

LOS HERMANOS

Villanueva Brigadistas Newsletter — Volume 3

Fall 2016



BRIGADISTAS IN MY VIEW BY GERI HALL

While I have been fortunate to serve with health care providers in a few countries, I don't know if I've seen a more dedicated group of women and a few men than I did when I visited our parish mission in Villanueva in 2014. I saw these unpaid para-professionals in action not only in Villanueva, but also in a few of the some 25 "caseros" (villages) that they serve. While my role was to ask questions and help assess their medical skills, what I also saw was the personalism that they brought to their work which, to them, is also a kind of vocation. Nicaragua had suffered some of the worst health care in Latin America prior to the Sandinista Revolution (see accompanying article) and a very high maternal mortality. Since then, there have been many improvements, but it is a nation that still needs and welcomes foreign assistance and therefore I could see that our role as a "sister-community" is most appropriate because we are enabling these talented and committed people to do it for themselves! Yes, we can certainly impart expertise on basic medical evaluation, but it is their own manner and cultural style in providing this care that makes their work so effective. When one of the "brigadistas" takes a blood pressure, does some nutritional counseling, asks some personal questions about stresses at home or other needs, they do it as a "companero" who is giving friendly advice, but with some knowledge and authority that makes them even more respected and their opinions are thus well appreciated.

In addition to the emphasis on a healthy birth for mother and child, these brigadistas assist in helping to identify the risks for mosquito borne diseases and testing in the countryside. As most travel some distances on public transportation, their dedication is so impressive. We assist in providing them the means for a good monthly meal when assembled, many supplies, coordination among their leaders, and a small special Christmas gift. I know from what I saw and my own international experiences that this level of dedication, profound caring, and basic health care has made a difference and I wholeheartedly endorse our work among these people who are often poor in resources, but rich in ability, caring, and dedication to their fellow citizens... and a good opportunity always for us to "help bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ." (Geri Hall)



Geri Hall (right side) meeting with Brigadistas in 2014

MISSION STATEMENT:

Promote a culture in which people are empowered to strive for the realization of their human rights. Encourage community organization and participation to meet community needs and improve quality of life.

"Only when we are united will we achieve healthy communities"

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NICARAGUA: A BRIEF MODERN HISTORY IN FIVE FACTS

1. *Early United States interventions- American mercenary, William Walker, assumes Nicaraguan presidency, seeks annexation by the U.S., and sanctions slavery. In 1907, US warships take possession of Fonseca Gulf then begin occupation from 1912-1925 and then 1926-1933. It is the longest US foreign occupation in the modern era. It began with the so-called "Banana Wars" in Central America (1898-1934) largely to protect American interests for a possible Nicaraguan Canal -- which is now controversially being constructed by Chinese interests. A complex history with American gunboats and Nicaraguan execution of two Americans accused of fomenting a revolution assisting conservative forces had preceded this and American Marine Major Smedley Butler had landed in 1910 with 250 Marines to "protect American interests. (He later described his service as a "gunman for big business.") Many subsequent American landings and small battles over the years ensued until a conservative government friendly to America was left in place in 1933. This is known in Nicaraguan history as the period of "Yanqui imperialism."*

2. *Cesar Augusto Sandino, a general who became a guerrilla fighter emerges in 1927 and for six years resists the American- Nicaraguan bargains. He is convinced to make peace in with promises of some sharing and on February 21, 1934, invited to dinner with conservative President Sarcasa. He and his unarmed men are gunned down upon leaving by Sarcasa's nephew, National Guard commander, Anastasio Somoza, who then assumes power in 1936 and establishes a dynasty until the revolution of 1979. "Sandino" is regarded as the martyr for Nicaraguan freedom and his image eventually is ubiquitous with the later rise of the "Sandinista" party which is currently in power.*

