

## RSCJ Celebrate 25 Years in Nicaragua: A Deep Presence....

Contributed by Lolín Menéndez, rscj

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a week in Nicaragua&hellip; What could one see, do, understand, in such a quick visit? Yes, the time was short, but I was able to glimpse the richness of a people, the beauty of the country, the commitment of my sisters. The visit also enabled me to join the rscj community in celebrating 25 years of our presence in Nicaragua.

photos by Lolín Menéndez

Pilar Crespo rscj, Lucila Cerrillo rscj, Ana Pérez rscj

Ana and Ramón

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I tried to recapture the essence of the visit during the return flight to Miami. Three words leapt immediately to my mind and heart as a summary of what I had lived and seen lived:

Reflection &ndash; Education - Healing.

I also experienced the community as one presence, lived in three ministries. I sensed a common mission: accompanying and supporting those with and for whom they worked, in relationships that are sisterly and mutual, in action that seeks to transform so that lives becomes more human, just, and peaceful&hellip;; not just words from Chapter 2000, but a life being lived.

### Reflection: Pili's

work at the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) is a ministry carried out in the context of human development. Pilar heads a program of continuing education that confers a Diploma in Religious Sciences. This course, designed especially for pastoral workers, young religious in formation, and Christians who seek to deepen their faith, is built on a process of dialogue and reflection. Participants will eventually "assume a creative and constructive role in a pluralistic society, faith community and family - a role deeply based on Gospel values", so as to enable others also to engage in the process of transformation.

Pili describes her commitment with conviction: "I do not work with the poor, but everything I do is for the poor."

### Education:

Lucila is based at the John XXIII Center at UCA, where she is pursuing an M.A. in education. At the same time, she supports and works closely with the facilitators of literacy programs in isolated communities. In this way she is able to bring together what she learns from experience and reflection with the task of preparing tools that are useful and relevant for workers in the field.

### We made a visit to

some communities located deep in the interior of the country, away from the main road and reachable only by driving on stones. But what joy Lucila and I shared as we listened to adults speak with pleasure of what they are learning, and saw the pride of knowing how to handle pen and paper reflected in many faces. One small instance, yes, but it bears witness to a process that goes beyond the acquisition of skills of literacy and numeracy and enables persons to tap their inner riches.

I was very impressed by a group of teenagers who give time in the afternoons to coach younger children in an after-school program; kids who in other circumstances would complain of boredom or be glued to TV. The facilitators for the literacy program are also young adults. One of the crucial problems in these communities is that children drop out of school early, as young as 10-12, because they have to help at home and in the fields. So there is little interest in learning for the sake of the future, and few role models to encourage children to complete their education; the cycle of poverty not only perpetuates itself but holds the community in a stronger grip. In one of the places we visited, we saw women going down the hill to where there is water, two kilometers away. And the bucket has to be carried back on the head, two long kilometers that certainly seem longer because the return trip is uphill.

I had a sense of people who are beginning to "drink from our own wells". As Lucila said, "Yes, there are many stones. But one can begin to see

the green sprouting between them”;

#### Healing:

“The glory of God is women and men fully alive”, said Ireneus centuries ago - words always in the background as I talked with Anita about the projects of natural medicine in which she is involved. I was impressed by the efforts made to make healing available and affordable by using the wisdom and material offered by nature: bioenergy, microdosis, sea water, herbs, roots... I visited two clinics where I saw many delicate gestures that transmitted love and understanding to each person being treated in a very personal way - in conversation, in gentle touch, in evident respect for the person in front. Those who came looking for relief from pain and illness certainly went away with much more: peace in their hearts as well as with bags of remedies.

#### During

part of my stay Ana was involved in a workshop at the Center of Cantera, a beautiful tropical “oasis of peace” on the outskirts of Managua, the Center on whose behalf Mickey McKay worked so tirelessly. I accompanied Ana to one of the morning sessions and, again, what struck me most was not just the joy the group had in exploring new media and making personal discoveries, but the energy generated by discussions and planning on how to share the contents of the workshop with colleagues.

We had many conversations about the history of Nicaragua, we remembered the first days of the Society and took a memory walk to the mountains of Jalapa in the time of the people’s struggle for an ideal... The community told me how this ideal gradually became “ours” and how their life as a community gradually intertwined with the life of the larger community of Jalapa. But a week later and back in Boston I realize that this celebration of 25 years of the presence of rscj in Nicaragua is not just a memorial celebration of the past, nor a nostalgic yearning for yesterday. It is rejoicing today because “we have to look for new ways of being present in Nicaragua” in view of a tomorrow that is very near. The stories of the beginnings, the ties forged through war, the remembrances of the recent celebration in Jalapa, all the conversations underlined this search for how to love and to minister in Nicaragua. Seeds that were sowed in these 25 years have taken root, roots that reach deep into the earth