

FRIENDS OF BATAHOLA NEWSLETTER

Tomorrow is a new dawn

SPRING, 2005

LITERACY PROGRAM CELEBRATES QUARTER CENTURY

It has been twenty five years since the **Great Literacy Campaign** took place in Nicaragua. Shortly after the Revolution in 1980, there was a nationwide effort to offer reading and writing skills to all Nicaraguans. High school and university students participated in the program, traveling to every nook and corner of the countryside, teaching basic literacy skills to every adult who desired to learn to read and write. The literacy rate rose from 50% to 87% within



the space of 5 months. UNESCO recognized this achievement with an award.

Sister Margie had not been long in Batahola when she realized the value of such an undertaking and began a small program. At first, two or three adults ventured into night class, but, before long, more and more people signed up to learn these precious skills. That was 22 years ago and the program is one of few in the country which has continually offered classes over these many years.

The Center offers an introductory level, for people who have no experience reading or writing, and then follows up with three levels, covering the full six years of primary school education. Of the 62 adults who attended this year's program, 68% were women. There is never a charge for these classes and the Ministry of Education grants a diploma to those who successfully complete the courses.

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

The **Scholarship Program** provides assistance for needy children or adults to take courses offered within the Center itself or to assist those who need help to attend primary, secondary or university classes at area institutions. Here we profile just two of the dozens of youthful recipients: **Fabiola Dayanna Flores** and **Anahi Chavez Castillo**.



Fabiola is 12 years old and attends the Hermann Gmeiner School where all students take a technical class in addition to regular academics. **Fabiola** chose "sewing" and says that the scholarship money she receives helps pay

for the needed materials and school fees. She also appreciates the tutoring and library assistance received at the Center, both of which help to keep up her grades. She is an excellent student.

Anahi has been receiving scholarship assistance for three years: the first year as a recipient of computer classes at the Center; the second to help her complete high school and this year to support her at the university. At age 21, **Anahi** lives at home with her mother who supports the family by cooking and selling food on weekends. She completes her Social Service by tutoring younger children, library work and giving workshops in environmental education and sex education.



OUTREACH TO A LOCAL SCHOOL

The **Carlos Fonseca Primary School** is located within yards of the Cultural Center and actually was built by Sister Margie and Father Angel back in the late 80's. They later donated it to the Ministry of Education, though the Center has always maintained a close relationship with the children and faculty.

This is evident in the current activities offered to these children by the Center, all of which are focused on helping them become well-rounded young citizens. For example, for the **first to third grade students, there are "Songs and Story Circles"** offered through the Center's Library, the purpose of which is to instill into these very young students a love of reading and learning.

On Fridays, the sixth graders come to the Center for videos and guided discussions on social issues such as: protecting the environment, health and family relationships, and children's rights.

Over the summer, the *Center offers introductory music courses* with the assistance of a volunteer teacher from Canada who will be there for three months.

And, as always, the **Center's well-stocked library is open daily for student's research, quiet homework time, tutoring or leisure reading.**

Many of the activities, in which the Center engages the children of the **Carlos Fonseca School**, are run by young people in the Center's Scholarship Program, their way of giving back to the community through Social Service.

OVERFLOWING CLASSES NEW TEACHERS

With increasing demands by the people of Batahola and surrounding barrios for a spot in the practical/technical courses traditionally offered at the Center, several new teachers have joined the staff. **Johanna, Daisy, Mercedes, and Juan** are the newest to share their talents with the community. **Johanna** learned her own **cooking skills** here at the Center and now shares those with **25** students each Saturday morning. **Daisy** is very creatively teaching a course in **handicrafts**, while **Mercedes** offers “**beauty class**” during the week. **Juan**, a member of the chorus for many

years, now teaches the **introductory music classes**. Another veteran teacher, **Cristina**, has **40** students in her Saturday “**beauty class**”. **Haircuts are offered free of charge for those willing to be recipients of the students’ newly acquired skills**



Damaris, practices shaving with a straight razor... using a soft balloon as a subject instead of a face. Quite an innovative teaching technique!



Other courses filled to overflowing are: **drawing**, taught by **Wilmer** and **Gerardo** who have **24** and **38** students respectively; **sewing**, taught by **Daisy** with **25** students, and **Level III Basic Adult Education** (equivalent to fifth and six grades elementary) where **Christian** has some **30** students working towards that coveted diploma. As always, **computer classes**, with **Sonia** and her assistants, almost require a “waiting list” for those anxious for knowledge of these essential skills.

