

Matthew 22: 38-39

Love your God with all your heart, soul and mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

In June I traveled with the Nicaragua Project to Somoto, Nicaragua, which is about three hours from the capital, Managua. Augustana has supported this mission with support from the Foundation, Global Mission, and several circles. It is a mission that was begun about 15 years ago with Lutheran churches in Longmont, Loveland, and Greeley. Over these 15 years Augustana has become a family with the Nicaragua Project and strong relationships centering on God's presence with families in Somoto and relationships with those of us who serve there and give financial support from here.

I share a story about Mario. The Global Mission Committee supports him financially with his university education. He is so grateful for our support because without it he would be unable to attend school. He is studying agriculture and has goals to work with sustainability and plants that produce healthy food for his people. He works full time in a bakery and goes to school on the weekends. Like many families, his father went to Costa Rica to find migrant work with the intention of sending money back to his family. However, the father has not returned and does not send money, so Mario supports his mother and sister. In return for the educational scholarship of \$350, Mario teaches Sunday School and does volunteer work in the child care center. He is filled with love and gratitude to Augustana and sends blessings to our community.

We also shared in a blessing of a new home. The Nicaragua Project raised funds of about \$4000 to build a 400 square foot home made of cinder block. They had lived in a house with cardboard walls and plastic for a roof. There will be eight people living in this space. They cook over an open fire outside of the home. Again they say, "We thank you for giving us this home with a roof and floor so we can be safe from the rains and mud." With tears of gratitude they say, "We love you and thank God for you." God's Work, Our Hands!! The adult son has received a micro-loan of \$100 to purchase a cotton candy machine to take to the market and sell there. We had a taste and it is just like our cotton candy! Statistics show that the average income is \$1 per day for a family, so our gifts of love are truly appreciated. God's Work, Our Hands!!

We delivered 50 water filters to a village. Now the children can attend school with fewer sick days because they have less diarrhea and dehydration. They love their five gallon blue filters.

I am reminded of the hymn: "In Christ there is no east or west, in Him no south or north. But one great fellowship of love, throughout the whole wide world" I left this experience with the sense of gratitude that I had been in the presence of God's people who shared their love, gratitude and hospitality with us and we shared our gifts of service and financial support with them. I left Nicaragua knowing we are all in the family of God.

~ Jean Gall