

Nicaragua Covenant News



New England Conference

The Road to San Francisco Libre

Dan Dolan, Executive Director

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In this edition of our newsletter we are focusing on real-life amazing stories with happy endings, to start your New Year. Four years ago as our mobile clinic was starting to take shape into the professional operation that it is today, the clinic managers were working to identify those communities most in need. They learned from a partner organization about a region known as San Francisco Libre (SFL). The region is on the north shore of Lake Managua, and by way the crow flies it is less than 40 miles from Nicaragua's capital city, but upon arriving there, one would think they had traveled 100 years into the past. When our clinic first visited this area, the Land Cruiser ambulance had to ford streams and travel down jagged volcanic gravel roads to reach the SFL communities where subsistence-farming villagers lived without access to electricity, health care, or safe drinking water and proper sanitation. Six villages in this region were eventually added to the clinic's rotation.

Step one was health care, which our clinic manager Richard Rinker will discuss in greater detail, but for this overview the main point is that the medical data recorded by the AMHC revealed that contaminated water and poor sanitation were the cause of most of the illnesses in these communities. Our doctors, and the NC trained community health care workers (brigadistas), were treating the same preventable illnesses month after month. Clearly, the source of these diseases had to be eliminated.

and partner with the communities to complete these important projects.

For instance, Trinity UMC of Springfield, MA has now sent teams for three consecutive years to the drought stricken region of SFL. Trinity mission teams, and several others from around New England, represent nearly 100 New England based mission volunteers. Over the past three years teams have delivered the materials to complete several major clean water, sanitation, and reforestation projects. NC Board members and mission team leaders Sandra Collins and Kevin McNally will share some of their personal experiences in completing these projects later in this edition.

The good news is that in late 2016, it was determined by the AMHC medical staff that the dedicated holistic effort to improve the health and welfare of these communities had made such a significant impact in two of these six communities that the presence of the AMHC can now be decreased and shifted to new communities in need.

The road to San Francisco Libre is a rugged one, but for many who donated money, offered prayerful support, or joined a mission team it was a journey to remember. Hundreds of our once forgotten and neglected neighbors on the north side of Lake Managua have now been healed, quenched, and fed through the hands and feet of devoted mission travelers and generous supporters like you. On behalf of all of them, I would like to say, thank you!

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Nicaragua Water Fact

With a population, 6,071,045, over 2 million people do not have access to clean water and/or adequate toilets.

Amanecer Mobile Health Clinic (AMHC) news

Richard Rinker, Director



2016 has been a very significant year for the clinic. Our various wellness programs have been very successful and the overall health of many communities that we serve has improved dramatically. For the first time, we have been able to combine the clinics at 2 communities in San Francisco Libre (SFL) due to the decrease in patients attending the clinics, enabling us to add a new community to the schedule.

In the two communities, Las Mercedes and El Bijague, patient visits have decreased by almost two thirds over the past 4 years, due to the general increase in the health of the communities. This increase is due to the unique holistic approach of the AMHC.

In addition to treating acute and chronic diseases on a 6-week schedule, the AMHC team is focused on disease prevention and community health education. In other words, the team looks at the needs of the community as a whole, not just treating individual patients who come to the clinic. In the three communities in SFL that the AMHC initiated major water/sanitation projects, the incidence of acute diarrhea, gastritis and parasite cases has gone down 83%.

Much of the success in the SFL region is due to the efforts of the volunteer community health workers (brigadistas) that the AMHC has trained over the years. Our data shows that in the 12 communities where we have brigadistas and community pharmacies, the volume of patients seen at the clinics goes down significantly over time, as compared to the communities that we serve without brigadistas. For example, parasite infestations have gone down 86.4% in the past year in the 12 communities where the AMHC has used brigadistas to implement a parasite eradication program.

Another factor for the success in SFL is the increased presence of mission teams from the various New England Conference churches who complete projects that are beneficial for community health. Projects that supply potable water, latrines, reforestation and stoves with chimneys all contribute significantly to the prevention of disease.

With evidence that we are making significant progress in developing sustainable community health programs, our plans for the future include expanding the brigadista program and expanding the number of communities that we serve. However, caring for over 46,000 people and training brigadistas is an expensive undertaking, please help us by making a donation to the Advance #3021921.

Donations to the clinic can be made through our website <http://www.nicaraguacovenant.org> and click "Donate Now" button or through the NEUMC, PO Box 249, Lawrence, MA 01842-0449. Please specify **Nicaragua Fund #803** in the memo line of the check.



Las Mercedes, A Determined Village

Kevin McNally, Chairman of NC and Water Projects

What happens in your home when the Cable goes out, or the internet is down, or you lose electricity for a few hours? Impatience, anger, frustration? We lose sight of the fact that these situations are inconveniences, not crises.

Imagine if you lived in a community where the closest medical services are a couple of hours away, where there is no electricity, where the closest source of potable water is almost a mile away, where good washing and sanitation facilities are rare. This is the remote village of Las Mercedes in the San Francisco Libre Region in Nicaragua. The Nicaragua Covenant's AMHC mobile health clinic was treating the same illnesses in the village every time they visited, and they realized that the only way for village health to improve was to tackle the sources of the problem.



Village leader Simon formed a committee to work on the health issues and he reached out for help and through NGO El Porvenir a comprehensive plan was developed. Simon had all the volunteer labor needed, but the village needed funding for the materials. The Nicaragua Covenant adopted the project and through donations from individuals, congregations, a public school, and fund raisers a total of \$49,000 was raised.

It was amazing to witness the determination of the village to provide better health for their children. To build the huge containment tank to hold the water that trickles out of the rocks the workers had to carry 20,000 pounds of cement, 20,000 pounds of sand, and all the pipes up the hill. They also had to hand dig a trench 3 feet deep all the way down the hill to bury the pipe. It took 30 men two months to complete the work, with the village women constantly bringing them meals to keep the work going. The end result is faucets at each home, bringing pure spring water to everyone in the village.

Today the village has pure water in every home, a double pit latrine at every home, new vented cooking stoves in many homes, and a reforestation program underway. The medical clinic has observed dramatic improvement in village health. Children are no longer sickened by polluted water and they can be in school instead spending their time trekking a long distance to collect buckets of water. A job well done by a determined village.

Nicaragua...land of volcanos and lakes

You may have heard the saying, "water, water, everywhere, yet not a drop to drink. This is a reality in Nicaragua. Over 800,000 people do not have access to safe drinking water. This lack of water causes a trickle-down effect impacting mostly girls and women. Securing clean water is often their responsibility. When girls are carrying water to their homes they are not able to attend school. In addition, a lack of safe drinking water results in over 200 deaths among children. Water also impacts toileting, resulting in over 2 million people not having adequate toilets.

Your donation to our Water Program can make a difference for other villages determined to improve their health.

A Village + A Congregation = Life Long Friendships

Sandra A. Collins, Communications Director

Over twenty-five people from Trinity have visited Las Mercedes since 2014. And even more have donated time, material aid and money to support the connection between Nicaragua and Springfield, MA.

In 2012, Rob Bell from El Porvenir visited Trinity United Methodist Church in Springfield, MA. Rob spoke about a village in Nicaragua in need of clean water. People from Trinity, having never met people of Las Mercedes, stepped up and raised money to help build a well and .5 miles of pipes, to provide clean water directly to over 39 homes in Las Mercedes. Over the years, fund raising efforts have included, a Christmas Is Not Your Birthday campaign, coffee sales (Managua Morning) and Lenten Lunches. Throughout the fund raising, Trinity prayed for the those in Las Mercedes and developed a love and respect for them.

In 2014, twelve people, including Pastor John Mueller travelled to Las Mercedes to visit the well, celebrate the completion of the project and solidify the relationship between a congregation in Western Massachusetts and a community in Nicaragua. Fund raising efforts provided monies to build 28 stoves and plant over 5000 seeds for trees. The delegation group left Las Mercedes, full of blessings and memories of newly formed friendships.



This friendship continued to grow. When crops died due to a drought, Trinity sent aid to purchase more seeds. Money was sent to help purchase textbooks, swings for the playground and preschool furniture. Trinity delegation members frequently recall memories and names of friends from Las Mercedes and in April 2015, another delegation travelled to Las Mercedes for a visit. Delegation members visited to say hello, walk to the well again and take photos of our friends. Textbooks and school supplies were given to the preschool and primary school serving the children of Las Mercedes. Once again, this delegation left Las Mercedes with memories of new connections developed and old ones rekindled.



April 2016, a third delegation travelled to Las Mercedes, this time to build six latrines. One delegation member likened the visit to that of visiting family members not yet known. Language barriers were overcome through smiles and laughter.

And now, April 2017, a fourth delegation is visiting Las Mercedes. Projects consist of work in Las Mercedes and surrounding communities. Throughout the years, we recall names, faces and memories. Delegation members share experiences, which bring to life the people from Las Mercedes.



This year, Trinity is focusing their worship on the topic of earth. During a service in autumn, soil from Las Mercedes has been incorporated into the garden of Trinity, a symbol of the connection between Nicaragua and Springfield.

AMHC data indicates, Las Mercedes is one of the healthiest communities served by the NC. This is a result of the tangible and perhaps intangible connection between Las Mercedes and Trinity. Clean water, fuel-efficient stoves, latrines, trees, supplies for the school and the human connection come together to make a much larger impact than ever imagined.

What is the Nicaragua Covenant?

The Covenant between the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church and our Covenant and ministry partners in Nicaragua was formed to accompany one another in solidarity as a response to the unjust and inequitable differences between North and South, rich and poor. In response to the healing ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, we develop and support programs that enhance the lives of the poorest of the poor in Nicaragua.

The covenant was established in 1986, providing financial support for children feeding programs, rural teachers and women's empowerment through sewing schools. A mission house was secured and teams from the US started traveling to Nicaragua to support our work. A mobile health clinic was started in 2007.

In recent years our mission has been greatly expanded and we were blessed with the donation of Quinta Amanecer, our headquarters facility in Masaya which houses our mobile medical clinic and training facility and provides hospitality for visiting mission teams. Our Amanecer Mobile Health Clinic calls on 30 remote villages. To address chronic illness observed by our medical team we started a program to bring clean water and good sanitation to villages we visit. Visiting mission teams work on the water projects and school renovations.

Visit our Facebook page: Quinta Amanecer

Use the QR logo to visit our website at: www.nicaraguacovenant.org



The Nicaragua Covenant Team in New England

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