STAFF RETREAT WITH SISTER HELEN PREJEAN AND JEANNE McMANUS A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE

Over a weekend in late April, the Center Staff (teachers, maintenance workers, administration—ALL) participated in a retreat conducted by **Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ** and **Jeanne McManus**, both members of the Board of Directors of the Friends of Batahola. **Jennifer**, the Center’s Coordinator, described the Sunday as a “special day—a great way for all staff to (re)connect with one another and with our Mission.” One of the other participants, **Alejandra Mendez, Natural Medicine teacher**, said: “It was a very enriching and pleasant day...the group and individual reflection times guided us in the importance of the Center’s mission, cultivating and always maintaining it as central in our daily work.

The moment when we did the ‘Shawl Ceremony’** and expressed our personal gifts to the community, was very special.

I felt an emotion that even today I am unable to express in words. Once again, I’d like to thank Margarita and Angel for this gift of love that they left to Batahola and to Nicaragua. Thank you to all the Friends of Batahola who help to maintain and grow the Center and to Helen and Jeanne for sharing with all of us and for making this retreat possible.”

Jeanne and Sister Helen were equally as positive in their evaluation of the entire experience.

***The “Shawl Ceremony” refers to a beautiful prayer shawl made by the women of the Northern Cheyenne. As every knot is tied, during the weaving of the shawl, the women say a prayer for the recipient. It is, therefore, a wonderful and deep symbol of love, friendship and prayer.*

The shawl was originally presented to Sister Helen, and she has brought it to Batahola to share with the people at the Center. It has been used for many special services such as in the ceremony referred to above.

LOYAL PARISH IN CINCINNATI

Cincinnati was home to Sister Margie. In fact, she was Principal at one of the Catholic schools in that city before setting out, in 1964, to become a missionary in Latin America. But Cincinnati was always “home”, and parishes there, to this day, remain loyal to her memory and her mission. **Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish**, through a “twinning program”, has sent thousands of dollars to the Center for its work over these many years. Sue Keefe a nurse, parishioner, and member of the Board of Directors of the Friends of Batahola, has been super-active in fund raising and in loving support of the Center. Among many other activities, Sue yearly gathers interested adults and students who are willing to sacrifice precious vacation days to learn about and serve the people of Batahola. Being part of the group necessitates completing the required readings and attending preparatory meetings prior to travel.

Describing this year’s upcoming visit (June 9-16), Sue writes: ***“There will be 22 of us, 12 teens. We are planning on getting to know the people of Batahola with our eyes, our ears, and our hearts—giving out reading glasses, working in the neighborhood, meeting with scholarship students, attending classes, doing a clean-up day, building relationships, and sharing Bible study with the teachers on Friday.”***

Sue also mentions plans to meet with the young people of the “Jesuit Volunteers International” who are stationed in Managua and to have a final evening meal, after Sunday Mass, with the Administrative Team, the Nicaraguan Board and old friends.

We wish Sue and the group well as they make the journey to Nicaragua. Of great importance is the fact that Sue and the group will present to the Center staff a check for \$13,000. — money raised at a giant parish yard sale. Undoubtedly, the Center staff will greet them with open arms as such a generous donation helps to support the many wonderful programs we have partially described in these pages.

TOMORROW THERE WILL BE A NEW DAWN IN BATAHOLA

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, TERRI HOLMAN

“On Thursday, March 10, five board members of the Friends of Batahola made the journey to Nicaragua. We were

greeted at the airport, as always, with the open arms of old friends, and this time by a new friend, Jennifer Marshall, the new Coordinator.

Early next morning we attended a staff reflection, a gathering held weekly to reflect on the following Sunday’s liturgical readings. It was a beautiful, prayerful

experience to hear staff members reflect on the Word and how it lives out in their daily lives.

Then came the many meetings set up with: finance staff, the Administrative Team, Jennifer and the Nicaraguan Board of Directors. The meetings went very well and we were able to share the development plan which the Friends of Batahola have been working toward: strategic plan, case for support, budget and goal setting.

The Administrative Team then shared highlights of the accomplishments in each of their departments. Mentioned were the dramatic increase in enrollment, new course offerings, new teachers, the increase use of the library by hundreds of students, and the success of the performing arts projects. Programs held throughout the year were described, including a well attended concert of sacred music during recent Holy Week services. The Friends of Batahola were truly impressed with the continued progress of the Center. Separate meetings were held with the Nicaraguan Board of Director at which they updated us on changes to their membership. Fr. Jose Luis will be moving to Honduras and will be replaced by another priest. Sister Dianne Fanguy is in the United States for a year. The Board put in long hours in search of a new coordinator and feels very happy with Jennifer Marshall who accepted the position and started in January.

