

Nicaragua Story-Sharing – June 7, 2020
from the 2020 Delegation to AMOS Health & Hope: Cynthia Parker, Martha VanCleave, Shelly Sanderlin, & Jennifer Scott for the First Baptist Church of McMinnville

Introduction to AMOS & FBC's Nicaragua Team Mission

AMOS Health and Hope really began 63 years ago when Dr. Gustavo Parajon - a physician and medical missionary and American Baptist pastor - when he dreamed of health care that would be effective and empowering for impoverished communities in Nicaragua, where health care providers would be not just doctors but teachers, where community members would learn basic primary and preventative care services, so that unnecessary illness and death would be dramatically reduced.

His son and daughter-in-law, Drs. David and Laura Parajon, were leading that ministry when FBC connected with AMOS in 2004, and over the last sixteen years, this church has sent ten delegations to partner with AMOS and its local staff in their work of establishing community clinics, implementing a clean water project, and training and supporting local health care workers and community members in first aid and nutrition.

AMOS stands for A Ministry of Sharing, but the name also evokes the Hebrew prophet Amos, who told of God's anger at injustice, especially the exploitation of the poor, by the rich, and who called for the day when justice would flow like a river, and righteousness like an unending stream. That vision is lived out in the work of AMOS and the people who carry it out, and this morning the 2020 delegation of Cynthia Parker, Martha VanCleave, Shelly Sanderlin, and Jennifer Scott will tell us about it.

Cynthia Parker

Hi Everyone, I am Cynthia Parker. It's so fabulous to be here sharing our experiences from the Nicaragua Mission trip with you all. I knew our trip to Nicaragua would be amazing and inspiring. We were going to make new friends with a group from Christ the King Church from Anacortes, Washington who agreed to partner with us to make up our delegation team. And about a month prior to leaving we found out that a young woman Nohemi from La Pimienta became a much needed Health Promoter for her community. Nohemi loves and cares so much for her community and that is why she became a Health Promoter. AMOS asked if we would take on one more project, renovating a building to provide Nohemi and La Pimienta with a New Health Clinic. We all wanted to be a part of this endeavor.

When we arrived at the AMOS Community the first thing we saw was the New Computer Lab and Library they had built. Helios Ovando-Arreola gave us the grand tour, he happened to be there on his own mission trip helping AMOS. WOW, what strides AMOS is making to empower the people and communities of Nicaragua with education, training, and medical care. We had a couple of days of training and visiting. It was so wonderful seeing the friends I had made from my mission trip in 2018.

Then we were off to La Pimienta and El Calderon. We had such a warm, loving reception from everyone. It took place in their renovated church which had solar panels installed on the roof. Then we walked up the hill to see the building we were going to renovate. The community had already wiped down all the walls in preparation for painting. Juan Carlos, the head of Maintenance for AMOS brought all the paint, wood doors, glass for the windows, and rod iron doors

to the site. Juan Carlos is a great team leader, he is compassionate and very proud to be of service to everyone he meets. So with Juan Carlos leading us for the next several days the ladies from FBC, the men from CKC, people from the community, Nohemi, Helios, the AMOS team worked on painting, replacing doors, replacing glass in the windows, cleaning, scrubbing and mopping the floors. We did have fun visiting and laughing during all this work. Many hands accomplish great work.

In honor of this great work we had an Opening Ceremony. Everyone from both communities came. There was music, singing and laughter. Silvina, who is El Caldron's Health Promoter and Nohemi's mentor came to give her Congratulations to Nohemi and La Pimienta. The beautiful Quilt from FBC was presented to Nohemi to be hung up in the New Health Clinic. AMOS presented the keys to Nohemi and she cut the opening ribbon to her New Health Clinic. What an exciting and proud moment for everyone.

I had such a truly Amazing and Inspiring Trip. There is so much love, compassion and support from everyone, Thank You.

Martha VanCleave

Since the first team made a trip to Nicaragua with Provadenic, the predecessor of AMOS, almost 20 years ago I've wanted to go. The opportunity to serve and experience life in a different place and in a different way tugged at me. So, when this trip was scheduled, I was eager to participate, anticipating the impact it might have on my life. Even with all the stories I'd heard and pictures I'd seen, nothing could have prepared me for the experience I had.

One of the projects our Nica team participated in was the piloting a survey to assess the efficacy of the water filter program. Ten years ago, AMOS began their project of installing Biosand and SAM4 microfiber water filters in homes in the rural communities they serve. The type of filter installed depends on the water quality in the region. The communities of La Pimienta and El Calderon use Biosand filter because of the amount of particulate matter in their water. Several of our teams have installed and performed maintenance on these filters.

