

As Thousands Flee, Nicaragua's Future Dims

By Ann Marie Zon

Hundreds of thousands of people have left Nicaragua in recent years, disrupting everyday life while leaving those who remain questioning the future — and the country's identity.

The 200,000 Nicaraguans who have fled the country seek political refuge, better living conditions, work and educational opportunities, as well as security from a life dominated by fear and uncertainty.

About 150,000 refugees have gone to neighboring Costa Rica, many because of Nicaragua's human rights violations. Because of the number of migrants, the government of Costa Rica is presently considering closing its borders to any further emigration.

So many of Nicaragua's young people are making the trek to other places, that it leaves the question: What is Nicaragua's future?

Where will the country find teachers, businessmen, medical personnel, professionals, farmers and parents? Those left behind lament: "Only we old people are left."

Many persons have been declared "non gratis" by the United States government, the Papal Nuncio who is the ambassador of the Pope; the Sisters of Mother Teresa and the European Union. Several traveling clergy were even denied reentry into their native country.

At the same time, all humanitarian groups are prohibited from offering services such as eye and cleft lip/broken palette operations, along with the distribution of needed goods. All offices and centers of these humanitarian groups have been closed and in some cases, their properties confiscated.

Schools, particularly universities and their branches that are located in major cities, are now under government jurisdiction.

Nicaragua is not the same Nicaragua that many have come to love, to work for, to live in, even to celebrate.

And that is sad.

Building Projects Open Doors for Disadvantaged

It is encouraging to know that when priests, communities and individuals feel secure and hopeful in asking Father Alfonso for his opinion, help and funds for projects, their expectations will not meet with disappointment.

Every evening, Father Alfonso and Ann Marie Zon discuss the needs and requests, trying to work out solutions to these problems.

• To begin with, Hurricane Julia left an indelible mark on the country. Because of the massive destruction, calls for help increased.

• In addition, Fr. Gabriel in Salinas was shocked at how many families, living close to the Pacific shore areas, came with their few possessions to higher ground. They sought refuge where he



lived, even though there was not nearly enough room.

Fr. Gabriel realized that his community needed a Center that could serve as a meeting place not only for religious education but also as a refuge when nature's powerful forces causes those affected to seek a place to sleep and live until it was reasonably safe to return home.

So he presented the problem to Fr. Alfonso, inviting him to see for himself in order to judge what could and should be done. Of course the **Nicaragua Mission Project** will help by providing funds for building materials and other construction needs as soon as plans for the center are finalized and people organized into work groups to attack the proposed project.

Similar requests came for rebuilding houses and replanting crops that were totally devastated by the flood waters.

There is no question that your donations will allow these needs to be met.

• In the meantime, Msgr. Marcial Guzman, Bishop of Juigalpa asked for suggestions and funds to renovating and add on to the Diocesan Minor Seminary. The seminary will become the main high school for boys from around the country who are thinking of joining the priesthood.

Cont'd on Page 3

- Your comments and suggestions are welcome. Send to Nicaragua Mission Project, 10100 Transit Road, East Amherst, NY 14051.
- If you know someone who would like to receive a copy of "LA VIA," email info@projectnica.com and a copy of "LA VIA" will be sent or e-mailed to them.

Honoring Their Patroness

“La Purissima”, Mary, The Immaculate Conception, is the patroness of Nicaragua and is celebrated in every town, city and settlement, no matter how remote or populated.

Mary has been honored as “La Purissima” for centuries, jubilantly and joyously, with nine days of prayer, song and processions.

The cry of “Quiencausatantaalegria” is answered in the churches and throughout the streets by all who echo: “La concepcion de Maria”, a sacred and a well loved tradition.

However this year there were no novenas of processions in the streets, no floats depicting the Virgin in the various aspects of her life nor of her titles, no shouting of her anthem in neighborhoods.

Gone are the “gritaria” where outside of each



home is a display of Mary’s statue, adorned with drapes, candles, and flowers. People walk from house to house singing Mary’s songs, praying to her and receiving a treat at the house of each host.

All these traditions have been prohibited by the government, putting a temporary end to these centuries-old observances.

However, Fr. Alfonso has worked hard to have the families carry on this celebration within their own homes.

