

Nicaragua – 17th November to 28th November 2013



Aims:

1. To accompany three young Methodists and a professional photographer to Nicaragua to learn about and engage with street children who will be playing in the Street Child World Cup in Brazil in 2014.
2. To visit a selection of Methodist churches across Nicaragua, visit Methodist project work and build and develop relationships between the Independent Evangelical Methodist Church of Nicaragua and MCB.
3. For the WCR Team Leader to familiarise himself with a partner church in Central America.

Programme:

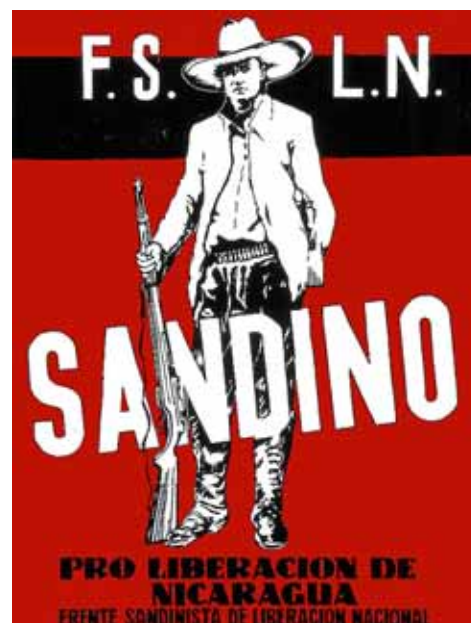
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| Monday 18 th | Morning with Casa Alianza (CA) at their vocational training centre. Afternoon at CA 'Hilton' Residence |
| Tuesday 19 th | Day visit to the Avocado Pear Tree School |
| Wednesday 20 th | Early morning start (05.30) to CA Hilton for football training session Morning visit with CA Outreach Team to city rubbish dumps Afternoon visits with CA Family Reintegration Unit staff to families |
| Thursday 21 st | Morning drive to Jinatago Afternoon visit to Methodist Churches in Jinatago including 'house church' visit |
| Friday 22 nd | Morning tour of CEPANA Agriculture Training Centre Afternoon visit to CEPANA beneficiary and return drive to Managua |
| Saturday 23 rd | Morning at Managua sports complex for sponsored Zumba class and inter-team football matches Afternoon drive to Grenada. Boat trip and sight seeing Evening Methodist youth service in Managua (Light for the Nations Church) |
| Sunday 24 th | Morning worship at Methodist Church in Managua (Church of the Good Samaritan) Lunch and time with young people at church Afternoon visit to Masaya market and then drive to Apoyo |
| Monday 25 th | Rest day at Apoyo |
| Tuesday 26 th | Early morning visit to volcano en route to Methodist Feeding programme Lunch and afternoon with children on feeding programme |
| Wednesday 27 th | Morning with CA at the Teenage Mother unit Afternoon with CA Hilton for art session and farewells |

Regional Context

The politics of Nicaragua have been turbulent throughout the 20th century. American intervention in 1912 set the scene for the next ninety years. The Constitutional War ended in 1927 but Sandino and his anti-imperialist fighters refused to recognise his country's surrender. Waves of revolutions, uprising and dictatorships followed with Sandino being assassinated in 1935. For the next forty years the Somoza dictatorship led the nation but Sandinista rebels (funded by Cuba) continued to challenge the oppressive regime. In 1979 Somoza resigned and fled the country handing power to the socialist Sandinistas. In 1981, the USA armed a counter-revolution and

strangled the Nicaragua economically, which brought the Sandinistas down in 1990. This led to 10 years of civil war, with Nicaraguans fighting Nicaraguans. It is interesting to note that the Evangelical Methodist Church in Nicaragua comprises members who fought on both the Sandinista and counter revolutionary side. During the civil war, Nicaragua's economy, based on subsistence farming and the export of bananas, coffee and other cash crops, virtually collapsed. The effects of the war are still being felt today with almost half the population live in conditions of poverty. Violence as a result of drug trafficking is also another issue that has arisen from the change in drug trafficking transit routes to the US. Central America is now a major route for drug transportation, leading to some of the highest levels of violence and murder in the world.

Despite these statistics the country felt a safe place to be as a visitor and those we met during the trip were all very friendly people, loved their country and seemed prepared to do what they could to make it an even better place to live.