I know some of you have worked on water filters in Nicaragua. What did you do? Feel free to share a comment about your experience.

During our orientation in Managua, Ximena Medrano, the WASH Program Coordinator, explained the survey project to us. The plan for our work in El Calderon and La Pimienta was to

- Go over the new survey with WASH promoters
- Pilot the survey for Biosand filters and perform minor maintenance if needed
- Gather feedback with the WASH promoters after the piloting

In each rural community AMOS' WASH program has trained water promoters. These women, men and youth of El Calderon and La Pimienta have been trained to provide water filter maintenance and promote personal and kitchen hygiene. Reviewing the survey with them gave us a chance to get to know each other a bit before we set out to make home visits to pilot the study.

Marcy Anderson and I were part of the team that piloted the survey in El Calderon. The team including the water promoters Ceyli, Alex

(Sylvina's son), Belkin, Hailing, and Aldear and AMOS staff Luisa and Guillermo, the driver, traveled across the river in the ambulance, an old converted Toyota Land Cruiser.

At each home we visited we divided into 2 groups. One group conducted an interview to gather information about the household and their use of the water filter. Marcy, with her Spanish language skill, was able to observe these interviews. The other group recorded observations of the living space and the placement, condition, and functioning of the water filter. I accompanied this group that included Guillermo, Belkin and the youth Ceyli, Hailing and Aldear.

At the first home visit, Guillermo took the lead on doing the inspection. He directed the youth and helped them record what we observed. But it didn't take long for the youth to take over. At the second house, Guillermo stepped back and watched the youth read the questions, decide on, and record the answers. With the training they had received as WASH promoters, they knew how the water filters were supposed to be installed and how they should function. By the time we visited the third house, Guillermo participated with the other team in the interview and I observed and assisted the youth doing their part.

These youth - 12, 13, and 14 year-olds - demonstrated leadership, joy in service, passion for and dedication to their community, and an understanding of the importance of clean water and good hygiene. For me, they, together with their new health promoter Noehmy, embody hope for the future of these communities. It's hard to understand how these young people could have such joy when they

have so little in terms of material possessions. But I learned that what they do have is so much more. They have faith and the love of their communities. It was exciting to serve with them. When do we get to go again?

Shelly Sanderlin

On February 13, the “Fab Four” flew out of PDX on a journey to meet up with four others to form a team with the goal of assisting the residents of La Pimienta, Nicaragua, with the 10-year assessment of their water filtration systems, originally installed by another FBC team.

One person, Marcy Anderson, was well known to us and completed the “Fab Five.” We would be meeting Jim, Jesse and Bill, from Christ the King Church in Anacortes, Washington, for the first time. Well, actually, Jesse was able to come to McMinnville for a couple of our pre-trip planning meetings so he wasn’t a complete stranger.

During our first few days together at the AMOS complex, friendships quickly developed and the “Exceptional Eight” was a team.

When we arrived in La Pimienta, we knew that the water system project would be the main focus of our time, but that there might be another project. And what a project! We were tasked with painting the community health clinic, inside and out. New doors and security gates and window glass were also installed.

The team broke up into two work groups, with Cynthia and me joining Jesse, Jim and Bill and community members to work on the clinic, while the others focused on the water systems and story

gathering. We did switch tasks after a couple of days so everyone could experience both projects.

To say that we could not have completed the health clinic project without each other is no exaggeration! We encouraged each other during the long, HOT days, sometimes working silently side-by-side in small rooms and hallways, but often laughing together and sharing stories of family, church and life in general.

I am humbled to know that our work on the clinic provided a more secure facility, which allowed the community to receive better drugs and supplies from the national health system, enhancing the clinic's ability to treat community members. As it turned out, we were also the last AMOS team able to complete our mission as the Covid-19 crisis necessitated the cancellation of all projects after ours, and I'm so glad we were able to complete our mission.

Bill, Jesse and Jim also coordinated "Vacation Bible School" activities for the local children, which FBC team members were able to assist with. Interacting with the children was a highlight of the trip for me and I'm grateful to the guys for providing the opportunity.

The addition of team members from another church enriched our experience in so many ways, and not just with the added, especially in this case, "man power." We know there are other groups who work with AMOS, but see them and their work only through written stories and pictures. But to form a team and work side-by-side with people from another church widens the reach of our personal story. We share our unique experience not only with the "Fab Five," AMOS team members and the residents of La Pimienta, Nicaragua, but it

also lives on with three good people in Anacortes, Washington, who will share it with others, as we are today.

Jennifer Scott

While in Nicaragua, we collected stories of people we worked with. We will be sharing these stories over the upcoming months, maybe in the Tidings, or maybe in the service. We started by asking each person about their life. We did not expect anything as dramatic as this story shared by Donald Palacios, of the AMOS rural health care team.