He has published a new novena centering on the family’s continuance of this loved and treasured tradition by people whose faith will not be stifled. So there will be cries of Mary’s anthem, songs of her praise and prayers for her care.

The tradition will continue, just in a new way.

Nicaraguan Church, Clergy, Religious Face Oppression

Over the last year or so, the Church in Nicaragua has felt the heavy hand of the government.

Msgr. Rolando Alvarez, Bishop of Matagalpa, has been sent to an undisclosed place of house arrest in the capital of Managua, while several of his priests, seminarians and house workers have been sent to one of the country’s most infamous prisons.

The eighteen Sisters of Mother Teresa were expelled, accused of money laundering, weapons handling and encouraging unrest, leaving the many souls they were caring for stranded. The Home for Abused Girls, Hospice in the North of the country and the Day Care Center for children of single working mothers were all closed. What happens to the individuals that were being attended to by the Sisters is not known.

There have been desecrations of Churches, thefts of religious articles, hateful and degrading words directed towards the clergy, threats to and arrests of priests from different areas of the country.

Any traditional religious manifestations and processions that run through the streets of cities and towns celebrating their patron saints are denied permission to take place. Crowds gathering for whatever reason including those of the Church are not allowed.

In their latest Advent letter, the Bishops asked that the faithful talk to one another, to seek peace, to live in the manner that Christ has called everyone to practice, as well as remembering the encouragement from the Church that we are all together, continuing the mission set before us.

Realistically, the faith of the people, faith in the Hand of God, faith in His ways and reasons, faith that He sees, knows, and cares is most important.



Members of the Sisters of Mother Teresa begin their trek

Your Email Address Will Cut Costs, Add to Project Funds

Every newsletter sent by email saves more than a dollar in printing and mailing costs, particularly valuable when it comes to “La Via.”

We thank the many readers who answered our invitation to send us their email addresses.

We invite you to join them in doing so.

Email addresses are kept confidential for the exclusive use for the newsletter.

Please help by sending your email address to info@projectnica.com

In the subject line, mention “Nicaragua email.”

The savings translate into more funds for the poor in Nicaragua and an opportunity for you to forward the newsletter to others.

Hurricane Julia Tests Nicaragua's Resilience

In early October, Hurricane Julia made its way through Nicaragua affecting cities, towns and land particularly on the Atlantic Coast and territories to the North.



The flooding caused rivers to overflow, covering bridges made impassable, and mudslides that devastated mountain settlements as houses were swept away and

crops destroyed.

Even though Nicaragua has seen its share of disastrous hurricanes, it is still hard to pick up the pieces and begin again. On top of that, difficulties grow with humanitarian organizations denied the work they willingly offered.

Nicaraguans are resilient people. They will recover in time, although how long that might be remains to be seen.



Added to that, many young people who could be a powerful force in rebuilding and replanting, have fled Nicaragua.

The **Nicaragua Mission Project** does what it can in whatever way is necessary, whether lending a hand, reaching out with resources, or encouraging those affected with a hope that things will get better.

Nature's greatest force is the human heart.

BUILDING, Cont'd from Page 1



The Bishop, Fr. Alfonso and a group of workers stand ready to begin the work as funds are available.

As the building stands now, there is not nearly enough room nor facilities to meet the future demand. A worthy project.

Journey of Hope Foundation is a not-for-profit foundation enacted under the Section 402 of the not-for-profit corporation law.

Its mission is to solicit and procure funding through donations, loans and grants for the promotion and support of indigent people, especially in Central America.

The Foundation at this time is looking toward helping the needy of **Nicaragua**. Because the containers that Ann Marie Zon has sent are no longer able to get through, the Foundation has turned to help Ann Marie with education. The more people learn of the hopes for the future of Nicaraguan poor, the more that future can be made brighter.

If you would like to help support the Foundation and its mission, go online to www.journeyofhopefoundation.org or send your donation with the form to the right, to: Journey of Hope Foundation, 200 River Road, North Tonawanda, NY 14120 or call 716-874-4074.

Fr. Carlos Maireno has been assigned to a new "comarca" (parish community) in the countryside region of Boaco. The people are eager to do what they can to show their new pastor how welcome he is.

