

NEWSLETTER FRIENDS OF BATAHOLA

Tomorrow is a New Dawn

Fall, 2007

“Working as a Community, Joining Hands in a New Dawn” New Slogan for the Kickoff of the 25th Anniversary Year

The annual fundraising fair on September 15 kicked off this year's 25th anniversary celebrations with a bang. In addition to food and drink stands, a raffle and a clothing bazaar, staff wore tee-shirts with the new slogan, “Working as a community, joining hands in a New Dawn.” Clarissa Gutiérrez, who created the winning slogan, was presented with an award for her idea. Throughout the coming year, each regular activity, such as graduations and cultural revues, will be linked to the anniversary, and every three months, there will be a special celebration. The costs for all these anniversary celebrations will be covered by sales of commemorative items, tickets to events, sponsorships and donations. We expect these events will raise the Center's profile nationally and internationally and will help energize Center graduates to stay involved.

Events to look forward to:

§ **December, 2007:** conference to highlight the 20th anniversary of the completion of the magnificent mural which covers the entire wall of the auditorium. The mural was given the title “Tomorrow is a New Dawn” by Sister Margarita.

§ **March 2 to 9, 2008:** painting exhibit, sacred music concert, and premiere of a new play commemorating the anniversary. A special Mass will be held on March 9th.

§ **June 15, 2008:** a special Sports Day with a lightning soccer tournament and activities for neighborhood children.

§ **September, 2008:** Stellar Cultural Revue at the National Theatre, with participation from the Center's performing arts groups and national artists.

White Caps and Smiles: New National and International Cooking Class

On Tuesday afternoons, the cooking area is busy with a new activity, with the students so intent on learning new recipes that they barely have time to talk. Experienced instructor, Marcía Santamaría, teaches twenty-two women and two men national and international cuisine. For students who have already taken the Center's basic cooking and dessert classes, it offers a new challenge, because—as the students affirm—you can never stop learning. They take home the ability to cook something new for their families or the chance to add something new to their catering repertoire (for those who have cooking related small businesses). Just like the Center's other courses, this new class is a great place to build both skills and friendships.



Liturgy to Commemorate 6th Anniversary of Sister Margarita's Passing

“Margarita... *Your enthusiasm continues in*



all of us in each moment that we learn and teach in this community; I am always talking to you; You are here in colors most vibrant; You are physically gone but

remain in each of our hearts; You have stayed on, to continue fighting the unjust world,”
– from “Story of a Child,” by Gerardo Arias, painting instructor

The Center celebrated a special Mass in memory of Sister Margarita on Sunday, September 2. The sentiment expressed by Gerardo encapsulates the feelings of all who knew Margarita. While she may be physically gone, Margarita remains a very real presence, and the hunger for knowledge she awoke in this community certainly lives on. Frey Martin celebrated a moving popular Mass, focusing on the fight against injustice. Together with the altar decorated with photos and flowers, it was the perfect way to express our gratitude for Margarita's life and example.

Tomorrow is a New
Dawn

Choir Reaches New Heights

The last weeks of August were the culmination of months of hard work for the Angel Torrellas Choir. On August 23 and 26, the choir performed as part of Nicaragua's 6th annual festival of choral music, hosted by the National Theater. This year choir director Juan Guido gave the Choir a new challenge: the Mass in B-flat major by classical composer Franz Schubert. The young chorus members more than rose to the challenge, performing the Mass in Latin in venues around the country, in collaboration with the National Orchestra and four soloists from the UPOLI Conservatory. The last performance was on September 3, when community members gathered at the Center to extend the celebration of Sister Margarita's life. Choir member Rigoberto Calero says he was pleased and impressed with the performance, his first of such caliber. Another member, Erick Torrez adds that it was a wonderful way to include so many new choir participants. In their beautiful performance they showed hundreds of audience members that often in sacred music, regardless of religion or creed, we can find community, strength and solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

Special Workshop on Managing Conflict

The Center recently received a gift in the form of extensive training in conflict resolution, teamwork and cooperative games by Emilio Arranz, a Spanish friend of Fr. Rui Manuel and member of the Friends of Batahola in Spain. Throughout his 3-week stay at the Center, Emilio gave workshops to schools participating in the Center's UNDP project, as well as for neighborhood children, scholarship recipients, the library team, chorus members and adult-education students. The activities culminated in a two-day workshop with the Center's staff team. The workshop provided an opportunity for staff members to deepen relationships and learn new skills for effective communication, active listening, leadership and conflict resolution. Arranz's many teaching techniques helped staff articulate their goals for themselves and the Center, mainly centering on self-esteem and focusing on their desire for self-improvement. Staff and students have already begun to apply his techniques and lessons to their own classes.