Casa Alianza and Street Child World Cup – The Facts and Figures:

Casa Alianza is an international, NGO dedicated to the rehabilitation and defence of street children in Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico and Guatemala.

They work with approximately 10,000 street children a year, most of whom have been orphaned, abused or abandoned and traumatised by the societies in which they live.

Founded in 1981 in an environment of violent conflict and human rights abuses rampant in Latin America at the time, CA has grown from a refuge for displaced Guatemalan children into an international organisation working on behalf of street children.

They offer street children shelter, food, medical care, protection, guidance, respect and love helping children escape from loneliness, hunger, drugs, poverty, sexual exploitation, trafficking, emotional starvation, physical abuse and extreme violence. CA also actively defend children's rights and they have become a leading advocacy agency for children at risk in the America's.

CA in Nicaragua is split between three main buildings in Managua.



Vocational Training Centre: This small unit offers catering, baking, tailoring and hammock making courses for groups of street children within CA's care. The courses usually run for three months with six to eight participants on a course at any one time. The unit also functions as a local cafe/lunchtime restaurant where those on the catering courses prepare lunch on a semi-commercial basis helping the unit to cover costs. Bread, cakes and needlework items are also sold. The centre also has a meeting room that we were able to make use of to meet staff and learn about the work of the organisation.

The 'Conrad Hilton' Residential Centre: This is the main CA venue in Managua and is the residential unit for up to eighty young people (boys and girls) between the ages of 12 and 18. The accommodation is dormitory style with around eight beds per room. Along with the dining area, kitchen and bathroom facilities there is a





large covered semi-open multipurpose space where many of the activities for the young people take place. There is a small open-air hard football pitch and an outdoor basketball court. Counseling takes place in small office-type rooms and there are other rooms and spaces available to the children. The main CA offices are also on this site and are the home to the outreach teams and the family re-integration teams.

The Teenage Mother Unit: This centre offers a home to up to 16 teenage mothers/mothers-to-be and their children. It is a safe environment away from other parts of CA and from the front looks much the same as any other house in the street. (It helps that all the properties have large secure wire fencing and locked gates!) Here the young women (currently aged from 14 to 17) are able to be cared for physically and psychologically as well as experience a sense of 'family' that they otherwise would not have. During their stay in the unit the young mothers are able to attend school or training courses. Some stay for only a few months whilst others stay much longer. No-one leaves until they have either been integrated into a secure and safe family (usually extended family) or are able to cope on their own as young adults.



The Street Child World Cup: This UK based charity grew from the Amos Trust in the run up to the 2010 Football World Cup in Durban. Amos Trust focuses on advocacy and rights for the poor and oppressed. In Durban as the city was being prepared for the World Cup Amos Trust spoke out against the forced 'round-ups' of the S Africa street children who were being cleared from the sight of the watching world. The outworking of the Amos campaign was the establishment of a 'world cup' football tournament for street kids from different nations. Since the Durban games the Street Child World Cup work has become a separate charity in the UK. The SCWC will be repeated in Brazil in 2014 and will be attended by 15 teams (boys and girls) from 16 different countries. SCWC partners with organisations helping street children across the world – CA being the SCWC partner in Nicaragua.



MCB Children and Youth voted at 3Generate 2012 to raise £30k to pay for the girl's and boy's teams to travel from Nicaragua to Brazil. CA were able to send a mixed team to Durban and have been using the tournament as a 'pull' to encourage the street children to develop goals and purpose in their lives. To play on the teams all the young people need to be not only good at football but must commit (and prove) themselves to be clean of drugs, solvents and alcohol, to attend all the training sessions, to keep fit and to attend school (or training courses). These young people are those who have been the 'nobodies' as viewed by society but the chance to play youth football at international level gives them a chance to be 'somebody'. In doing so they raise the profile and plight of all the street children in Nicaragua and highlight the human rights issues within their nation and across the world.

Casa Alianza and Street Child World Cup – The Reality of the Work:



Before heading out onto the city rubbish dumps we were very well briefed by the Outreach Team that we were assigned to. These teams would not normally take out 'observers' to meet street kids so this gave us an almost unique insight to this aspect of the work. They were very open that the young people we would meet were ones well known to the outreach team members and that they wouldn't take us to either new or especially risky areas.

