of wealth. But like greedy children, the folks at the top are seizing virtually all the marbles. Income and wealth inequality in the U.S. have reached stages that would make the third world blush. As the Economic Policy Institute has reported, the richest 10 percent of Americans received an unconscionable 100 percent of the average income growth in the years 2000 to 2007. Americans behave as if this is somehow normal or acceptable. It shouldn't be, and didn't used to be. Through much of the post-World War II era, income distribution was far more equitable, with the top 10 percent of families accounting for just a third of average income growth, and the bottom 90 percent receiving two-thirds. That seems like ancient history now.

The current maldistribution of wealth is also scandalous. In 2009, the richest 5 percent claimed 63.5 percent of the nation's wealth. The overwhelming majority, the bottom 80 percent, collectively held just 12.8 percent.

This inequality, in which an enormous segment of the population struggles while the fortunate few ride the gravy train, is a world-class recipe for social unrest. Downward mobility is an ever-shortening fuse leading to profound consequences."
Bob Herbert, NYT, March 25

What kind of Society do we want to be? Can we commit to care for one another?

As Christians We know we must prioritize the needs of the poor. Our United Methodist church has made eradicating poverty a focus area for our collective ministries. So what are we waiting for? I continue to believe that we can make a difference! We can build community to find creative solutions, to help us reduce our consumption and our carbon footprint, to influence our representatives away from war and tax breaks for the wealthy and towards job creation, education, health, safety nets for the poor and elderly and innovation for the future of our children. Everything we do, every small kindness, makes a difference and helps bring about the reign of God here on earth. Even though at

this point in time it is hard to imagine, we must do what we can do to bring it about among us.

“I am glad, brothers and sisters, that our church is persecuted precisely for its preferential option for the poor and for trying to become incarnate in the interest of the poor and for saying to all the people, to rulers, to the rich and powerful: unless you become poor, unless you have a concern for the poverty of our people as though they were your own family, you will not be able to save society.” – Archbishop Oscar Romero, July 15, 1979

Youth Network for Gender Equity 2010 Report

Objective: *To promote and disseminate respect for human rights in the framework of equality and equity between men and women, youth, adults, girls and boys*

The Youth Network for Gender Equity in San Francisco Libre had 50 active members in 2010.

The youth have become protagonists in their communities and develop actions to prevent violence against children, youth and women. They are from twenty-five rural villages in the municipality (like a large rural county in the US). Each village has two representatives who attend meetings, workshops and reflections together every month. They return to their village with information they share with other young people through informal talks, local meetings and multiplication of workshop topics.



Each pair of youth in a village works with twelve to fifteen teenagers thus reaching about 350 youth. They are committed to sharing information and reflections with their family and friends, thus reaching more than 600 parents and more than 900 brothers and sisters.



In 2010 the youth celebrated *International Youth Day* with a Festival dedicated to the promotion of “**Gender Equity and Citizen Participation.**” More than 350 young people participated in this festival.



The youth wrote a statement and delivered it this day to the municipal authorities demanding the town council dedicate a percentage of their budget to activities that promote the integral development of the youth.

The youth had a great day of recreation, learning and sharing about gender equity. They raised awareness with personal testimonies, songs, murals, t-shirts with messages about gender equity and competitions like a dance contest. The Youth Network wrote and acted in a play about gender inequity in the family and violence against youth.

The Youth Network participates with voice on the Municipal Council, the Commission on Children and Adolescence and the Municipal Commission on Youth Employment.



When Youth have good information they act with more responsibility. Today the Youth Network has more parental support than ever.



Parts of San Francisco Libre are still flooded!

And the rains begin again in May. You may remember that last year Nicaragua had the worst flooding since 1931. Lake Managua, that borders both Managua and SFL, rose over a meter higher than during hurricane Mitch in 1998. Sadly, we are expecting the majority of the town to flood again this year. Women and Community and the local government are working together to begin to provide safe lots so families can build homes.

United Methodists gave \$10,000 through UMCOR to provide food for 351 displaced families. Thank you! United Methodist Bob Mullin of Minnesota also donated \$10,000. He has supported the scholarship program for over ten years.



Four members of the Network are learning to make community videos. We will bring their videos with us when we visit churches later this year. Radio spots made by the youth to reduce violence against children, violence by young men against young women and to encourage young women not to be submissive to their boyfriends air on national radio stations **To hear the spots in Spanish, please email us at myc.sfl@live.com.**

Women and Community began a pilot program in 2010 doing training on human rights issues with 25 youth from 11 Evangelical Methodist Churches in the Department of Managua. Members of the Network helped design and facilitate workshops. The youth are very enthusiastic about the topics as well as the opportunity to get to know youth from other churches.



Nicaragua News Notes:

Over 1.3 million people are benefiting from subsidized food prices in 3,739 points of sale run by ENABAS, the government's program to help families confront rising food prices. Low income families are able to buy subsidized basic grains and cooking oil. In addition, ENABAS in March distributed 12,860 food packets to workers in the Free Trade Zones, to health care workers, to teachers, and other govt. workers.

March 29th Nicaragua news bulletin

Nicaraguan exports continue to grow at an unprecedented rate according to the Center for Export Documentation (CENTREX). From Jan. 1 to Mar. 14 Nicaraguan exports generated US\$526.45 million, a 35% increase over the same period last year.

March 22nd Nicaragua News Bulletin

The 26,000 jobs that were lost in free trade zones (maquilas) between 2008 and 2009 have now been recovered. According to a Central Bank of Nicaragua report released in December, 89,927 are currently employed by the 148 businesses operating in the free trade zones. This is the highest number on record.

March 15th Nicaragua news bulletin

We will be itinerating to Covenant churches beginning in July. We will be sending letters with a proposed schedule. The youth are helping us make a video about the work to share with you!

really great guy and hard worker. We welcome him into our family. Our good friend and pastor Mary Kraus celebrated the wedding. We were blessed by the presence of Nan's niece and family and many dear friends from far and wide.

Our son Daniel is working with a Palestinian Economic Institute in Ramallah and doing well.

Please remember your Covenant church giving as well as donations to special projects. For the projects ask your treasurer to make the check to your conference earmarked for ADVANCE 13285A Women and Community. Or give online or by phone: <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/give/advance/>

Contact us at nanmigl@yahoo.com for pictures of Thank you so much!

Nan's sister Karen passed on Jan. 24th from brain tumors. Nan is grieving for the loss of her sister. In December our daughter Nora was married to Lino Alvarado. Lino is Nicaraguan, a musician and a