



Volume IX  
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**Mission in Challenging Times,** By David Hulefeld, Past President, Friends of Esquipulas

2020 has been a challenging year for people everywhere. In Nicaragua, the pandemic has amplified hard times already facing the country. Political protests in April 2018 were met with violence and government repression of dissent, free speech and right of assembly. These conditions have taken their toll on the national economy. Although the country had enjoyed steady growth since 2005, this trend ended abruptly. Since 2018, Nicaragua’s economy has shrunk steadily. For our sister parish, this has been a time of political uncertainty and declining economic opportunity.

Covid-19 has added to the troubles facing Nicaragua. Sadly, the national government has chosen to deny the risks of the pandemic; it failed to endorse distancing or face masks, schools have remained open and no online instruction is provided. Most parents have chosen to keep their children at home, even though their children will be held back a year for missing class. Teachers are mandated to continue instruction to near-empty classrooms. The Ministry of Health denies the incidence of Covid-19 in Esquipulas, but the people know otherwise. The parish radio station and the internet have enabled people to access reliable health information. Night burials of Covid victims are occurring and fear is palpable; the streets of Esquipulas are largely deserted. Transportation is difficult. Instead of the buses normally used to get around and transport produce to market, people are walking or riding horses.



Despite this one-two punch, our partners in Esquipulas continue to serve the needs of their community. Here’s an overview of the good work made possible by your generosity:

**Health Clinic** — Dr. Yuliza has obtained the needed PPE and continues to work full time at the parish clinic. In conjunction with Caritas, the parish radio station has publicized WHO guidelines for halting community spread of the virus. In the last four months, Dr. Yuliza has served 920 patients. Your donations also helped patients needing specialized care, lab tests or transportation to the hospital. Basic medications are still provided at the clinic’s pharmacy, although the country’s economic decline has reduced the support received from other entities.

**Nutrition with Vegetables** — 78 single moms with young children receive the materials and training needed to grow healthy food and improve their families’ nutrition. Technicians Leonardo and Jose work closely with the women in six communities, providing ongoing advice and encouragement. The women learn to grow and transplant seedlings, and to create organic fertilizers that will increase the yield. Climate change is an issue for these small scale gardens. Rainfall patterns are erratic, with periods of drought and excessive rainfall hampering production. The technicians are working to install irrigation in some locales. Dr. Yuliza monitors the children of project participants every two months and trains the moms in nutrition and drinking water safety. She has documented reductions in anemia and parasites and malnutrition.

**Organic Farming** — This initiative assists 35 farmers practicing sustainable agriculture achieve family sustaining jobs. Instead of emigrating to find work, they are able to stay with their families. The technician Chepe teaches the participants to control fungal and insect pests and to generate organic fertilizers. The farmers raised and transplanted 15,000 tomato seedlings in addition to a broad array of tropical food. They continue to market their production in the town square of Esquipulas, but are facing new challenges due to the pandemic. People who have lost other sources of income are peddling any food or wildlife they can obtain at informal roadside stands. Disposable income has declined and sales are affected. Chepe is an encouraging presence helping the farmers maintain a spirit of optimism.

Times are tough in the highlands of Nicaragua, but good things continue to happen every day

—thanks to you!





Friends of Esquipulas  
1226 W. Oak Street  
Louisville, KY 40210



Project Technicians (L-R)  
Dr. Yuliza, Chepe, Sonya, Leonardo, Jose

## An Outreach Ministry of St. William Community

### How to donate!

Simply make your check payable to Friends of Esquipulas and mail to: FE c/o St. William, 1226 W. Oak Street Louisville, KY, 40210

NEW! Use Amazon Smile to designate a portion of your online purchases for us! Just go to smile.amazon.com and add Friends of Esquipulas as your recipient. Also there are instructions on our website.

Donate with Paypal on our website: [friendsofesquipulas.org](http://friendsofesquipulas.org)

Register your Kroger Plus card to help us earn Kroger rewards! Instructions to register on our website or [krogercommunityrewards.com](http://krogercommunityrewards.com)

### More Connections

The pandemic challenges described in the cover story have made it impossible to organize the regular and very important shared delegation visits with our friends in Esquipulas. These exchanges have been central for our work and relationships. Like everyone, we also have become more dependent on virtual conversations including Facebook and Zoom. But we've also been receiving video journals of the ongoing work in Esquipulas. These will be featured during our "virtual fundraiser" described on the right. Here is a link to one of the videos, a brief description of Organic Project technician Jose Savillas, talking about the work of the "farm school" where education and projects are developed for the organic project. Here's the link to enjoy! <https://tinyurl.com/chepefarmschool>

### Mark your Calendars — Join our Virtual Fundraiser in October

Since we were unable to have the important annual *Friends of Esquipulas Solidarity Supper* in March the FOE Board will host a virtual fundraising event. *Solidarity and Song* (a fundraiser via Zoom - a platform familiar to so many) will be held on **Thursday, October 8th from 7 to 8:00 pm EST.**

*Solidarity and Song* will include greetings, songs, videos, and updates about our friends in Esquipulas. Like our St. William Sunday Zoom service, participants will receive a link to join and will be able to see everyone else in attendance. All participants will be muted and will be able to enjoy the program and use chat to converse with others. Like our *Solidarity Suppers* everyone present will be invited to make a financial contribution but it is not a requirement to attend.



<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88663084719>  
The meeting ID is 886 6308 4719 and the password is Gracias

Please invite others to attend as well to learn and share your connection with Esquipulas communities in Nicaragua.



**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!**

