



TRANSFORMATION MATTERS

News from the Nehemiah Center

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

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATORS

Caribbean Ministries

Christian Reformed
World Missions

Christian Reformed
World Relief Committee

Food for the Hungry

Life Wind

Missionary Ventures
International

Partners in Christ

Partners Worldwide

Worldwide Christian
Schools

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CRISIS AND HOPE IN EL OJOCHÉ

"He died so that thousands of others could be saved," they said.

As hundreds of patients arrived daily at area hospitals, what had begun with the death of one 24-year old in the rural community of El Ojoche was quickly becoming a regional crisis. Public health officials, already worn ragged by the massive recovery efforts in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region following Hurricane Felix in September, found themselves frantically trying to manage yet another disaster.

The persistent rainfall in the Pacific region following the hurricane created ideal conditions for many kinds of bacteria found in animal droppings to spread throughout the soil, including the potentially deadly leptospirosis, which took only two weeks to kill 10 people and affect more than 3,790 others in late October.

In El Ojoche, 39 people as well as a majority of the farm animals were diagnosed with leptospirosis, and with the added crisis of losing their year's harvest in an unexpected tornado the same week, the community's suffering became even more acute. Community health worker Herbert Reyes shared, "There is so much pain and need on the part of the people in El Ojoche. I have just been weeping for them."

Following several visits to local hospitals, a flurry of conference calls and international coordination, Nehemiah Center collaborator Food for the Hungry (FH) secured medicine for the affected individuals, many of whom traveled long distances from their families to receive medical attention. Additional donations provided food for the 85 families of El Ojoche, and Oxitertraciclina to give injections to all the cows, horses, and pigs affected by leptospirosis in the community.

The local CHE (Community Health Evangelism) committee played a critical role in containing the disease, going house to house to determine the health status of each family and speeding up treatment of those with leptospirosis symptoms; they also organized a community wide animal treatment campaign, injecting 142 animals within 24 hours with the needed antibiotic. FH Teams Coordinator Andrea Kamouyerou noted that, "At first, the CHE community leaders seemed overwhelmed with the problems they faced. But once they started to do something, their spirits began to lift." Public health officials praised the leadership, noting that the disease might have spread much more rapidly in a less well organized community. LifeWind, CRWRC, and FH have been supporting the CHE strategy in El Ojoche for the last 5 years, during which child mortality rates and incidence of diarrhea and parasites in children have dropped substantially.

Community leaders continue to look for alternative food sources and income to address the shortfall that will exist until the next planting season in May 2008. Potential projects include family gardens, installing dams along a local creek for water storage and irrigation, and agricultural diversification training to promote greater food security.

By choosing determination over despair, and using their creativity to bring order from chaos, these CHE leaders vividly illustrate how the greatest resource in any community is its people. **People who are bearers of Christ's hope for their neighbors, and the nation.**



CHE leaders in El Ojoche led the process of treating all affected animals in the community.



choral music in Nicaragua.

TRANSFORMING CULTURE THROUGH MUSIC

Art—whether it be music, poetry, dance, painting, sculpture, or theater—has the power to transform.

With this truth in mind, the Nehemiah Center collaborated with Nicaragua's National Theater Ruben Dario to organize and host the first Choral Music Colloquium on October 31, 2007, entitled *"Celebrating the Impact of Choral Music in Nicaragua."* The event, held shortly after the conclusion of the annual choral music season, brought together over 30 choir directors and members in order to facilitate an exchange of perspectives and experiences related to the potential of

Widely expressed among the event's participants was the deep desire to continue impacting lives through music. As Susan de Aguirre, Director of the National Theater, said, "Our goal is to continue growing and cultivating artistic appreciation in the population." Antonieta Corea, member of the Parajon-Dominguez choir, agreed. "The objective is to continue sharing a good message through our music," she said. During the colloquium, participants discussed many ways to strengthen the impact of choral music in Nicaragua, including future colloquiums, further development of children's choirs, and initiating choral music seasons outside of Managua.

The healing power of choral music is visible even in the darkest places, as Director Joan Parajon has experienced firsthand. She took her choir to a dangerous prison in El Salvador to perform a concert—a place where even the guards were afraid. When they concluded by singing 'Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace', both the choir and the prisoners were in tears. Words alone might not have touched their hearts, but the voices combined with the melodies of piano, guitar, flute, and other instruments enabled a message to reach their souls.

For the Nehemiah Center, this colloquium provided a means of strengthening relationships with respected national cultural institutions like the National Theater and the Nicaraguan Institute of Culture. This strategic collaboration, observed Arts and Media Program Coordinator Hultner Estrada, "will give us more direct contact with both Christian and non-Christians artists throughout the country, which we hope will lead to the formation of a network of artists who share a wholistic vision for the transformation of our culture through the arts and media."

"Music is more than just playing an instrument or a way of earning money. Music means communicating emotions, ideas, values. It means taking social responsibility, caring for people, healing them."

Jorge Bojorge,
Sub-director, Choir
Parajon-Dominguez,
Managua

MICAH CHALLENGES INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES

Compelled by the prophetic call of Micah (6:8) to do justice and love mercy, last fall the Nehemiah Center began promoting the 8 Millennium Development Goals through participation in the international Micah Challenge campaign. The campaign kicked off in Nicaragua last October with a workshop for pastors and community leaders led by Peruvian Erika Izquierdo, called "Let Yourself Be Touched by the Poor."

Following this training, a one-year pilot project was organized to raise the level of awareness of the MDGs, how funds allocated to Nicaragua to achieve them are being used, and what role individuals can play in the nation's ongoing development. In several communities throughout the Pacific region, "seed projects" (community development projects mobilizing Christians to take action against poverty, such as community clean-ups) have been organized; many times these projects have taken shape after church

and community leaders participate in a locally organized "Let Yourself Be Touched by the Poor" workshop.

Luz Urania Largaespada, psychologist and member of the Ezra training team, notes that, "One key part of the workshop is to make people aware of the real situation faced by many communities."

Raising awareness within the local church through the Micah Challenge campaign is one concrete step toward Christ-centered transformation, both at the individual and community level. During a recent workshop in El Limonal (Chinandega), the hearts of two women who had been at odds with one another for many years were softened, and they were able to seek forgiveness from one another and be reconciled. Another participant added, "It is great that the Nehemiah Center is promoting this kind of awareness so that we as children of God can truly proclaim truth and denounce injustice."