The Rio Negro River flows between our partner communities of La Pimienta and El Calderon. Former FBC delegates have walked across the Rio Negro when it was low and have ridden horses across when it was high. On this trip we drove across the Rio Negro. One day about four years ago, Donald, a member of the AMOS rural health team, was driving across the river in the AMOS ambulance with his passengers, Dr. Carlos, Silvina, and Alex, Silvina's nine-year-old son. From the shore of the Rio Negro, they watched a motorcycle safely ford the river. Donald, who has driven across this river many times, began to guide the ambulance across, negotiating familiar rocks and currents, confident that they would safely reach the other side. As he was almost ready to drive up onto the far bank, Donald heard a very loud whooshing sound. A wall of water barreled down from upriver, turning the ambulance sideways, parallel instead of perpendicular to the shore, leaving it trapped in the river, water blocking a safe exit on all sides.

Water began to fill the cab. Dr. Carlos crawled out the ambulance window into the rising river. Silvina and Alex were also in the

rushing waters, with Silvina trying to rescue Alex who was trapped near the wheel of the ambulance. Donald clambered from the ambulance cab up onto its roof. From there he pulled Dr. Carlos and Silvina to the top of the cab. Nine-year-old Alex still struggled in the flooding river. As he tells us this part of the story, Donald shifts in his chair to lean forward in demonstration, placing his knees akimbo, leaning forward to reach into the imagined Rio Negro, grabbing Alex by the shirt or the arm or the waist. Then, elbow locked, arm taut, hand holding Alex in an unyielding grasp, he shows us how he lifted Alex straight up out of the river and continued in an arc over his head to fling Alex to the relative safety of the cab's roof.

Donald tells us he does not know where he found the strength to do this.

Night fell on the wet group huddled atop the cab of the truck marooned in the high waters. They spent a few hours there, stranded, not knowing how they would reach the shore. Eventually, they saw a small light in the distance, growing brighter as it grew closer. The light holder arrived on the shore, promising rescue. "I know this river like the back of my hand," the man says. He requests them to do as he asks and to trust him fully.

He rescued each of them one at a time. The man threw a rope to Donald who pulled him through the river to the truck. Starting with Alex, he swam each of them from their perch, downriver a short distance, and to the shore. Next was Silvina, who he assured would be easy, that because of her beauty she would float well. Dr. Carlos followed, and finally Donald. Everyone, the rescuer and the rescued, was safe on the shore. Someone noticed that Dr. Carlos was still

holding his computer, but no longer wearing his pants. Everyone laughed and laughed at this, finding both comic and emotional relief in their safety. To their amazement, the computer remained dry. Eventually their rescuer revealed that he told them he knew the river well to help them remain calm and confident that he could rescue them. In reality, he did not know the river well at all. He thanked them for their trust.

The rescued and the rescuer parted ways. Donald assumed the man used his light to walk back up the hill to his home. By morning the river waters returned to normal level. Donald was able to drive the ambulance onto the shore. No repair or towing needed, only a turn of the key. He wanted to thank their rescuer again but did not know where he lived. He searched for the man, climbing the hill above the river, asking folks along the way if they knew this man and where he lived. No one he met knew of the rescuer. To this day, he has never been able to track down the man who liberated them from the rushing Rio Negro and the roof of the ambulance.

When Donald first returned home he told no one this story. About four days later, he told his wife and at that time he cried for a long time. Dr. Carlos and Donald chose not to share the story for many years. On the day of our delegation's arrival, the AMOS staff held their customary Friday lunch and devotional, this week focusing on love since it was Valentine's Day. In Nicaragua, Valentine's Day can be about romantic love, but is often more a celebration of all love, including love between friends. In the devotional, Dr. Carlos told the story of how his friend Donald rescued him. That day they shared their love for each other and for the AMOS mission that inspires

them to travel the rocky roads and riverbeds to carry health and hope to vulnerable rural Nicaraguans.

In hearing us this story, I don't recall Donald ever using the word "miracle." How did he find the strength to pull Alex out of the river? How did the Creator of Miracles know to fit in comic relief, keeping Dr. Carlos' computer dry, but taking away his pants? How was Donald able to start the ambulance the next morning, no towing or repairs required? And most of all, how did the rescuer find them, reassure them of his trustworthiness, and then swim each of them to shore, only to then disappear forever? At the story's end, instead of trying to answer these questions, he simply finished his story with the phrase I heard him use often, a quiet "Gracias A Dios," "Thanks be to God."

Have you experienced a miracle that you are grateful for? Let us know in the comments!