3. *The Somoza Dynasty - Venal and corrupt but with cooperation from the United States, the Somozas accumulate estimated wealth of over \$700 million dollars before his assassination in Panama in 1956. He is succeeded by his son, Luis Somoza Debayle - somewhat less repressive - but is succeeded by younger brother, Anastasio, in 1967, who is the worst of all. The devastating 1972 earthquake that destroyed much in the capital, exacerbated the profound poverty and provided much international aid that was stolen by Somoza. Resistance begins to arise through "La Prensa" newspaper of Joaquim Chamorro and increased interest in the rebel bands of "Sandinistas." In 1978, Chamorro is killed by presumed Somozistas; the Sandinistas gain military strength; a civil war ensues and the Sandinistas win with Daniel Ortega as President and Somoza flees to Paraguay where he is assassinated in 1980*

4. *The Sandinista Years 1979-1990 - It is estimated that some 30,000 died in the civil war but many National Guard also escaped into Honduras where they will base a "Contra" war and rebellion. Opinions about the goals and successes are very mixed. Some notable advances were made in health, education, land distribution, and culture, but undercurrents of Sandinista wealth, dependence on the Soviet Union, and disgruntled capitalist concerns created internal ferment that was exploited by the United States to underwrite much of the period of "contra war." Oliver North creates a scandal with President Reagan's complicity in funding but the situation turns against Sandinistas who are voted out in 1990.*

5. *The last 25 years - Chamorro's government develops ties again with right wing and eventual election of Ricardo Aleman, later convicted of fraud and listed as one of the most corrupt leaders of the last two decades. This rocky history forces some peace with former Sandinistas and the World Bank forgives \$4.5 billion of debt (2004). Daniel Ortega re-elected in 2006 and ends international disputes in 2008 and controversially re-elected in 2011. US withholds \$62 million in aid due to irregularities. Poverty remains a problem with 48% below poverty line and 80% on \$2 per day with high unemployment, eroding education advances made during early Sandinista years, and regional drug violence although Nicaragua is much safer than neighboring countries. Ortega stated "We are sentencing the Monroe Doctrine to death" to signify desire to end US presumption of regional domain and influence. The November 6, 2016, elections will be critical again in determining the immediate future of the country in preserving Sandinista and other allies or a more conservative coalition.*

VIENEN CON ALEGRIA

(scan this QR code to watch the video clip of our sister community singing with our 2014 travelers)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdgHtbBD8lk>

Vienen con alegría

Vienen con alegría, Señor, cantando, vienen con alegría, Señor, los que caminan por la vida, Señor, sembrando tu paz y amor, los que caminan por la vida, Señor, sembrando tu paz y amor.

1. *Vienen trayendo la esperanza a un mundo cargado de ansiedad a un mundo que busca y que no alcanza caminos de amor y de amistad.*

2. *Vienen trayendo entre sus manos esfuerzos de hermanos por la paz, deseos de un mundo más humano que nacen del bien y la verdad.*

They come joyfully

They come joyfully, Lord, singing, they come joyfully, Lord,



Dave Pasinski is a mostly retired chaplain who has served with Maryknoll in Venezuela and been on previous trips to Villanueva. Married to Geri Hall with two children, Micah and Mariah, who have all done mission trips.

Meme's Reflections

My husband, Frank Woolever, and I were sitting around the kitchen table back in the 1990s after listening to a church talk given by two Maryknoll Sisters. Pat Edminston and Ann Hayden worked in Villanueva, Nicaragua and were looking to St. Andrews for some financial support. I told Frank that I had never been to the Third World but that I would like to go someday. He had been to Nicaragua with Witness for Peace and suggested that we go to Villanueva to visit the sisters. We finally went in 1999 with a group from St. Andrews and I met people who lacked much of what we in America take for granted – indoor plumbing and water, big houses with lots of room, cars and good roads, and much more. As I got to know the Nicaraguans that Pat and Ann worked with, I found that they laughed, sang and enjoyed life as much as I did. Even though I had more stuff than they did, I found that they added to my life every bit as much as I added to theirs.

Now, many years later, I look back on those experiences in Villanueva and am so happy that we have maintained the relationship. Thank you to St. Lucys and All Saints for keeping this beautiful mission reality alive.



