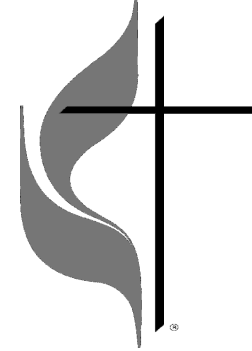


Nicaragua



2007

BOLDLY

Passionately

JOYFULLY

Making Disciples of
Jesus Christ!

FRIDAY, JULY 27

Ephesians 6: 19

"Boldly, Passionately, Joyfully Making Disciples of Jesus Christ." You may recognize this phrase as the theme of our Nicaragua mission trip this year. It's printed on the back of our T-shirts and the front of our devotional book. My prayer is that before this week is over, it will be imprinted on each one of our hearts as well!

I wish that I could take full credit for coming up with this theme but I simply cannot. This theme is actually the vision statement that our own Holston Annual Conference has adopted for this year. Our Bishop is very committed to encouraging every one of the 920 churches in our Conference and every member of these congregations to embody this vision statement. So how do we do this? You've taken the first step by making yourself available for this mission trip. I truly believe that when we make ourselves available to be used by God as missionaries, God is going to empower us to do great things in His name.

You can take another step toward making this theme your own by making yourself available to all the various opportunities for ministry this week. These can be very simple and will be very numerous this week: giving a hug or smile to one of our new Nicaragua friends, playing with the children that we meet each day, offering Medical care to those who would go without if it were not for you, assisting with construction projects that help to make Nicaragua a better place, or simply sharing with people the love that God has for them. I'm sure the list could go on and on! The point is that God will offer us numerous opportunities to serve in His name. We just need to be willing to make ourselves available.

This experience in Nicaragua will be one of the greatest experiences of your life — I guarantee that! There may be moments of joy and moments of sadness but they will be experiences that you will never forget. May prayer for you this week is that you would boldly allow God to work through you and in you. Through your words or your actions, may you boldly proclaim what God has done in your life to everyone you meet this week.

Melissa Smith

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we joyfully devote this new day to your service. We pray for guidance to see the needs of the people we have come to serve. All our actions, words, fellowship, teaching and prayers reflect the light and love of Jesus. Thank you Father for the privilege of serving you.

Prayer by Mary Emma Scott

JOURNALING PAGE:

JOURNALING PAGE:

SATURDAY, JULY 28

Right Place at the Right Time

Acts 8: 26-39

Every have that internal nudge in your heart to go and "stand over there" or "sit here just a little longer" or "turn around and go another way?" Admittedly we sometimes hear these internal heart nudges and are just working out our own ambition or anxiety. Yet, with patience and practice we can begin to hear the Holy Spirit guide us, like Philip, to be at the right place at the right time for a divine purpose. For Philip, it was actually the voice of an angel that spoke very specific directions to him. You too may hear a voice. Perhaps the voice you hear will be that of an angel, a local, a team member, or a song that comes to your mind. Take time to heed that voice today. As you work alongside other team members and Nicaraguans, allow your heart to be nudged. Listen to the conversations around you. Perhaps you will be nudged to help someone come to know Jesus for the first time, grow in a more personal way with our risen Lord, or find your own heart strangely warmed. When you come to the end of this day, reflect on how you were at the right place at the right time for a divine purpose.

Thoughts to Ponder

-What barriers are in my life that prevent me from hearing a Holy Spirit heart nudge? Am I too focused on the "job at hand," worried about language barriers, concerned that I might mess up, or something else?

- How can I shape a "breath prayer" (a short prayer you would say throughout the day, over and over) to be bold and have the faith and courage to overcome these barriers?

Prayer

Precious Jesus, you are my light, my redeemer, and my strength. Open my mind and heart to hear the still small whisper of your will and give me the courage to respond. Amen.

Don Hanshew

SUNDAY, JULY 29

Scripture: II Corinthians 8:1-7

Okay. Quick! What do you think of when you hear the word "America"? Hmm. Did you think of Canada or Venezuela? No, I'm pretty sure you thought of Panama. Wrong? Okay, was it Nicaragua? By the time, you read this, you could maybe think "Nicaragua." Most probably, though, you thought of the United States. That is the part of America in which we daily live, breathe and move. However, of course, we are only a part of the Americas. We have no monopoly on the name. We have no monopoly on the beauty of God's creation. We have no monopoly on the joy of living each day. And we certainly have no monopoly on the Christian faith.

