

## Nicaragua July 2011 Teen Delegation

“When you return to the United States you will not be the same,” Yamileth Perez told us as we visited the Churreca – the Managua dump and Acuhualinca. Yamileth used to live and work in the dump. Now she is a health promoter and works with youth in a soccer league to help young people who might have joined gangs. She is an inspiration.

During our two weeks in Nicaragua, the teens would have two home stays. One in Mirna Urgarte – an urban community and a rural home stay in a community in Matagalpa called Ramon Garcia.

We visited the Free Trade Zone and met with Emilio Noguera a lawyer who negotiates with the labor unions, toured a Taiwanese factory that produces North Face garments and also with the workers movement Maria Elena Cuadra. North Face jackets retail in the US for \$150-\$170 dollars each. The women and men working in the factory earn about \$4 dollars a day. We learned that real wages have fallen 20% under Free Trade agreements such as NAFTA and CAFTA. Poverty rates have reached 81%. Since 1994 when NAFTA passed income inequality has increased and here in the United States, we lost over 1 million jobs. Over 4 million Mexican corn farmers have gone bankrupt due to US subsidized agriculture and have migrated north order to be able to feed their families.

Julio Sanchez from the Humboldt Center told us “We need people that can make change” Change will only come if people demand it and work for change. The whole earth is connected. “Think about others not just about yourself”

While in the rural farming community, I met with an agronomist named Alexis Ochoa Garcia. He described some of the programs supported by the Nicaraguan government called Zero Hunger “Cero Hambre” - *The Agrarian Productive Loan* gives a pregnant cow, a pregnant pig, 9 chickens and a rooster, 5 goats plus wood, zinc and nails for a fence as well as seeds to rural families who qualify. This is an attempt to improve the diet and the standard of living of people living in the countryside. The Nicaraguan Government also gives small loans – Zero Debt – to groups of five people who qualify to begin a small business. A salary Bonus is given to workers such as teachers, police, municipal workers, the military and policy, and doctors to supplement their salary.

The government subsidizes fuel/transportation through a program received through Venezuela – ALBA so that the cost of transportation will not rise. They are also improving the roads. We drove on the road between San Ramon and Ramon Garcia, which has been repaved.

The people in Ramon Garcia taught us many lessons – the importance of family.” I learned that I do not need much to be happy.” “How to live simply.” “I hardly every think about who in my life sacrificed so that I can live a luxurious life.

Carlos Vidal – Director of Los Quinchos – a program for former “street children” was one of the many inspiring people we met. He gave us an overview of Nicaraguan history. Many children must live on the streets because their parents do not have a job. “These young people lived in the Eastern Market and sniffed glue in order to stop their hunger. With the help of an Italian woman, Los Quinchos takes children and brings them to a farm in San Marcos where they receive food, housing, go to school and learn a trade. The day we spent with these children ages 6-18 was one of the most moving of our trip.

As Yamileth told us on our first day in Nicaragua. “We returned home changed.” We pledged to give talks in our churches and schools and to help educate our family and friends about Nicaragua. We are grateful to our parents and all who contributed so that we could make this life-changing trip to Central America.