

Dear SIGA Supporters and Friends:

New Year's Greetings to all! We pray that this coming year will be one in which you are blessed in many ways, and one in which you are also a blessing to many! It's January, an intentionally slow month for us, where we stay close to home, and recuperate a bit from our Christmas outreach to the villages of the region (more on that later in this newsletter). January is also when children come to Arbolitos from other villages and from Nicaragua to visit relatives before the school year starts in February. Since I keep the learning center open most days during the month, they visit regularly, to read and checkout books, to color, to do arts and crafts projects, and to hear Bible stories.



I have written previously about pastors Franklin and Yolanda Fernandez, who are church starters in the region. Last summer, I taught an introductory course on hermeneutics to the church leadership, and am preparing a second course on church history to launch, hopefully in March. We now have two years of working with Franklin and Yolanda, and the more that we get to know them the more respect and admiration we have for them. They are the type of ministers this area so badly needs! But if you have been

following SIGA on Facebook, you have also seen pictures the dire circumstances in which they live. They receive no outside support, and because they are Nicaraguan, they do not have work permits. They have a few chickens in the yard which they sell, Yolanda makes and sells popsicles in the neighborhood, and Franklin, when he can, repairs shoes. They live behind black plastic walls, in a small room tacked on to their church. The church building itself is really just four posts with a tin roof and a dirt floor. We had months of torrential rains and winds, and it was very rough for them. Even so, they remain committed to the region for the long haul. All this to say, that we feel the need to intervene, so that these two fine ministers do not give up in despair, simply because they are cold, wet, and hungry. To that end, our hope is to help them provide short-term intervention that will move them toward personal economic stability and security. These are details that I do not feel appropriate to post on the Internet, which is a forum that is a little too public for such a personal story, but the plan as it stands now is 3-fold:



1. We have committed to \$100 a month for 6 months, basically so they have enough to eat. Their empty kitchen told me this was the thing to do, and when I handed them money for January, the tears in their eyes confirmed it. We really hope to limit this to 6 months, but in part it will depend upon how we do with #2 and #3 below.
2. We have committed to help Franklin with the fees for a work permit, if he can qualify for one. The fees are about \$400-500. This would give him the ability to get a job one of the nearby farms.
3. We want to help find them a small lot upon which they can build a home of their own. With a piece of land, they can see a brighter future, even if it isn't "now." They live in a town where, because of "free" houses handed out by the government (available only to Costa Ricans) everybody has decent housing, except for Franklin, Yolanda, and their 3-year-old son. This will level the playing field, so to speak, and once they get the fledgling church off the ground, they won't be losing their home

when they hand over the church to a new pastor in order to reach out to new communities. It is also our best means to invest in the neighborhood, by assuring the positive witness and helpful presence of this family in the community. The lot purchase will cost about \$3,000.

This initiative to come alongside Franklin and Yolanda is what I believe to be our most immediate priority at the moment. What we actually are able to do will of course, depend upon God's provision of funds, but project the total cost to be \$4,000.

Now, permit me to rewind a bit ... In November and December we were blessed with two groups of visitors. In November we received a team from First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia. During their



stay here, they helped with the construction of our new guest house, hosted a ladies' social event in the learning center, and traveled with us to San Juan Nicaragua, where we donated about 15 boxes

of books to the public library, and where we spent time in worship with the Rama Indians. The team took photos of the Rama people, and because they brought a photo printer with them, everyone that came to worship received a photo as a keepsake.



In December we were visited by a United Methodist group, a collaborative effort between our friend Carl Dickerson, pastor of Foley UMC in Foley, AL, St. Mark UMC in Pensacola, and Bagdad UMC, of Bagdad, FL. Of course, behind the scenes are missions groups and individuals who contributed items and finances, so that these teams could visit, and who also sent many gift items for our



Christmas fiestas in the villages. Because they visited in December, this group experienced first hand some of this outreach. They brought gifts with them, which they sorted, packed, and delivered to children dozens of children in *Media Vuelta*, and attended worship at the church in *Las Marias*,

where Franklin and Yolanda serve as pastors. They also pitched in on the guest house construction. Both groups were great visitors, who pitched in whenever and wherever, doing their part to share Jesus' love in tangible ways and demonstrating considerable flexibility and maturity in dealing with multiple last-minute changes in plans. We feel blessed to have so many new friends!



Our Christmas outreach experienced a few delays, because the river flooded twice in December, forcing us to postpone three fiestas, and preventing us from visiting other villages that we would like to have visited. So we "only" were able to serve the communities of *Boca del Toro, Los Angeles, La Gata, Media Vuelta, Jerusalem, La Ceiba, Las Marias, Chimurria, Gaspar, Pueblo Nuevo, and Progreso*, providing about 450 gifts in all. Once the school year starts up in February, we intend to visit communities where we were unable to go, and continue the Christmas good will gesture of providing gifts to the children.

We look forward to an exciting 2012. As things unfold we will provide you with more information, but in the works already are two micro-businesses, which average \$400-600 to get off the ground. The Institute for Ministerial Excellence will offer additional seminars to pastors and ministry leaders, in hermeneutics, theology, and church history. Our work with the local schools will become more focused, as we invest in the schools where teachers who have demonstrated an above-and-beyond commitment to educating the children. And we intend to continue to work with the Rama Indians, as also expand outreach to the public schools in Nicaragua. And, of course, there is the initiative to help Franklin and Yolanda.

Many blessings to you all. For SIGA, 2011 was a year of surprises and advances as well a few setbacks and disappointments. God is faithful though, and we hope he feels that way about us. All in all, it was a fruitful year in ministry. We thank the Lord for each one of you, for those who have visited, those who have contributed, and those of you who have prayed for us. We pray that God will bless and prosper you, as you follow the Lamb, wherever he leads you.

Dios les bendiga,

*Ruth*

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