

LOS HERMANOS

Villanueva Brigadistas Newsletter — Volume 12

Spring 2022



Looking Back: How Two Maryknoll Sisters' Efforts Gave the Villanueva Community Health Program Its Start

[Editors' Note: After several years of mission work in Central America, the Sudan, and Korea, two Maryknoll Missionary Sisters, Sr. Pat Edmonton and Sr. Ann Hayden, found themselves working together in Nicaragua. Both were nurses. Both had a strong interest in training village-level health promoters as a way to help communities develop their health-care capacity. What follows is their recollection of their work between 1986 and 2001 with four communities, including Villanueva.]

In September of 1986, we (Pat and Ann) met again in Managua, Nicaragua and began to research a new ministry for health work in the northern war zones of the border between Nicaragua and Honduras. After meeting with the Ministry of Health, we agreed to begin training Community Health Promoters in 4 townships along the border (Villanueva, Somotillo, San Pedro and San Francisco del Norte). We bought an old run down house on the Villanueva Central Park and on February 21, 1987, we spent the first night in our new home on the floor in sleeping bags



A boy gets his COVID vaccine in the community of Guasimito.

Vaccines are now readily available in Nicaragua and anyone who is old enough to receive the vaccine, and wishes to receive it, has been vaccinated.

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trying to ignore the mosquitoes. After some repairs we were able to move in and being our ministry. We visited the communities of each township to converse with them regarding their needs, and we asked the communities to name their health promoter(s) ["Brigadista(s)"] who would attend the training programs. We worked with local health clinic personnel to plan and execute the program in each township. After a few years we were able to turn over some of the training and supervision to a team in each township, made up of local health personnel and of "Brigadistas". After the first year, the teams Somotillo, San Pedro, and San Francisco del Norte needed our presence less and less.

While we continued to support and develop the Teams' skills and confidence, we were also able to begin a new ministry of educational programs and to find funds for mini-economic projects for the women of Villanueva – The Women's Center was created with wonderful results. In later years we also formed a Commission of Social Development and worked with The John 23rd Institute of the UCA/ Nicaragua to fund and supervise small farming projects to improve rural incomes and to promote care of the environment. It was during this time that we enjoyed the connections made with the St. Andrew's Church community of faith.

By 1994, we started to plan for a three-year turnover of the Ministries to the teams responsible for the a) The Health Promoters, b) The Women's Center and c) The Commission of Social Development. We planned a series of workshops and retreats for all the leadership members of the various ministry groups to prepare them in the skills and a mindset for trust, for teamwork, for service, and for assuming financial responsibilities. The groups elected their coordination teams and the first steps we made were to turn over the finances to the coordination team and to

Roberta Hernandez – Retired Midwife



Brigadista Program Co-director Maria Antonia Osorio (left) visiting Roberta Hernandez – Retired Midwife

Roberta Hernandez has devoted her life to serving her community of Rancho Pando as a midwife. Because of her age, she no longer attends the Brigadistas' monthly training sessions in the town of Villanueva. Still, she is not forgotten by the Brigadista Program. On a recent visit to Rancho Pando, Maria Antonia Osorio checked in on Doña Roberta. Roberta lives alone and was delighted to get a visitor. While she no longer helps to deliver babies, sometimes gets out to go to church and, if there is a pregnant woman that needs to be seen, she will go and see her. Part of the commitment of the Brigadista program is to make sure that the Brigadistas and midwives, who have given so much to their communities, know how much they are loved and appreciated.

meet regularly with the finance person to help in their skill development and to help them build confidence in their ability to manage the finances of the group.

In 1997, we moved to Jinotepe, leaving the ministry in Villanueva in the capable hands of the teams we prepared. A terrible hurricane hit Villanueva the year we left, but the movement forward has never stopped. There have been struggles, and The Commission of Social Development was not able to continue functioning due to loss of European funding from the John 23rd Institute. The Women's Center continued to be accompanied by Sr. Carolyn Sweeny, OSF. Capable leadership of the [Villanueva] Health Promoter Program has been maintained through the faithfulness of Candidita Betanco and many of the Brigadistas, who serve the health needs of the community even today.

We left Nicaragua in 2001 to serve our frail and elderly sisters at the Maryknoll Center in Ossning, NY. We are deeply grateful to the people of Villanueva and surrounding communities who welcomed and protected us in time of war, who supported us with their love in difficult times, and who blessed us with their witness to God's love in service to others. We are so grateful that the faith community of St. Andrews [and others] continues to support and share in the life of the people of Villanueva whom we continue to hold close in prayer and in our hearts.

In gratefulness and peace, Sr. Pat Edmiston, MM
and Sr. Ann Hayden, MM



Scan this QR code to hear Brigadistas in their own words describe the work they are doing and what they are learning at their monthly training session in January 2022



Sister Patricia Edmiston



Sister Ann Hayden



Maryknoll Sisters
Making God's Love Visible

The New Water Tank

Over the years, access to water has been a recurring issue in Villanueva. Thanks to the generous support of All Saints and St. Lucy's parishioners, the Brigadista program will now have a reliable source of water.

First, a little background. In the 1990s, the Maryknoll sisters who were instrumental in developing the Brigadista program helped get a well. At one point in the early 2000s, when water was scarce, the local government would only provide three drums of water per week. Candida, the leader of the Brigadista program, remembers having to bathe and wash her clothes in the river so that she could keep the drums of water for her family's drinking and cooking needs.

Even in 2022, water is scarce: in the town of Villanueva, water is available only from 4:00 am to 8:00 am every day. When they have monthly trainings at the Program Center, the Brigadista program has had to buy garrafones (5-gallon jugs) or get bags of juice or water sold in local convenience stores to provide refreshment for the Brigadistas.

As of February, 2022, however, the Brigadista program now has its own dedicated water tank which can be filled during the hours of 4:00-8:00 am when water is available from the town, and then can be used by the program at any time. The water tank cost \$750. Scaffolding materials and installation labor added \$250. This is another example of our Sister Community identifying a need and our Syracuse community responding to support them.



Contributions Welcome

Thank you from both of our parishes for being so generous during this pandemic year!

If you wish to help support our Sister Community and their efforts, you can make a tax deductible contribution as follows:

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St. Lucy's Church, or

All Saints Church

Be sure to put in the memo section: "Sister Community".

Or place your contribution in the envelopes available in the back of each supporting church

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We sent down \$1,000 extra in April to pay for 5 bicycles.

The Directiva also helps out with funeral expenses when a Brigadista dies and with transportation to medical care. For example, there is a Brigadista named Inez who goes to Managua for chemo, and the Directiva pays part of her transportation