The teams are made up of two or three workers and always include at least one man and at least one woman. They go out with nothing (no money, watches removed etc) but a small rucksack which contains a small medical kit, head louse comb and treatment, a football, playing cards and a diablo! They usually travel on public transport and by foot though we did have the use of a small minibus for the group of us.

As we drove to the rubbish dump – an area that stretches for further than I could judge with mounds of waste just being tipped from large trailers being pulled by tractors – the housing quickly changed from the rough squat concrete block shells to wooden framed tin sheeted shacks in varying stages of disrepair. On the dumps small groups of kids and some adults were sorting through the rubbish. They look for plastic bottles, anything metal and glass jars to sell on. Clothing also seemed a prize though whether that was kept or sold it was unclear. It would be wrong to generalise but it appeared that most of the money from the sale of rubbish was being used to buy glue and other solvents for sniffing. We were told that solvent abuse numbs the senses and takes away hunger pangs. Solvent abuse causes damage to the brain, liver, kidneys and can cause muscle damage. There are also real dangers associated with the users actions when high. This is a particular issue on the rubbish dumps as the children run alongside the rubbish trailers and climb up while the vehicle is still moving – in the hopes of getting the best pickings from the load. One boy, Omar, told us his story (and showed us his scars!) of how he was caught under the wheel of a trailer and dragged along as the driver failed to stop. He was eventually taken to hospital where he was operated on, sewn up and then discharged the same day without any further medical care.

Soon after we arrived the small gang of children led us across a piece of scrubland to a makeshift football pitch. The outreach team produced the football and the game commenced. It was an interesting game! Six of us (those of us from the UK and the outreach workers) against about fifteen street kids aged between about eight and eighteen – mostly high as kites and completely fearless when it came to tackling! Every now and again one or two would disappear off for another fix – the Outreach team staff make it clear as they build relationships with groups or gangs that they will only visit and meet with the street kids if they don't do drugs or alcohol in sight of the outreach teams. This is the start of the process of showing that coming into CAs care can be the route to come off the drugs.

In the mid morning heat some of us 'lightweights' dropped out of the game once in a while for a rest. Watching at the pitch edge were the smaller children who have come to see the novelty of the UK visitors. This gave us a chance to



interact with each other. The diablo is popular as the youngsters try and get it spinning on the string and then throw it into the air. Catching it is a skill that most still have to develop! This outreach team have been visiting this gang regularly for about ten months. On this occasion, as a few of the younger kids were beginning to engage more when playing with the diablo, the team decided to let them borrow it and look after it until they came to visit next week. This was a big thing for these children. It was clear that the concept of being lent something to play with was completely alien. The outreach workers use this technique to help build trust and respect. There was a real chance that the kids would sell on the toy but they would then have to explain that to the outreach team on their next visit. Apparently the team usually gets things back and it is these small things that lead to a point where they can invite some of the children to the Hilton Residence to see if they wish to try and change their way of life. They come for odd days at first. They are helped through Narcotics Anonymous and with other counselling, and eventually some will become full residents.

When asked how many of a group of fifteen like this will stay at CA, the response was maybe two or three. When asked how many who go to the Hilton return to the rubbish dumps later the answer was about 50%. The outreach team were very honest caring people and you could see that despite the huge number of hours they put into this work they knew it was worth for the small success rate that they have. As one worker said – he “gets up every morning knowing that he has the best job in the world. They even pay me to play football with kids all day!” Of course he made light of the hardship and dangers of the work which encounters every day but his dedication and commitment to the work was without question.

Once in the Hilton the young people are housed, clothed and fed properly. They receive counselling and any other therapies that are necessary to help them including regular meeting of Narcotics anonymous. They attend regular school once they are clean from drugs and the older ones take part in the internal training course offered. Some are able to get places on external training programmes and among those we talked with some were training to be mechanics, engineers and waitresses.

Sport is used to offer childhood activity, build team working skills, provide a healthy environment and attitude within the centre and to release energy! Both football and basketball are played by boys and girls together without any of the gender issues that would arise in the same setting in the UK. Local competitions with other youth teams take place on some Saturdays and it is from this competitive sporting position that has enabled CA to become the street child world cup partner in Nicaragua.

