



TRANSFORMATION MATTERS

News from the Nehemiah Center

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Volume 1, Issue 4

Managua, Nicaragua

May 2007

THE NEHEMIAH CENTER is a community of service and learning which trains lay and pastoral leaders in an integral biblical worldview and encourages local, national, and international collaboration for the Christ-centered, transformational development of communities and nations.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATORS

Caribbean Ministries

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Food for the Hungry

Life Wind

Missionary Ventures International

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Worldwide Christian Schools

Kingdom values, tools build small businesses

An expectant and enthusiastic cross-section of Christian entrepreneurs and friends came together under the roof of Amor Viviente church in Chinandega on a recent Sunday afternoon.

The purpose of the gathering? To bring the Nehemiah Center's "Businesses for the Kingdom" program participants together with other interested individuals to raise awareness about the program and demonstrate its impact through the testimonies of participants. The meeting opened with worship and a reflection by Program Coordinator Mario Benavides on a passage from the Book of Job, followed by an explanation of the program for new visitors.

"Our objective is to change the way we think about doing business," said Mario, who recently joined the Nehemiah Center staff through funding provided by international collaborator Partners Worldwide.

"Businesses for the Kingdom" participants come from churches where the Nehemiah Center has already initiated a series of pastoral trainings around biblical worldview. The program is structured around small groups of 5-12 individuals who study the content of two manuals (written by Nehemiah Center staff); the first is focused on Kingdom values such as integrity and stewardship, while the second emphasizes the concrete steps required to start or strengthen existing businesses, including the production of a business plan. The ultimate goal? A regional Christian business association which can support, mentor, and equip its members in the pursuit of Godly entrepreneurial activity.

Seven individuals gave testimonies during the meeting, each at a different stage in the business development process. One man said, "We haven't finished the first manual yet, but we are going slowly,



Businesses for the Kingdom participants share testimonies at a meeting in Chinandega.

deliberately, to capture everything we can." Another described how he now prays over the tools he uses in the making of his furniture. "The example of Nehemiah really impacted me, because I know the Lord wants to bless us, but we have to do our part too," he said. "Faith is action."

In some cases, the church has used this program as an outreach tool. "I met some people who hang out at a local bar who were interested in this opportunity," one participant said. A pastor who recently started his own pulperia (small store) told the group that his goal is for everyone in his church to have the opportunity to start their own business.

What has been the key to the program's success thus far? "We are convinced that a big part of our success has been the involvement of the pastors. The first part of the program is about values and attitudes, and it's great to have the help of the pastors in the teaching of this spiritual area," Mario explained.

There are now groups meeting in Chinandega, Leon, and Granada, with plans to expand to Nagraote and Los Cedros in the near future.

The meeting closed with fervent prayers for all those present, that God would continue working in their lives and providing for their families through the businesses they had begun.

While the impact of this fairly new program is beginning to be seen in the businesses being developed, for Mario, the most exciting change is in the participants themselves.

"We are poor," they used to say. "But while they may have limited economic resources, they now recognize that we have the greatest treasure, Jesus Christ, and He has given us creativity, and the potential to develop."



Pastor Porfirio of Amor Viviente (right) prays for the participants at the close of the meeting.



Founded in 1997, Gamaliel School now has 128 students, representing Pre-K to 6th grade.

SPOTLIGHT ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

When many Christian schools here opened their doors, they were simply extensions of church Sunday School programs, operating with volunteer teachers, scarce academic resources, and little organizational infrastructure. In response to these needs, an integrated School Improvement Program was developed and is now being implemented by Nehemiah Center staff and international collaborators Missionary Ventures and Worldwide Christian Schools (WWCS), in partnership with ACECEN, the Nicaraguan association of Christian schools.

Nathan Boersema, Teams Coordinator for WWCS, says “The School Improvement Plan [SIP] has been an incredibly valuable tool to help these schools clarify their vision and mission, and to develop clear goals for their future. The final product these schools produce after one year of the SIP help us as collaborators with these schools know how best to serve them and achieve their goals.”

Workshop topics for participating teachers and administrators include Biblical worldview, establishing a vision, mission and values, strategic planning, curriculum development, and financial management. To begin the improvement process, each school conducts a self-evaluation in conjunction with the Nehemiah Center and sets measurable goals in various areas (e.g. enrollment, administration, teacher development). As of today, more than 100 primary and secondary school teachers representing more than 43 Christians schools throughout Nicaragua have participated in the School Improvement Program offered by the Nehemiah Center, and have committed to share their new knowledge and skills to benefit their local community.

One of these schools is Gamaliel, located in Las Americas II, a suburb of Managua established after the 1972 earthquake destroyed much of the city’s center. The school began in 1997 as a ministry of the First Christian Reformed Church in the neighborhood. “There was a group of teachers in our congregation,” Pastor Isaac said, “so we felt like we had the capacity to begin a school.” With Pastor Isaac’s wife Lilliam, a former public school teacher, serving as director, they began by offering pre-school, adding one grade per year until they had developed a full primary school in the space adjacent to the church, which was purchased with support from WWCS. “When we began the school, I wasn’t sure we could do it,” she admitted. “But God has been with us and helped us move forward.”

Today the school has 128 students in pre-K through 6th grade, with 10 paid teachers, 7 full time (one per grade-level) and 3 part time, who offer computer, English, and dance classes to students. All of the teachers attended workshops led by the Nehemiah Center’s education specialist, Daniel Aragón, which Lilliam says “has greatly improved their teaching”. Meanwhile, the improvement of the school’s physical infrastructure, including the construction of classrooms and donations of books and supplies, has been made possible through collaboration between church members, volunteers, and teams from WWCS. With its monthly tuition rate of \$6 per student, the school is currently self-sustaining, but it has a larger vision. “We want to develop a full secondary school also, because right now our students have no other options to continue their Christian education—the private schools are too expensive and the public schools are full,” explained Pastor Isaac.

While the congregation is very involved in supporting the school, the community has demonstrated its appreciation for the services provided by Gamaliel as well. “Eighty percent of our students come from families that do not attend our church,” noted Pastor Isaac. Long-time church member Maria sent all 5 of her children to Gamaliel because “I wanted to send my children to a school where they would learn about God.” Maria’s eyes lit up as she spoke of the school’s impact. “My children have turned out very well, respectful, eager to serve.” Her oldest son Melvin is now 17 and considering a career in civil engineering or law. “[The school] was like my family. They treated me with a lot of love,” he said.

Please pray that Gamaliel and all Christian schools here persevere in their ministry to students, families, and communities as they raise up the next generation of Nicaraguan Christian leaders.

“Our vision is to form the best kind of citizens, capable of serving the Kingdom of God and helping resolve the problems of poverty in our community.”