Computer Donation from Connecticut Quest for Peace

Two new computers, donated by Connecticut Quest for Peace, have been set up in the



Virgilio Medina

Teacher's Room for staff use. Virgilio, the Center's main computer technician, has been instrumental in setting them up with Linux operating system and Open Office software. While these programs are a change from the familiar Microsoft Windows, they take up less memory and the computers' processors are not slowed down. They also give staff a chance to familiarize themselves with the system, as the Center starts the transition to open-source software. Virgilio has also helped staff become familiar with this new system through special orientation and training times.

With thanks to Jennifer Marshall, Coordinator of the Cultural Center, and to the new volunteer, Rebecca Janzen, for contributing most of the articles in this newsletter.

Center Welcomes a New Volunteer

Rebecca Janzen, from Ottawa, Canada, arrived at the Center on August 28. She will be volunteering at the Center until July, 2008 through the Mennonite Central Committee's SALT program. Having just graduated from the University of Waterloo in History and Spanish, she seeks to serve



Rebecca (left) with Karla, a scholarship recipient

others while using her university education as her experience in teaching and working with children. She hopes to be able to use her love of teaching, talking and writing in her year at the Center. She will provide assistance to the scholarship program, newsletter, teaching programs, administration and the library, as well as providing some informal English tutoring. She also has hopes of developing a more complete photography program and re-inaugurating a swimming program for choir participants. Needless to say, she will have a very full and busy year ahead.

Welcome Rebecca!

Center Response in the Aftermath of Hurricane Felix

The community in Batahola Norte has come together to support our brothers and sisters affected by Hurricane Felix, in the Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region. Throughout the week following the hurricane's landfall on September 5, the Center collected donations to be sent to Acci3n M3dica Cristiana (Christian Medical Action). After a full day of sorting, they were able to donate 41 family packages along with 4 bags of adult clothing, a box of infant clothing and 11 boxes of cold-weather clothing, the latter necessary because of continuing heavy rains and lack of shelter. Our community members also donated much needed potable water, medication, rice, soap and cooking oil. The region has experienced major environmental damage that will make subsistence and rebuilding difficult for these isolated, primarily indigenous, communities hardest hit by the storm. Center staff offer heartfelt thanks to the generosity of both our local community and our many US friends who made donations to relief agencies working in the region.

Upgrades to Center Facilities

With buildings covering nearly an acre of ground, some area of the Center always needs upgrading. Thanks to donor Carl Bailey, of Connecticut, many areas have recently received overdue attention:



In the library, a reception desk with cubbies allows students to leave their bags behind while they study, which should reduce the rate of disappearing books and allow students to use what we have for years to come.

Just across the courtyard, in the stifling sewing workshop, an air conditioning unit has been installed and students are learning how to use the newly donated serger, a specialized sewing machine. This allows students to broaden their range of skill and better prepares them to establish a business, or to work in someone else's shop.

Every night of the week the Center holds adult education classes, and now, thanks to specialized desk chairs, they are better



able to begin or complete their primary education. Here young students wait for a tutoring session to begin and are inaugurating the new desk chairs.

Many other projects are planned, including:

- installing ceiling fans in the chapel
- restoring the historic murals
- upgrading tools for the cooking classes.

New Theater Instructor Shines Students Learn Healthy Decision-Making Skills Via Art

On September 5, Diego Nuñez, the Center's new theatre instructor performed with his troupe in a short piece entitled *el Concierto Peligroso* (the Dangerous Concert). This presentation originally began 12 years ago, as an innovative tool to educate youth about



Kids Enjoying Theater Class

healthy decision-making, and continues to be relevant today. It brings an important message of the consequences of drugs and risky sexual behavior to youth in Nicaragua. At the end of the interactive performance, audience members made comments and asked questions. Not only is Diego a gifted actor, but he has contributed to a growth in interest in the theater program. About 35 young students ages 8 to 13 flock to his Thursday and Friday afternoon classes for the chance to play the drama games he plans, learn how to act and to become more self-confident.