Methodist Churches, their work and worship

Although Methodism in the Latin American and Central American region was introduced mainly by the United Methodist Church (UMC), it was Council of Latin American Evangelical Methodist Churches (CIEMAL) who supported evangelical congregations through the 80s and 90s to develop themselves as an autonomous Methodist Church in Nicaragua. Eventually in 1996, the church gained legal status and for the next 8 years the church developed slowly with support from CIEMAL, the UMC General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and other Methodists and NGOs based in the United States. More strategic support by GBGM and CIEMAL continued between 2004 and the present day with the result that the church has grown to over 3,000 members in 15 established congregations to a community of approximately 7,000 people. The church currently has 19 pastors (only 3 are women). The current head of church is Pastor Eduardo Rodriguez.

The Methodist Church in Britain has been supporting the *Iglesia Evangélica Metodista de Nicaragua (IGLEMEN)* for a number of years through various grants and round table meetings with other Central American partners. One of the key focuses of our partnership is to support them in building capacity within the church. This includes supporting the church in offering training in Methodist doctrine and theology for their church leaders, most of whom do not come from a Methodist background. This is important given that there are no Methodist

theological institutions in the country, so Methodist pastors often undertake their ministerial studies at the seminaries of other denominations, leaving them with no firm Methodist foundations.

Worship in the Methodist Churches is an interesting mix of praise, fellowship, preaching and prayer. Clearly the major emphasis within each service we attended was that of praise with the ministry of the word playing a significantly lesser part than one might expect in a more traditional Methodist environment. I have to say this was at times refreshing particularly the easy and frequent involvement of members of the congregation participating



in worship from the front. There were times when we could have been part of the audience of 'Methodists got Talent' but freedom that was allowed within the worship was very moving. The other advantage of the services being focussed like this was that the message or sermon slots were concise and on the whole well structured.

The congregations were made up almost entirely of women and children with very few men. This is obviously an issue for the church and they did tell us that they are trying to address this though they found it difficult to tell us how they would do that. My personal feeling was that this was

probably a symptom of the Methodist Church on the whole being a church of and for the poorer sections of the community where the women could more easily associate themselves and see the part they can play in bringing about change.

The Methodist Church in Nicaragua is by no means a wealthy church. It was clear that without financial support from overseas (mainly the States) it would not be able to function. This is a real issue for the church as it grows numerically in size (drawing people in from economically poorer sections of the community) and wishes/needs to have more places for worship and social programmes. Two of the very small 'house churches' were literally that – small houses that had been gifted to the church. Each could hold about 30 people squashed in but in both there were over forty attending services.

Scholarship and Leadership Training Grant for group training (SALT):

The *IGLEMEN*, along with other Central American partner churches, benefited from a SALT grant in 2012 from the Methodist Church in Britain to support training of their members and leaders in collaboration with the GBGM, the UMC and the Duke Divinity School in North Carolina, USA, through their Course of Study. This training was offered as a way of giving participants an understanding and grounding in Methodist theology and doctrine. Pastors from *IGLEMEN* travel to El Salvador for a week's intensive study and then return to Nicaragua whilst they continue with assignments and practical application of their learning. Each pastor should complete the full course of twenty modules over a five year period. Interviews with some of the SALT students have been recorded separately from this report.

Nationals in Mission Appointment (NMA) Grant:

Funding has been committed between 2013 to 2018 for the post of Coordinator for Christian Education. The post-holder, Pablo Lezama, has begun delivery of Sunday School teacher training, with one of the sessions actually taking place whilst this trip was taking place. Sadly we were not in the right part of the country at the time to experience the training session first hand but were able to see photos the following day and over the following days talk with some of the Sunday School teachers who had taken part. They were very affirming of the training and were telling us about the new things they had learned and how they would put them into practice. This NMA

post will also start to develop more formal worship leader and preacher training over the coming years. Again, a personal interview was recorded with Pablo and is available separate to this report.

Methodist Church Child Feeding Programme

Four of the Methodist Churches in Managua operate a child feeding programme seven days each week. There are many children who are from either one parent families or from poor families where both parents need to work but cannot afford child care. Schooling is free in Nicaragua (though there are associated costs which can make it prohibitive for some) but only takes place in the morning. This means that children return home for lunch each day. For those who have no parent or carer at home during the day they often go without food until late in the evening. The Methodist Church has responded to this situation by providing food for hundreds of children each day.



