



# TRANSFORMATION MATTERS

## News from the Nehemiah Center

The Nehemiah Center  
AP 1076

Managua, Nicaragua  
+011 (505) 271-2958

[www.nehemiahcenter.net](http://www.nehemiahcenter.net)

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

Volume 2, Issue 2

Managua, Nicaragua

January 2008

### UNIFIED VISION STRENGTHENS NICARAGUAN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In the beginning, they just wanted a voice. An organized network of Christian educators would help protect their legal rights, they thought. "Our motives were completely secular, political in nature," admits Denis Melendez, the current Executive Director of the Nicaraguan Association of Christian Schools (ACECEN).

Meanwhile, Daniel Aragon of the Nehemiah Center's Ezra training team had begun hosting biblical worldview trainings for agents of transformation in

Leon, where Melendez was working. Aragon invited him to participate in the trainings, but Melendez was initially uninterested because there was no funding involved. Eventually, however, Melendez shared his vision for an association of Christian schools with Aragon. "Daniel challenged me to reconsider the purpose of the network we were trying to create," he recalls.

Soon afterward, Melendez and the other leadership of the newly formed association agreed to change direction from lobbying and advocacy to equipping teachers and improving Christian education throughout the country. Daniel [Aragon] and his wife Darling offered free trainings to teachers and administrators of interested schools, and worked together with a team from the Nehemiah Center to implement an official School Improvement Plan process, in which 40 schools have now participated.

One of these schools is Colegio Filadelfia, located in Ciudad Sandino, just outside Managua. Founded 10 years ago with only two grades, Filadelfia now offers a full primary and secondary education and enrolls about 200 students annually. The school's director Rosa Valle says, "Our vision is that children grow up with values, with a wholistic formation, serving the community." Service to the community has become an integral part of this school's identity; teachers visit their students' parents in their homes, students lead bimonthly worship services for the community, and the school assists with fumigation in the community. The school models both academic excellence, witnessed in the achievements of several students who were recognized in a recent national level math competition, and spiritual growth, evidenced by the more than 30 children baptized in the last year.

The growing number of participating schools and availability of locally equipped leaders made a regional-level strategy appear to be the next logical step in improving the quality of Nicaraguan Christian education. Thus, this past fall ACECEN established 8 regional "centers" of training, offering 10 trainings annually to area member schools. Each of the now 70 members pays a small enrollment fee and an annual amount for training. Missionary Ventures and Worldwide Christian Schools provide funds to help with the costs of training and school improvement projects, but the organization and its members are growing towards self-sustainability. For example, after a recent training at the Nehemiah Center, Director Avidán Medina of member school Colegio Lirio de Los Valles, called a faculty meeting in which together they developed the budget for the upcoming school year.

"I have learned how important a shared vision and ownership is," he says.



Students at Colegio Filadelfia

## “THEY WOULDN’T EVEN GIVE A PENNY FOR THEM”

This past November, an exhaustive, 29-month process of training and reflection focused on integrated ministry to youth in difficult places came to a close. The “Transforming Mission” program was implemented by the Nehemiah Center in collaboration with the Strategy of Transformation supported by Christian Reformed World Missions and Caribbean Ministries; rather than offering “new tools for ministry”, the seminars emphasized personal reflection through an in-depth study of the incarnational ministry model of Christ.

During this process, the hearts of more than 50 young leaders were opened to a different way of seeing youth and their families: people who had been rejected—even by the church—as the least, the last, and the lost of society, but who maintain a special place in the heart of God.

Elias Gaitan Quintana, youth leader in the Christian Reformed Church of Nagarote, used to hold the opinion that



Youth leaders received certificates and books to celebrate their achievements.

“this kind of person should not exist.” His perspective and that of his church began to change, however, through the course of these trainings. “Our church was so reactionary that it discriminated against these people, but now, we are reaching out to them,” explained Elias.

In addition to awakening in participants a deeper love for at-risk youth, the Transforming Mission program served as part of their personal development. Such is the case of Jackarelys Gonzalez, a youth pastor in Chichigalpa. Jackarelys shared that when she was invited to participate, she was about to throw in the towel. “I felt like I had been thrown into a pool, and told “save yourself if you can”. However, after becoming part of the program, her life, way of thinking, and vision for ministry changed. During the two and a half years, she met and married her husband, who together were sent to pastor a church in a semi-rural community in Chinandega. Today, in addition to these new responsibilities, she and her spouse are the proud parents of a beautiful baby boy.



As part of the closing celebration, participating leaders wrote letters of encouragement to their peers.

Juan Antonio Meneses has his own testimony. A member of the Light and Life Church in Corinto, Juan Antonio had recently accepted Jesus at the time he began the training program, which he says, “fit me like a ring on a finger. It awakened in me a greater passion for the Word of God.” He added, “This training helped me outline what we should be doing as Christians to help those who urgently need Christ in their lives.”

For these youth at risk, “what matters is not just talking about doctrine, but speaking words that fill them with love,” says Juan Antonio. And while many people, as Elias mentioned, “would not even give a penny for them,” Jesus Christ laid down His life.



Graduating youth agents of transformation, Nov. 2007

PLEASE PRAY for these new youth “agents of transformation” that have embraced the commitment to bring Christ’s love and healing to those youth and their families living in high-risk situations.