As you are there in that beautiful land that God created, and are among some of God's beautiful children, **boldly, passionately and joyfully** living out your faith, think about the fact that you might **boldly, passionately and joyfully** receive from those to whom you are giving. Allow your heart and soul to be open to receiving the Good News from our fellow Christians there. Let the people of Nicaragua be evangelists for you.

In II Corinthians 8:1-7, the Apostle Paul says that although the Macedonians were enduring great affliction themselves "their abundant joy and their extreme poverty ...overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part" for those in need. They were able to do this because of God's grace (v. 1). And so it is that you go in God's grace and that you are received in God's grace. You serve in God's grace, and the Christians of Nicaragua will serve you in God's grace, probably in ways they will not even realize. However, God will use them!

When I think of my own visit to Nicaragua last year, I really cannot think of much that I did to help God's children there. However, I am flooded with memories of how they helped me. As America goes to America, may God allow your hearts to be open to receiving **boldly, passionately and joyfully** from those whose physical wealth is paltry but whose spiritual wealth is like a cup that overflows.

Prayer: Dear Lord God of all, create in me the willingness to serve and to be served, to love and to be loved, to give and to receive faith so that my faith might grow as I strive to help others grow in faith. In Christ's name and spirit, Amen.

Jim Whedbee

JOURNALING PAGE:

JOURNALING PAGE:

MONDAY, JULY 30

To all the saints who have been called to serve in Nicaragua, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ:

Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

We greet you with these words "borrowed" from one of the epistles and updated just for you. Indeed you are one of God's saints serving in Nicaragua. You are, in fact, continuing the work begun so long ago—taking the Good News of Jesus Christ to all the world and sharing His love with everyone.

Perhaps sometime this week you'll find yourself a bit overwhelmed with the weight of being Christ's representative, with all that needs to be done, with the lack of time, or with the lack of resources. There were times in Nicaragua when we felt inadequate and frustrated that we were not better equipped to do more. But God always found a way to use us, and just as He used us in the past, He is using you in some special way each day.

Be joyful in all you do, and don't underestimate what you can accomplish with God's help. Remember these people and what they did with God's help...

Jonah ran from God, but he eventually became the messenger
Nineveh needed
Joseph was a spoiled child, but he grew up to interpret dreams and
become a ruler
Moses lacked eloquence, but he parted the Red Sea
Timothy was young and timid, but he was an effective missionary
Mary was a young peasant girl, but she gave birth to the Savior
Peter denied Christ, but he became Simon, the rock upon
which the church is built

God finds special ways to use even the most humble servants. Be still a moment, and hear what He wants you to do today.

Prayer: Father, allow me to do Your will without hesitation or fear. Fill me with Your grace and love that I might share it with everyone I encounter today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 31

Matthew 25: 31-46

Several years ago, I was on a similar mission trip to Nicaragua. At that time, no one on our team had ever been to Nicaragua, and we did not really know exactly what to expect. The year before, I had been to Costa Rica on a mission trip, but still, I *REALLY* didn't exactly know what to expect. We had an interesting flight to Managua and it was great to meet everyone at the El Ayudante mission home for the first time.

On our day off, we attended a mid-week "worship service" at the Leon garbage dump [sorry, land fill]. Before we left our comfortable surroundings, we were told that when we left the dump that day, we would never be the same again. *I dismissed this whole idea of being changed by this experience.* However, God had another idea for me.

As we headed up the steep mountain slope to the Leon dump that day, I began to notice people that we had treated in a clinic in a village close by the day before. I could not help noticing the people scrounging to find something to eat or something of value at the dump. I also noticed how incredibly hot it was.

As if this was not enough, Melissa had purchased some "cross necklaces" with some money that her uncle who was near death had given her prior to the trip. She bought the crosses only a few days before she left for Nicaragua. When I climbed up the rock wall, all I could see was this huge line of Nicaraguan children patiently waiting to receive their "cross necklace" from Melissa and her assistants. I started helping hand out crosses. The symbolism of the cross being given out was incredible. All I can say is that I had tears running down my face.

Afterward, I could not talk; I could only ball like a little baby after this experience. I was completely, totally, emotionally drained.

Earlier in the day, I had dismissed the "*we would never be the same*" conversation entirely. However, God had something different in mind. I had been changed, and I will be forever changed after this experience. To this day, when I think about this event, I still well up inside. *Praise be to God!*

Ralph Paden

JOURNALING IDEAS

Remember what you did today.

Who did you meet?

What will you remember about them?

What did you see?

What made you laugh?

What made you cry?