At around 12.30 children gather at the churches and there is a short time of praise and worship. At the church we visited one lunchtime there was a small liturgical dance group drawn from a few of these young people along with a young lad on the drum kit and others singing. After worship small bowls of rice, chicken beans and plantains are served to each child by the pastors and members of the church. It is the community outreach work such as this that appears to set the Methodist Church apart from many of the other more established protestant denominations in Nicaragua – which in turn appears to be attracting more regular worshippers across from some other churches.

CEPAD

CEPAD, the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua is an organisation composed of over 30 denominations and churches in Nicaragua, focusing work on helping communities and individuals to be the principal activists in their own development.

CEPAD was founded in December 1972, just days after a strong earthquake destroyed Managua, by Dr Gustavo Parajon, a medical doctor who called people to gather together to help the victims of the earthquake. Over forty years later, CEPAD continues to be one of the strongest organisations working for the development of rural communities in Nicaragua. Their model is one of accompaniment and empowerment, helping communities and individuals to use their talents and their own abilities for development. CEPAD have strong funding links with ERD in the States and have good systems in place for volunteer teams to visit and participate in their work.

IGLEMEN also have their church office at the CEPAD headquarters building so relationships between CEPAD and the Methodist Church are particularly strong.

CEPAD run a model training farm in Matagalpa called CEPANA which trains groups of individual small holders to become more efficient and diverse in their food production. Our visit to CEPANA gave us an insight of how well a locally based ecumenical movement of churches can work in social programmes. We were also able to visit one of the women who had been on a number of the CEPANA training course and talk with her about the benefits to her and her family. Much of the training is offered to women as they are more likely to use the benefits of increase food and income potential wisely for their families.



There is also a microloan scheme that is administered by CEPAD though it appears the interest rates are now very high for borrowers. This has led to a reduction in the size of this scheme though not in the need for loans assuming they could be provided at more realistic interest rates for start-up micro businesses.

Whilst in Jinatago we were able to meet with three commercial coffee growers (all local Methodists) and learn more about the process and economics involved in commercial coffee production for export. Coffee growing provides much needed employment across much of the northern part of the country though, as prices of beans is forced down on the international markets, levels of employment are having to be cut for the commercial growers to remain competitive.

Avocado Pear Tree School

This small secondary school was established sixteen years ago with financial support from Amos Trust. Then the school was in an area of high poverty without adequate resources for education. Until this year even privately established schools like Avocado received the majority of its funding from the socialist government which allowed the additional funding from the UK to really improve facilities at the school.



Over the years the area has drastically improved and developed and now caters for a more middle class community. The Government has recently changed its policies of funding of schools and schools like Avocado no longer receive state funding. This has meant that the school will, from the start of the new year need to raise all its own income which has led to school fees being introduced. Although Amos has agreed to pay for a few scholarships other students will need to pay full fees. Some families will now be able to do this but some do not have the financial means.

Our time at the school showed us a very different part of the community with young, bright aspiring young people. Many of the final year already had confirmed places at the university and will be studying to be doctors, dentists, IT specialist, agriculturists and business managers.

Group Visit

Travelling as a small group worked very well and was a positive experience for us all. The three 'youth' engaged brilliantly and thoughtfully and prayerfully reflected on their experiences as the days went by. They were quick to build friendships with those they met particularly the young people involved with the SCWC football as well as in the more testing environments and situations such as the rubbish dump and the teen mum unit.

Travelling as a group enabled each of them to experience things that would not have been possible on their own and yet also offered occasional points where the group could split and each experience something unique. Having Laura Cook (former MRDF/World AIMS staff member) with us as a photographer and interviewer was really beneficial. Laura was able to dedicate herself to the photography role leaving the young people to properly



engage with each other without all the time wanting to be capturing their time on camera. Her experiences of leading school groups overseas were also helpful.

The experiences gained by these three young people will stay with them for many years to come and I am sure will play a part of forming who they become. Each of them has real potential to play a significant part within the Methodist Church at this point in time and in the future and we need to ensure that they are effectively included from now on.

As a result of such a positive group experience I would like to recommend that WCR supports a group of three young people from C&Y / 3Generate to travel to visit Methodist work in another part of the world – hopefully linked in with the 3Generate world focus for that year. WCR support should be for funding and organising the trip, and for accompanying the young people when they travel. I would also support the sending of a photographer on appropriate visits to bring back professional images for WCR and other MCB use.

David Friswell
WCR Team Leader