

UPDATE FROM NICARAGUA
Submitted by Jennifer McGrath, June 19, 2020

In early spring, the steering committee of the World Service Mission Ministry to Nicaragua made the unhappy decision not to travel to Nicaragua this summer due to the surging COVID-19 pandemic. At that point, we didn't know how things were in Nicaragua, just that it was becoming evident that every nation in the world was going to be affected by this virus in some fashion.

Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the western hemisphere. A pandemic such as this one has hit hard in places like Nicaragua that do not have good national infrastructures, especially hospital systems and medical resources. In addition, the government has actively denied the severity of this pandemic and is ill prepared to fight it.

News has been trickling out of Nicaragua and none of it is very good. Families get no news of loved ones in the hospitals. Diagnoses are not provided in order to minimize the official number of COVID-10 cases. People who have died from COVID-19 have been buried quickly and late at night so that families cannot participate or question the cause of death. It is a frightening and dangerous time in a country that was already fragile and politically unstable.

On June 10th I received this email from Dr. Nour Sirker, founder of the Caroline de Sirker School that our Nicaragua ministry helped to build and has supported for over 20 years:

We are doing ok, sheltered in Nejapa, but hurting for the death of over 60 doctors, nurses and medical technicians. This is due to the absence of PPE. And also hearing of the death of over a thousand Nicaraguans due to the complete negligence of our first lady who instead of obeying WHO recommendations, she encouraged public activities, telling people to go out, not to use face masks so they wouldn't alarm others.

Hospitals are overburdened, no beds, no meds, and medical personnel resigning. We are on the upswing of the curve without seeing the end of the contagion. The Carolina de Sirker School is closed, but not the public schools. We are giving classes online and expect to be like that till the end of the year.

In a few words, the government is in denial, and we are in the hands of God (as always...only we weren't so much aware). Pray for Nicaragua and the children.

Blessings,

Nour

On June 12th, this email came from Jebon Hanifa Sirker-Velásquez, the director of the Carolina de Sirker School:

The school has been closed since March 18, when the pandemic began in Nicaragua. Our authorities have refused to acknowledge the health emergency, but we have to be prudent and take our own measures. That is why we started classes online. It is very difficult because of a lack of resources, but it is not impossible. We do not want our students to stop receiving their classes. Parents are supporting us from home, and with the help of God we can do it. I am the Bible teacher now, from 4th grade up, to send the children spiritual bread.

We don't know when all this will end, but we trust that God is in control of everything. On June 30 we finish the first semester of the school year, and the children have 15 days off.

Greetings and blessings,

Jebon

The following update was sent on June 13th from AMOS Health & Hope, the missionary organization in Nejapa that runs the guesthouses where our mission team stays. We have done some healthcare work with them and support their ministry. They provide healthcare services to 23 of the poorest rural communities in Nicaragua, serving over 74,000 people.

In these difficult times for everyone, we could not be more grateful for your solidarity and support. And we are reminded that together, we can do so much good in the world.

As of June 9th, Nicaraguan health authorities have officially confirmed 1,464 cases of COVID-19 within our borders and 55 deaths from it. A significant increase in confirmed cases began around May 19th, and some hospitals are now reaching their capacity to receive patients. Experts have indicated that after June 10th, cases will continue to increase exponentially.

As a result, starting June 5th, our leadership team decided to suspend the following activities for the month of June:

- *supervision rounds to the 23 rural communities we serve*
- *non-emergency clinic visits and home visits*
- *community meetings, child weighing session and all community activities*
- *operations in our 2 urban clinics in Nejapa and Villa Guadalupe*
- *all operations at the AMOS campus*

Tele-medicine consultations will be done via phone. Staff will work from home. These measures are being taken to protect our staff during this high-risk period of transmission of the virus.

At such a critical time for the health of everyone in Nicaragua, we ask for your continued prayers and support, especially for the most vulnerable people. Our leadership team will continue to monitor the situation to evaluate and adjust these measures as needed in the coming weeks, and we will keep you updated accordingly.

We hope and trust in the Lord for better times for all nations, and that we may continue to advance our ministry of sharing health and bringing hope to vulnerable people in Nicaragua during this time of crisis and for many years to come.

Sincerely,

*Dr. David Parajon, Executive Director, and Dr. Gabriella Woo, Country Director
AMOS Health & Hope*

We won't be returning to the little town of Nejapa before 2021 at the earliest. But we will continue to send our prayers and financial support to Nicaragua because that is what we can do at this time.

Prayers are desperately needed for our brothers and sisters in Nicaragua. Please pray for the students and staff at the Carolina de Sirker School, for the staff and patients of AMOS Health & Hope, and for the country during this scary time.

Thank you!

Jennifer McGrath, Chair, World Service Mission Ministry to Nicaragua