What's one thing that you'll always remember about what you did today?

In what ways did you experience God today?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What was the hardest part of this week's ministry for you? Why?
- What will you remember most about your experience in Nicaragua?
- What did you do while in Nicaragua to show God's love?
- How will your life be different because of this experience in Nicaragua?

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 1

The Little Sheep of Nicaragua

Matthew 18: 10-14

In preparation for our mission trip to Nicaragua in 2006 I, along with several other members of FCUMC, cut out and drew hundreds of sheep faces for our Bible School mission. We prayed for our mission and for the children who would receive these sheep faces long before we stepped foot on Nicaraguan soil. I even dreamed about those sheep faces!

One hot, humid day in a remote area of Nicaragua as our team helped the excited children decorate their sheep faces with cotton balls and mount them on paint sticks, I looked around the makeshift classroom and marveled that God knows each of these children by name, and His love for each of these children is far beyond my comprehension.

I was privileged to be used by God to help teach the Nicaraguan children that God cares if one of His sheep gets lost. In fact, a good shepherd will leave his flock just to look for that one lost sheep, and he will rejoice when he finds the lost sheep. That's how God's love is for each of us, whether we live among the volcanoes of Nicaragua or among the mountains of East Tennessee.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us always to remember that Your love and concern extends all around the world and that You know each of us by name. Each of us is special because You created each one of us. In Jesus Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Becky Johnston

Prayer:

We have come to this amazing place by our own choice. What we do with this day is also our own choice. As we perform each task today, let our every action reflect the love of Jesus. See beauty in the land and on the face of the people! Watch the children closely and "make mental photos" of their beautiful faces. As you prepare your prayers tonight, count the blessings this day has given you!

Russ Coble

THURSDAY, AUGUST 2

Yesterday, I had an opportunity to help a friend. No big deal. Just meet with a group for Bible study. It's something I enjoy - talking together about the Bible stories and thinking and praying together.

I arrived early to meet a newcomer; I had read over the material and had some thoughts, but I was open to the group needs and willing to see what happened. Only the newcomer came to the group. We sat together waiting on others, but after several minutes, realized it would be just the two of us. She shared her story, her new-found love for God, her welcome to the church and her eagerness to learn more about the Bible. So we opened God's word together.

She taught me as I listened. We looked together at the assigned passage. She asked questions and expressed frustration about knowing how to approach a Book she had never really read. I shared the same passage from *The Message*, and a light came on in her eyes. Then I shared one of my favorite verses, Isaiah 40:27-31. She marked it in her Bible and expressed her joy in its affirmation. Thanks be to God for unexpected opportunities to share and learn together! There may be an opportunity for you today. The blessings overflow!

Susan Todd

- How have you experienced God work in ways this week that you were not expecting?
- How can you continue to develop a faith in God that allows his presence in you life to be new and exciting?

FRIDAY, AUGUST 3

Colossians 1:3-6

I began this week by saying that this mission trip would be one of the greatest experiences of you life. Was I lying or telling you the truth?

If you're like me, there have probably been a flood of confusing emotions that you've been wrestling with this week. You joyously play with the children that we met each day and your Spirit soars. Later that evening, you pass the village that these children live in and wonder how they can possibly survive. You may even ask harder questions like "Why am I so blessed when they have so very little?" or "How can they be so happy when they have absolutely no material blessings?"

All of these emotions and questions (and many more like them) are valid responses to what you have experienced in Nicaragua this week. Hopefully you have been changed in some small or dramatic ways by what you have experienced. If so, you're not alone. Many of your team members are probably feeling the same exact way — just ask them!

In the opening chapter of *Colossians*, Paul talks about that people had heard about the faith of the *Colossians*. Do you think that's an accident? Probably not! It sounds like the *Colossians* were so serious about living out their faith in God, people couldn't help but hear about it! The *Colossians* knew that their hope was not in their material possessions but rather it is "stored up in heaven." Sound like anyone you met this week?

My favorite verse in this passage is verse 6: "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing." Hopefully you have seen this week that the Nicaraguans have a great love for God. You should be very excited that you have experienced God in a country where the gospel is growing and people are coming to know God. But understand that you have played a part in this Gospel being spread throughout the country. As you have taught, prayed, served, and played, you have been the only Gospel that some people might have seen. Understanding that is very humbling!

Thank you for loving and serving our friends in Nicaragua. More importantly, thank you for your availability to be used by God in some pretty powerful ways. Thanks be to God for how he has worked and will continue to do so!