

LOS HERMANOS

Villanueva Brigadistas Newsletter — Volume 4

Spring 2017



BRIGADISTAS IN MY VIEW BY EILEEN CLINTON

Being in this village with these families who gave us so much even though they had so little had a profound effect on me. I became more humble, shedding the “ American “ status that I thought I had. I listened a lot and spoke little Spanish, but the listening and seeing the expressions on their faces, their hand gestures, their smiles took the place of the language. After a day or two in the Village of Villanueva, I felt safe. I felt accepted by the folks in the village. They greeted us “Gringo’s” with acceptance and kindness. I was worried that they may have had a negative impression of Americans due to the recent political situation here.

My favorite day was riding on the back end of the truck to reach Rancho Pondo, a community in the country. It was a hard road to drive and walk on but these people would walk miles and miles to bring their children to the clinics. We visited with some of the families of the brigadistas who welcomed us in for “café” and home made tortillas. They had so little, but offered so much.

I had been involved with fundraising and learning about our sister community from my 20+ years at St Andrews and now St Lucy’s and always wondered if our donations worked, were they important. On this trip I experienced first hand how well the brigadista program works, how respected they are by the Ministry of health and what a valuable service they provide. The system works and has been sustainable. Our challenge is to keep it going with the new folks who will take over. I have no doubt they will continue the program and do it very well.

Eileen Clinton

I have not been this hot and sweaty in a long time but it is nothing compared to the living conditions of some of the people we have visited with. They have so very little compared to us but they give so much to their neighbors. When asked what makes them want to do this job (volunteer) they say that they were given the gift by God so they must use it to help others. Amazing people and spirits.

Nancy Zarach



The road to Rancho Pondo (Eileen Clinton)

In This Issue

- BRIGADISTAS IN MY VIEW BY EILEEN CLINTON
- A NEW ROOF!
- MESSAGES FROM LA DIRECTIVA
- MELVIN’S GIFT
- THE WELL BY RICHARD MASON
- BREAKING BREAD BY CAITLIN STIGLMEIER
- CONTRIBUTE!

A NEW ROOF!

On March 21st, with the support of St. Lucy's and All Saints, our Sister Community began the process of replacing the roof of the program center in Villanueva. This is a major capital project and has been a dream of theirs for several years.



The roof leaks during the rainy season, which is why they wanted to begin work this March in order to have it completed by May when the rains begin. They are also going to raise the ceiling of the building in the process, which will help keep the building cooler. Replacing the electrical

wiring in the building is also part of the project. This will allow them to get the long-defunct ceiling fans working again.

The program center is the base for all Brigadista training sessions, so making the facility as comfortable and functional as possible is essential to the program. Since the facility is unavailable for monthly Brigadista training sessions during the construction, they are mobilizing their training sessions and holding them in the communities of Becerro, Cayanipe, Israel and San Ramon. They chose these communities since they have the largest health outposts and most Brigadistas in their communities. Furthermore, because the center cannot be properly secured at night, Brigadistas from the various communities are taking turns staying at the center as security guards.



The Brigadistas and their leadership, La Directiva, are grateful to their sisters and brothers at St. Lucy's and All Saints for their generous funding of this project.

MESSAGES FROM LA DIRECTIVA

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Churches of St. Lucy's and All Saints, The visit from our brothers and sisters was a great experience. They were able to visit the Brigadistas in the rural communities. It went very well from our perspective, thanks be to God, and we hope it went well for the travelers as well because spending time together as a family and having them stay in our homes is very important to our relationship. We enjoyed it a lot. We also thank you for the photo of Frank Woolever that you gave us.

• Candida

Hello Brothers and Sisters and Friends, We always keep you close to our hearts and think of you often. Thank you for your friendship and for working with us as one body with the one unifying objective of supporting the Villanueva community. See you soon! God bless you! Sending a big hug to the people of St. Lucy's and All Saints!

• Maria Antonia

Hello Friends and Brothers and Sisters, You are always in our hearts. God bless you for the confidence you have in us to be able to bring our message to the communities of our town. Many blessings and hugs!

Your friend,

• Lucas

Hello Friends from St. Lucy's and All Saints,

I enjoyed getting to know the new brothers and sisters who visited us. I hope to continue to get to meet more of you. It is a blessing! Many hugs! God bless you!

• Juanita



Some of the Brigadistas with the new t-shirts we brought with us in February 2017

Melvin's Gift

Melvin Varela is a Brigadista in his mid-20s from the community of Platanal. He has been identified by the Directiva, the directors of the Brigadista program, as an up-and-coming leader of his community. He is soft-spoken and thoughtful, but also hardworking and dependable. During our visit to Villanueva in February, we learned from the Brigadistas that having bicycles could help them get to the monthly trainings at the Program Center in Villanueva and make it easier to serve the people in their communities. We agreed that we would purchase three bicycles during our visit and present them to three deserving Brigadistas who had demonstrated a need for transportation as well as a commitment to the program.



