

**Report of the World Relief Officer to the World Relief Committee**  
**June 23, 2017**

In late March 2017, I made a quick trip to Nicaragua to gather pictures and stories for the 2018 One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) promotional materials. Thank you for the opportunity to share a small reflection on my inspiring time there.

“How has life changed for you since you joined the farming program?” I asked Pedro Gonzalo Parrales. “Now I have more vision and ambition to do more!” he answered.

When monitoring and evaluating development work, this is a response that you hope to hear. What is significant about Pedro’s response is that he is 71 years old and is looking ahead to many more years of productive farming—he is reenergized by what he is learning. Prior to entering the farming program, the only access he had to training and new techniques was consultation with a Central American farming almanac. He would review the almanac and call the publisher with questions. While that provided some basis of information, climate change within Nicaragua and recent droughts had left him with little innovation to employ in his farming techniques.

Before entering the program, Pedro was growing mostly basic grains--that is what he knew how to do and did it with limited success. However, the soil on his farm is clay, and that can be difficult to cultivate. Now he uses a combination of manure, compost and mulch to improve the soil. The three-acre “farm” that I walked through with him was now planted with citrus trees (orange, lime, and lemon), avocado trees, yucca, and scattered in-between a few trees that produce a valuable wood--of which only the branches are cut for sale for income generation to the farmer.

The farming program that Pedro participates in is through International Ministries’ partner the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD). I would be remiss in mentioning CEPAD without mentioning the significant American Baptist involvement in forming CEPAD decades ago. CEPAD was founded in December 1972, just days after a strong earthquake destroyed Managua, the capital of Nicaragua. American Baptist missionary, Dr. Gustavo Parajon, a practicing medical doctor, called people together under a mango tree and urged churches to cooperate in service to help the victims of the earthquake. Now, 40 years later, while the needs have changed over the decades, CEPAD continues to be one of the strongest organizations working for the development of rural communities in Nicaragua.

“What are your hopes for the future?” I asked Luisa Maria Lopez. “That my children will preserve and protect our environment better than we have.” she responded.

Luisa Maria is another farmer in the CEPAD program. Her response surprised me a bit. We had spent about 90 minutes with Luisa Maria and she had proudly shown us literally the seeds of her harvest. Her first year of farming under the CEPAD program yielded much greater and varied return than her previous harvests. She had literally kept the seeds and organized them to show to her neighbors as she begins her outreach to help others improve their own farming. I expected her to respond that she was anticipating an even greater harvest, or more varieties of fruits and vegetables. However, Luisa Maria was focused on the future of her children.

The CEPAD program includes focus on the environmental aspects of farming and how changes to farming today can prevent or increase things like deforestation and soil conservation. She was sharing this new knowledge with her two young boys and had given them the responsibility to take care of a spring that was located at the rear of their rural property. She said it was a small responsibility, but one that had given her the opportunity to start teaching her children about the difference they could make for their future. “Do you want your children to be farmers?” I asked. “No, I want them to be professionals. But I want them to understand how they can conserve and preserve all of the resources around them.” she shared.

This is but one example of the partners that OGHS supports and the impact they are having within their own country and communities. I had the honor of meeting and spending time in the presence of Dr. Parajon in the early 2000’s—it is an experience I will never forget. I found him to be a soft-spoken man who listened intently and spoke little. And when he spoke it was with wisdom and conviction. As I walked through the farms in rural Nicaragua in March, I reflected on what he would think today of how CEPAD continues to serve the people he devoted his life ministry to. I believe he would be very pleased.



Pedro Gonzalo Parrales



Luisa Maria Lopez



Mango tree painting at the CEPAD offices  
to commemorate where Dr. Parajon gathered others in 1972

#### Financial Report on FYE 2015

The \$1,623,565 received by OGHS in 2016 represents a 2.5% decrease compared to prior year giving. The decrease was driven mostly by the slow but continued decline in undesignated giving to OGHS.

Undesignated giving totaled \$1,118,324 which represents a 4% decrease from the year prior.

World Relief Office administrative expenses totaled \$96,811 and the World Relief Committee expenses were \$7,488, for a total of 6% of receipts. Promotional expenses were \$88,391 or 5% of receipts. Cash reserves decreased from a fiscal year-end 2015 balance of \$412,392 to \$345,945 at the end of 2016.

#### Report on 2016 Year-to-Date Giving

Year-to-date receipts through April 2017 totaled \$126,255 compared with \$118,331 for the same period last year. There is no significant difference between the two years due to the absence of any significant natural disasters in the first four months of both years.

#### Other Important Items of Interest

2017 OGHS promotional materials were mailed to churches the last week of March. The materials included a Planning & Resource Guide, posters, bulletin inserts, offering envelopes, a DVD, and coin boxes. The materials were sent to the 2,304 American Baptist churches that have given to OGHS in any of the past three years.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Rothenberger