Besides the many hours of meetings, we enjoyed other gatherings: a delicious lunch at Jennifer’s house in the hills of Managua; a Saturday night party, Mardi Gras style, for some forty staff members and guests. The women who run the small “Cafe” at the Center catered a delicious, typical Nicaraguan meal for all. Dancing and prizes are always the highlight of the staff party.

After Mass on Sunday night, a large group gathered for dinner in honor of, and in gratitude to, Fr. Jose Luis for all of his years of service to the Center. On Monday, the Friends of Batahola headed back to the United States more than satisfied with all that had been gleaned from this visit.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE NEW COORDINATOR, JENNIFER MARSHALL

Jennifer Marshall began her position as Coordinator of the Batahola Cultural

Center in January, 2005.

Originally from the Boston area, she is a graduate of Wellesley College where she majored in Linguistics.

Jennifer has had various post-graduate academic experiences in both the US and Europe. Prior to the move to Managua, she worked for several years at “**City Life/Vida Urbana**”, an organization which works with women, youth and families to defend their

rights for meaningful work, education and safe, affordable housing. Every skill desirable in a Coordinator of the Cultural Center seems to have been found in Jennifer --summed up, perhaps, in her own words: *“...the most defining facets of my life so far: faith, creative arts, and nonprofit administration in the service of social justice.”*

Jennifer has travelled extensively throughout Mexico, Central and South America and Europe and has a list of accomplishments in her professional life that are already proving to be valuable assets to the work in Batahola. Her musical background alone is extensive, as well as her study of and experiences in administration, research, communications, fundraising, various forms of creative expression and leadership skills. Jennifer also describes the basis for her chosen work:

“God’s call to walk humbly with Him and to do justice...has been the basis for my work and worship. To me this means both service to the poor and challenging the structures that perpetuate poverty. It also means embracing the challenge of diversity in all areas of life.”

That the Center was fortunate to have teamed up with Jennifer was due to the efforts of the Nicaraguan Board of Directors who searched far and wide for such a candidate.

On July 19th, Jennifer will marry Paulo Madrigal, a Nicaraguan, whom she met in Boston while he lived there for a few years. Happily, her parents, Phil and Beth Marshall, will be able to travel to Managua to participate in the ceremony and festivities.

The Friends of Batahola wish her and Paulo a grace-filled, wonderful life together. The future of the Cultural Center of Batahola is certainly in good hands.

ACTIVITIES OF THE MUSIC GROUPS

A lasting tribute to Father Angel—these continuous, wonderful works by the chorus and orchestra of the Center. For Holy Week, they prepared a beautiful repertoire of sacred music and offered it in two well-attended community concerts prior to church services. Now they are preparing for the annual “Choral Week” to be celebrated at the National Theatre (Ruben Dario) in August. It is a prestigious honor to be invited to participate in this yearly event. The group has chosen this year’s selections from “**Ocean World**”, works by Anne Conlon with music by Peter Rose. It focuses on the treasures of the world’s oceans and has been produced by **UNICEF**. Some of the pieces which make up the work are: “Creatures of Coral”, “Enigma of the Deep”, “My World”, “Sensuous Soul” and “Angels and Butterflies”. An example of the magnificent lyrics from “Ocean World”:

“Come, let me show you the beauty of my home... creatures of coral, miraculous bone, life living city of living stone.”

Besides the presentations of the chorus, the “music” programs offer lessons and programs for various instrumentals: violin, viola, marimba, piano, and flute, as well as traditional and sacred dance. Sunday liturgies are made all the more precious by the inclusion of these various offerings.

MAYRA VELAZQUEZ has been selected as the new Assistant to Francisco Jarquin, Choir Director. She works with Francisco Gutierrez (Artistic Promotion Coordinator) and Director Jarquin to plan rehearsals, choose music, and look for ways to engage chorus members in the life of the chorus



and the Center. She has also taken over directing the music during weekly liturgy. Mayra has been a member of the choir since she was a young child and studied with Father Angel. She has been steeped in music programs ever since. Proficient in violin, she gives lessons in that instrument to students at the Center and is a member of the newly formed “Romanza Women’s Ensemble” as well as “Music in the Barrios.”

HISTORY OF THE CULTURAL CENTER



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 there was a one room prefab structure with a woman volunteering sewing classes as Father formed the children into a little choir. The Center, through some twenty two 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.

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MISSION STATEMENT OF THE FRIENDS OF BATAHOLA

Inspired by the vision of Sister Margie Navarro, CSJ and Father Angel Torrellas, OP to empower the Nicaraguan people, and in unity with the people of the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte, the Friends of Batahola strive to answer the Gospel call by affirming and supporting their mission. We share who we are and what we have through friendship, prayer, solidarity and financial support.

FRIENDS OF BATAHOLA

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