Some of the February 2017 travelers at our March meeting.

TRIP PLANNING UPDATE

We are continuing to prepare for our next mission trip which will take place February 20, 2017. Thirteen members of our All Saints and St. Lucy's communities are planning to make the trip: Anne Marie Buss, Charles Clinton, Eileen Clinton, John Clinton, Andy DiMarco, Waded Gonzalez, Jane Hugo, Zach Komar, Rick Mason, Dave Pasinski, Marijane Reilly, Caitlin Stiglmeier, Nancy Zarach. We are fortunate to have a good balance of St. Lucy's and All Saints parishioners, as well as a diverse set of talents and experiences. Since January, we have met regularly to get to know one another, learn more about our Sister Community, discuss trip logistics, and plan for what we will actually do in Villanueva (see Save the Date in this newsletter for more information).

Our Sister Community starts all of their meetings with one or more songs, so we have been learning some songs in Spanish that we will be able to sing with them in February. The first song we learned was El Amor De Dios Es Maravilloso. We are currently learning Vienen Con Alegria (see the lyrics and QR code/link to a video in this newsletter).

In order to better relate to our sisters and brothers in Villanueva, we are trying to develop our Spanish language skills. We have held monthly Spanish lessons thanks to Katie Clinton, Kip Hargrave, Coco Koseki, Cathy Nock, and Dave Pasinski, who have taken turns teaching. Several travelers are also using an app called Duolingo to hone their skills. While fluency is not required, we know any efforts to communicate in Spanish will be appreciated by our hosts!



Waded Gonzalez-Candelaria is a member of All Saints. She is a Service Coordinator for the Early Intervention Program and enjoys exploring and visiting new places, cities, and countries.



John Clinton is a member of All Saints and enjoys playing soccer.



Jane Hugo is a member of St. Lucy's parish. She is retired from ProLiteracy where she did adult literacy work around the US. Is now volunteering at Bread of Life lunches and active in St. Lucy's Justice and Peace Committee.

Some of the Travelers going in 2017

SAVE THE DATE

Nicaragua has the highest maternal mortality rate of any Central American country (<http://americasquarterly.org/content/where-the-region-stands>), and yet our Sister Community reports that no woman has died in childbirth in the more than 25 years of the Villanueva *Brigadista* (volunteer health workers) program! The focus of our February 2017 mission trip will be to better understand the work of the *Brigadistas* and how this work fits in with the critical global issue of infant and maternal health. We see the primary purposes of our trip to be to 1) to bring the spirit of the All Saints and St. Lucy's communities to our brothers and sisters in Villanueva and spend a week walking life's journey with them, and 2) to learn more about our Sister Community and the healthcare work they do so that we can share it with the All Saints and St. Lucy's communities.

Please join us on **November 14 at 7:00 pm in the Harrison Center at All Saints**, for a brief pre-trip presentation and discussion. We will share what we have learned about the global issue of infant and maternal health in general, and specifically what is being done in Villanueva. We will also share what we hope to learn during our week in Villanueva. Finally, we will welcome your questions and hope to be able to report back to you after our trip with a follow-up presentation and discussion.

CONTACT INFO:

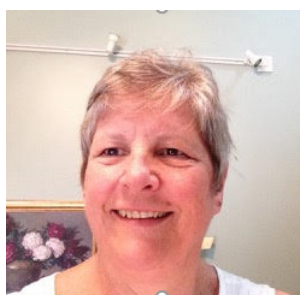
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Caitlin Stiglmeier is a Global Health Pediatrician, practicing in both Syracuse, and abroad in India and El Salvador. She loves photography, hiking, and travel.



Eileen M Clinton is a senior VP with Brown and Brown of Empire State specializing in insurance and risk management programs for commercial accounts.



Nancy is a member of All Saints. She is a retired secondary math teacher, having spent almost all of her career in the Syracuse City School District. She now loves to read, sing and play golf when she is not visiting her grandson!

Some of the Travelers going in 2017

Contribute!

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

Make checks payable to either

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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View of the countryside outside of Villanueva.