They have begun constructing a simple residence and ask for funds to purchase roof girders and tin roofing pieces to complete the work.

Without the donations from the unselfish, faithful and trusting contributions from supporters, answering these requests would not have been possible.

Other requests seek schooling, dairy cows and pigs, new wells, all worthy projects that deserve efforts to complete. New requests will not be denied as long as funds allow.

"THANK YOU" for your help doesn't even come close to showing our appreciation. You may never realize how much your donation allows these undertakings to happen in the lives of others.



YES! I want to do my part to continue the work of the Nicaragua Mission Project. Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift. Make checks payable to: **Journey of Hope Foundation.**

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

E-mail _____

Amount enclosed _____

Reflections: A Look Inward

Seeing our reflections in a mirror is most often rewarding, sometimes worrying, rarely disheartening.

Seeing our reflections through the eyes of others is most often rewarding, sometimes worrying, rarely disheartening ...however, often eye opening.

Reflections for the most part are something coming from the outside – like mirrors and through others. But what about reflections from the inside? Do we ever take enough time to reflect on who we really are?

That is not so easy, basically because we are a bit more apprehensive at what we might see. It could be rewarding, worrying, disheartening, and eye opening - all at the same time.

We need time to do this well and often, as well as honest with ourselves. And then what do we do with what we discover?

First and foremost, we have to remember that we are made in the image and likeness of our Creator, that His Son gave His life for us so that we might have Life, that the Spirit of Love watches, guides, and fills us with all that He is.

Keeping this in mind, we take what we find out about ourselves and apply ourselves to keep what is rewarding, work on what is worrying, pray for help for what is disheartening, and change the “not so good” of what is eye opening.

At the same time, our reflections have to remind us of what Our Creator, His Son and His Spirit has done for us and does for every individual walking the earth.

That should be our guideline on how we see others, try to understand them, how we treat them.

As the new year sets upon us, let us all take time to reflect and do something with what we see, not only about ourselves but how we look at others. What a better world this might be if we all took time to do just that.

Ann Marie Zon

They Go Before Us

In recent months, several of our very capable volunteers passed away to a reward Our Lord promised to those who do unto others. We are ever grateful to have had them as part of our efforts for Nicaragua



• Michael Sarachman was not a “regular” volunteer but somehow when we needed his hands, his heart, his strength, he would be here.... always showing up when our need for help was at the edge. What a willing spirit he had in his quiet working way ... he was an inspiration to watch even knowing he was not in the best of health. But there was nothing wrong with his giant heart ... he gave of himself, never counting the cost.



• Audrey Clare was a person who never made it to our Tuesday packings and loadings, but never failed to send a dessert: lemon bars, banana bread, apple crumb cobblers graced our table.

Most volunteers did not know her personally but they knew of her kindness, caring, and willingness to put smiles on many a hungry face.



• John Veneski was fondly known to one and all as “Big John” not only for his stature or his strength, but also for big heart that he showed in so many ways to so many others. John was our “main loader/packer” for hundreds of containers that were shipped to Nicaragua. He had a system and stuck to it and along with his “crew” always got the job done so well. Even as years ganged up, he was here to do what he could to get the containers ready for shipping. He will be remembered as our “big John”.



• Eleanor Scott - a sweet, gentle, soft-spoken person who, for years, used her love and talent for sewing to touch hundreds upon hundreds of babies in Nicaragua. Eleanor delighted in sewing brightly colored, fun patterned receiving blankets with a matching bed jacket. Each article was special to her as it was to every mother who received her carefully stitched creation. She could never imagine the joyful surprise she brought to so many mothers who dressed her newborn in something unexpected and appreciated. We pray that Our Lord reward her for every yard of material she cut, for every inch of ribbon used in decorating, for every hour spent at her machine, for every stitch she so lovingly put into her unique and practical gifts.



This newsletter is produced through the generous support of the Journey of Hope Foundation

www.journeyofhopefoundation.org

Journey of Hope Foundation * 200 River Road • North Tonawanda New York 14120

Nonprofit org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #12
N. Tonawanda, NY

Journey of Hope Foundation
200 River Road
North Tonawanda NY 14120
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED