

Two groups from North Dakota recently went to El Convento, near Leon, in Nicaragua. The groups were able to help build a house, be involved in a dental clinic, provide school necessities, help with a special children's program, and continue to work on a farm project. This newsletter highlights the health classes and clinic that were also a part of the trip.

Helping Hands and Hearts

LEON - Naomi sat in her hammock outside her small home made of a few boards and sheets of corrugated metal feeding baby Lew with a bottle. When she turned to greet her friend Marcia coming into her yard, she dropped Lew's bottle on the ground. The chickens scurried from the sudden interruption to their pecking. Lew cried asking for more, so Naomi quickly picked up the bottle, brushed the dirt off the nipple with her hand and stuck it back in his mouth. When Marcia asked Naomi how she and the family were, Naomi replied that she was concerned with Lew's frequent diarrhea.

The story above was actually a drama portrayed before a class on diarrhea held for church members at the El Convento church near Leon, Nicaragua. Bonnie Anderson, FNP (family nurse practitioner) and Leah Motta, RN (both of Fargo, ND) were members of a small missions team from North Dakota that spent over a week in ministry with the church congregation. Bonnie and Leah taught health education classes to interested church members for 5 mornings in a row. The students helped choose the topics and included common problems seen in their community including diarrhea, parasites and worms, anemia, colds and flu, and dental decay. Each class began with a short drama portraying a common problem. The students took turns being the "actors." The group was asked what they saw happening in the drama, if it was a problem in their community, and what should be done. Students shared what they already knew and Bonnie and Leah gave more information and corrected misconceptions.

The students were interested, engaged, and appeared to have fun learning new things. They were taught from the beginning to teach what they learned to their friends and community members. They received small booklets to take with them to the homes to aid in talking about the topics. At the end of the week three of the women that are leaders in the church said "come back next year and teach us everything!"

We did not know we were going to have a scheduled clinic until we arrived in Nicaragua. An inventory of our supplies consisted of 2 stethoscopes, one blood pressure cuff (from a local nurse), ordinary flashlight, bottles of over-the-counter medication from the US, and



Above: Small group discussion during a health class in the church.

Below: Church members performing a skit to demonstrate a principle for a health class.



Gatorade. We felt very challenged by the opportunity we were given. There were so many questions and concerns. **Would there be enough medication for the four clinic days?** We prayed that the medication from the US would be enough and "multiplied like the loaves and fish" in the new testament if needed. **Would there be enough money in the budget to purchase prescription meds from local pharmacies?** **How could we know what to do without a laboratory to do testing?** **Would too much of the information get lost during the translation?** **Would just two of us ever be able to see all the patients?**

Afternoon "clinic" in the church was anything but a typical clinic. The one room church swarmed with about 70 people the first day waiting to have their names taken so they could be seen by Leah or Bonnie. No fans or air conditioning greeted us. An occasional gust of hot breeze came in through the open windows along with an intermittent loud whir of a saw the men were using to cut metal for the roofing project near by. The patient, interpreter, FNP or RN and "scribe" (took medical notes for Bonnie and Leah) huddled around a small table at one end of the church. The "exam table" became the cement platform at the front of the church. Our only privacy was the distance between patients.

Our senses were strained to the max as we listened with our ears and hearts to the concerns of our Nicaraguan friends. We prayed God's love would be conveyed through our hands as we examined each patient and hugged the children. God answered

Helping Hands, Hearts

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our prayers each day. Each day of clinic the patient numbers slowly decreased. By the last day, everyone waiting to be seen was seen. We did have enough over-the-counter medications. We did have enough money for prescriptions that were needed. We were relieved that many people appeared quite healthy and only had minor problems. We were so warmly welcomed and thanked for our help by our Nicaraguan friends. What a privilege it was to be able to serve them and receive so much in our giving.

We weren't able to say yes to every request that came our way and it was difficult to say we couldn't help at this time. There are many health care needs in this community. One elderly man doesn't have money to pay for needed cataract surgery. Women do not get medical care during pregnancy. There are many preventable diseases that have a huge impact on the family and community. Most families do not have enough money to buy Tylenol for their children for fever.

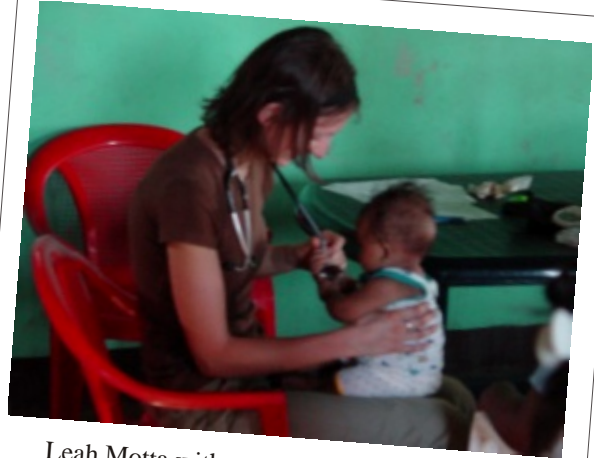
As we prepared to leave more questions came to mind. **What happens after we leave? Will they have transportation to get to town to see a doctor when they need to? Will they have money to buy medications? Will the students in the classes remember, put into practice, and share the health information we gave them. Will it make a difference in their community?** Our questions remain unanswered.

Please join us in praying for God's children in Nicaragua. Pray that we might have wisdom to help in the best way possible. Pray we will each be good stewards of the gifts God has given us and graciously share with our neighbors in need.

-- Bonnie L. Anderson, FNP



Bonnie Anderson, with a Nicaraguan family at the clinic in the church at El Convento.



Leah Motta with a young patient at the clinic.



Leah Motta and Shannon Lovdahl with an interpreter and a patient at the clinic.



A young boy with vitamins, at the clinic.



Bonnie Anderson with a mother and daughter.