New Workshop to Assist Young Entrepreneurs and Combat Underemployment

In collaboration with PRODEM, an organization for the Promotion and Development of Businesses, the Center is planning an intensive course that promotes starting and growing small businesses as a way to combat youth underemployment. Starting on October 12, 30 participants (age 18 to 35) will have the opportunity to learn how to build a business from the ground up. Some participants already have small businesses, such as hair salons, and would use the opportunity to improve, expand or overhaul them. Other young people dream of opening stores that do not yet exist in their neighborhoods. They are eager to improve their economic situation and that of their families. They also hope to improve their communities by eventually providing employment for others. When they complete the 12-week course, they will have created a detailed business plan and will have opportunities for start-up loans from microlender ACODEP to implement the plan.

Tomorrow is a New Dawn

A follow-up on Gabriel Perez

Since so many people have asked how this child is doing now, we have decided to include this update. Several months ago Gabriel returned to Nicaragua following two more surgeries for his severe scoliosis (curvature of the spine). After the first operation in the US (he had already undergone two in Nicaragua), an edition of this newsletter featured his good recovery. But he still needed much more extensive intervention and earlier this year underwent two more operations at Atlanta Children's Hospital, the last an eight hour procedure performed by a wonderful pediatric spine surgeon who donated his services. Gabriel has now four titanium



Gabriel at age 6 in that steel and plastic brace he wore for 6 years. Below, seen with his grandmother this past August at age 12..



rods and several bone grafts in his back, but he is pain free and can do most everything now. Playing his beloved soccer is still off limits, but no doubt he sneaks in a game or two. In August, he was able to visit his grandparents who live several hours away. They had not seen him since before his first US surgery in December, '06 and were obviously pleased with his progress...as were his uncles, aunts, cousins...all who live in the same tiny house. Perhaps, one day, all of Nicaragua will address him as "El Presidente".



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Brief History of the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte

The Cultural Center of Batahola began in 1983 with the arrival of Sister Margarita Navarro of Cincinnati, Ohio and Father Angel Torrellas of Spain. Originally, in a one room prefab structure, a woman volunteered to teach sewing classes while Father formed the children into a little choir. The Center through some twenty-four years, has grown into a true oasis in a community which knows great poverty. Thousand of lives have been enhanced through the career preparatory courses offered at the Center, as well as through financial assistance given to students to attend primary, secondary, and university classes in the city. Courses offered at the Center are registered with the Ministry of Education so that diplomas have National recognition. Students who have benefitted are counted among the teachers, homemakers, lawyers and doctors of Nicaragua.

Faithful Center Alumnae...Future Leaders in Nicaragua



Alina Vanegas (left), a highly motivated, mature young woman, recently left Nicaragua to study medicine in Cuba, following in the footsteps of three other Cultural Center Alumnae; Karen, Queyla and Karla who have already become physicians. During her many years associating with the Center, Alina was a very active participant in the chorus and dance troupe, and gained a reputation as a special person who can always be counted on—a real leader. As the youngest child in her family, she was very close to her mother, a faithful participant in weekly Mass. Alina, aceing her entrance exam at National Nicaraguan University, received a scholarship and completed two years of medical study. Still, knowing that Cuban Medical Schools are very prestigious, she sought and won a scholarship to study medicine there. Armed with the gift of a guitar and dance costume from the Center, Alina is sharing part of her country with new friends. When she returns, she plans to work in an under-served rural area of Nicaragua.

Jamileth Socorro Flores (right), is one of many faithful young women who, from early years, has been a part of the everyday life of the Center. She is pictured here helping with the painting of a wall mural. Jamileth began by joining the choir many years ago, then learning a musical instrument (she plays the flute) while completing her social service requirements for obtaining scholarship assistance. She studied English at the National University and shared those skills generously by teaching the subject for a non-governmental organization working with poor youngsters. Currently she participates in the Center life in numerous ways including: assisting the dance professor with practices, costumes, etc., and by organizing birthday celebrations of the chorus members.



For donations to the work of the Center:

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