



Volume VI  
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### Progress and Signs of Hope

By Diana Pantalos, 2017 Delegation leader

The 2017 delegation to Esquipulas was warmly embraced by their Nicaraguan hosts for eight days in late July. Delegates included Tina Blincoe, Michael Wade, Meredith Doll, and Diana Pantalos. The leaders in Esquipulas were anxious to describe the progress in the nutrition, clinic, and gardening projects; and in the rural communities, the people who benefit from the projects were thrilled to share their music, stories, food, and gratitude. All of the delegates were deeply touched, and inspired by the small and large successes that are underway.

#### Organic Farming Project

The farmers in each of the communities had progress to report. Farmers in La Danta had asked to grow a new crop, broccoli, and the technicians were able to find seed appropriate for their growing conditions. El Castillo farmers bought a pump for irrigation for \$500 with profit from growing tomatoes, even though price of tomatoes has been low. Since farmers bought the pump themselves, the technicians agreed to provide the irrigation tubing. In a newer community, La Enea, 12 farmers went together to pay for a system to grow tilapia and by now they are probably ready to sell the fully grown fish. Several other communities are nearly ready to graduate, and new communities can be added.



Delegates to Esquipulas (l-r) Michael Wade, Meredith Doll, Tina Blincoe and Diana Pantalos.

#### Nutrition Project

The women in the Nutrition Project were proud to show off their gardens. Two new communities have been added this year. Since the traditional diet is primarily beans, rice, and corn, the technicians first need to convince the women of the value of vegetables for the health of their children. Then they demonstrate preparation of the unfamiliar vegetables, and show that many items can be eaten raw – also a new experience. The delegates were treated to beets, raw and cooked cabbage, several types of squash, and baby corn that was in season. Red beans had just been harvested, and were cooked fresh or hung up to dry.

#### Signs of Strength in Communities

Beyond farming and gardening, developments in several communities reflected additional positive impacts of the Friends of Esquipulas (FE) programs. Now that parents are able to stay home and farm for a living, as their children are growing up they are helping in the fields and gardens. There they are learning the sustainable gardening techniques their parents learned from the agricultural technicians we support. Parents are optimistic that the next generation will be able to take over this sustainable way of life.

Women in the communities have strengthened their relationships with each other. Through the saving circle/micro-loan group in La Sirena which meets monthly, the women have formed bonds of support, beyond simply being acquainted with one other. Women in Santa Maria had been very shy when the gardening project was initiated, but are now confident and strong, and their pre-teen daughters are picking up these characteristics as well.

#### Clinic / Health

The health monitoring of children now includes blood and urine tests, for which their mothers are very thankful. Anemia is common among children, especially in poorer communities such as La Sirena. When two of our delegates were debilitated by GI bugs during their stay, they experienced firsthand the dedicated and excellent care the clinic provides, as the clinic physician and her staff attended to all of their needs and brought them back to health.

#### Challenges

The price of seeds has increased dramatically, by 500%, due to drought in recent years. It is not always possible to save seeds for the next season, depending on the humidity and on the plant, as the seeds must be specifically adapted to the region. Climate change continues to have an impact, and some communities have lost crops as a result of temperature and rain extremes. This year has been unusually wet, increasing the need for the fungicides that the farmers make from local ingredients.

#### Conclusion

In their visits to twelve of the communities, the delegates were thanked again and again for the support the farmers and gardeners receive from FE. They were asked to carry that message home, to thank everyone in the US who makes this progress possible. If that includes you, “Muchas Gracias!” from our friends in Esquipulas.



Friends of  
Esquipulas  
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An Outreach Ministry of St. William Community

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## Thanks for your support!



The Friends of Esquipulas  
Board provides funding for internal  
administrative costs (including this  
newsletter) so that 100% of  
donations go directly to benefit the  
projects in Nicaragua! Thank you!!

### The Green Market Stall



There is excitement in the town of Esquipulas over the market stall that was opened this year just off the town square, very close to the bus station. Out of this small space, the farmers from the Organic Project are able to sell their produce directly to local families, instead of hauling it to another city on the bus. The farmers in La Pita told the delegates what a wonderful step it has been for them, as the produce holds up better since it is nearby. La Danta farmers are thankful that they can get a better price there, and don't have to go to many places or as far away as Managua, to find somewhere to sell produce. Chief technician Pablo Diaz Hernandez said it has been a learning experience for all of them, but now they realize they can sell organic products and make it work.



Mark your calendars: January 14, 2018—Annual Cristo Negro Celebration at St. William Church, 9:00 –noon.  
April 14, 2018—Solidarity Supper Fundraiser for Friends of Esquipulas. Call David Horvath for more information 502-435-3265

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