Melvin took a leadership role in helping us purchase the bikes. While several of us travelers caught a 7:00 a.m. bus for the two-hour ride to Chinandega, the capital of the region, Melvin got there ahead of us to investigate the options available and negotiate a good price. We later met Melvin at a supermarket to discuss what he had found. In a break in the conversation, he said he had something he wanted to show us. From his backpack, he removed a clay sculpture in the form of a head. It looked like a bird, or possibly a warrior mask. He said that he had found it on a riverbank in his community and that he thought it might be from tiempos indigenos ("indigenous times"). We passed it around, marveled at it and thanked him for showing us.

The next day, we had a small ceremony in which we presented the bikes to the three Brigadistas who had been identified by the Directiva as being the most deserving. Melvin was one of the men, along with Isabel and Nahún. It was a simple, but emotional ceremony. After the presentation had concluded, I was sitting by myself when Melvin approached. "I want you to have this," he said in Spanish, holding out the clay figure. I was moved and humbled. He clearly was so appreciative of the bicycle and the opportunities it would afford him that he wanted to reciprocate by sharing his prized possession. I thanked him on behalf of our Syracuse community and promised I would show it to our two parishes. He wondered if someone in our community might know more about the artifact's history. I hope to be able to tell him about it on our next trip to Villanueva.

PS: In the spirit of compliance with international laws on cultural property, we plan to return this item to Melvin's community on our next visit. We will consider this artifact to be "on loan" from our sister community.



View down the Well (Photo by Andy DiMarco)

THE WELL BY RICHARD MASON

In the United States, even in poor areas by our standards, citizens have certain expectations. When someone turns on a faucet they expect potable water to come out. When someone flips a light switch they expect the light to come on. When someone goes to the grocery store they expect the shelves to be full. When someone pulls up to a pump they expect gas to come out.

Nicaragua, as a whole, was a lesson in humility and gratitude. The efforts in health care are very much citizen based. People do not look to the government first. Rather they look to each other and make every resource count.

On one occasion we visited a rural village. A female brigadista lived with her husband and five children. She was eight months pregnant yet still made the trips to other locals to check on their well being. She lived in a cinder block building approximately twenty by twenty feet square with a single wall separating the sleeping area from the wood burning stove and general living quarters. There were no doors. A hen and chick walked around us during our discussion with her. She could not have been more gracious. Only five months prior she had electricity made available at her home. I don't believe there was any wiring in the home. She had no running water. Water was sourced from a school well located approximately 1.5 kilometers away.

Next door a gentleman was digging a well by hand. He had been working approximately three months and the hole was forty five feet deep. He and his spouse estimated it would require another month and three meters to hit ground water. Even then, they will not have potable water. They may have water to wash the children, animals and their clothing.

A pilot program was initiated by Charles Clinton and others to provide bicycles to a few of the brigadistas. Absent the bicycles they walked from home to home to administer to people. The gratitude was enormous. This is but one example of the good being done because of the generosity of the people of All Saint's Parish and St. Lucy's.

The citizens are anxious to improve their quality of life. Largely through their initiative and a helping hand it is happening. I encourage anyone with an interest who has never made the trip to do so. It is life changing.

BREAKING BREAD BY CAITLIN STIGLMEIER

We sat ten to a side, with the plastic chairs being shuffled to fit a few more each time, the ends of the table bulging with extra place settings and people. No one was turned away, and there was always enough to share. The table cloth was changed for each meal- floral prints on a steady rotation, the one from the previous meal fluttering on the clothesline in the garden out back. We sat like you might at home, after all the kids have returned from sports practice, or after you've returned from work, waiting for the last few whispers to die down before saying a prayer. We held hands and gave thanks, and then went about the process of serving. "Who would like some juice?" "Another scoop of gallo pinto?" The noise would steadily increase from that moment of calm silence right before we said "Amen" to the clattering of utensils on plates, the slurping of hot soup and fresh fruit juice, questions being asked and answered, the searching of the hot sauce, five conversations going at once down the table, and laughter being passed back and forth from each side between bites. It was impossible to hear what the other end of the table was talking about, and you could easily be pulled into a conversation depending on whether you turned your head right or left. After dinner each night, we lingered in our chairs, some helping to clear plates and clean dishes, others carrying on conversations, and some dancing. Juanita's cooking was hardy, it filled us all with sustenance for the coming day's work, but the time, the stories, the laughter we shared at every meal is what will sustain us as a family.

Fruitful work comes after bonds of trust are built, after we move from acquaintances to familia, and what better way to build those bonds than through the breaking of the bread.



Some of the Travelers sharing a meal during our visit in February 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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114 EAST GENESEE ST.
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Padre Juan Bautista Peguero De la Rosa, one of the priests of La Immaculada Concepcion church in Villanueva, celebrated his 100th birthday!