

**Taking time with patients;  
Medical outreach brings health care, evangelism to small towns in Nicaragua**  
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**Madroñal, Nicaragua** – At first glance, this small town on Nicaragua’s Pacific coast may look like the paradise that many tourists are looking for. Wide sandy beaches, palm-lined shorelines, picturesque fishing boats putting out from shore – all could lead one to think that this might be the dream place to vacation or even retire.



But, for those who live here, even amidst the beauty, life is difficult.

“The main needs here are the economy and the lack of potable water,” says Pastor Enrique Gutierrez Espinoza who has served an evangelical church in the nearby town of San Pablo for 13 years. “The water only comes at night in some parts of the community,” he explains. “Some people haven’t had any running water for over two months.”

Alcides Fuentes, country director for Christ for the City International, says that the same problem exists in many parts of Nicaragua. “Most of the 1,500 people who live in Madroñal receive water only every other day.”

And, the water that arrives in many of the homes in San Pablo isn’t fit to drink. “The water systems are old,” says Mary Ezzell, a CFCI missionary working with medical clinics and community development in Nicaragua. “People have to get water from wells in other communities, but often that water is contaminated.”

The land in San Pablo is made up of rock that contains a lot of Calcium Bicarbonate. The water from the wells in this area is contaminated with an overabundance of Calcium Bicarbonate which leads to kidney problems including kidney stones.

Mary moved from Greenville, South Carolina to Nicaragua in January of 2005. In Greenville she worked as a physical therapist at Bon Secours St. Francis Hospital and attended Grace Church. She graduated from the University of North Florida

in Jacksonville, Florida where her parents, Joe and Pat Ezzell live in nearby Green Cove Springs.

She is a missionary with the Omaha, Nebraska-based Christ for the City International and also represents Medical Mission International of Saint John, New Brunswick in Canada.

CFCI works in a number of countries around the world to meet the greatest needs of the poorest cities. The mission's purpose is to help people transform cities by transforming lives. Missionaries from CFCI accomplish that by determining what needs people have, meeting those needs out of the love of Christ and building relationships so they can share the Gospel and change lives.



While Mary and the CFCI team work to provide services to impoverished seaside communities such as Madroñal, they depend heavily on volunteer workers from inside Nicaragua as well as Canada and the United States to help carry out the work.

“We bring in four medical work groups a year from outside the country,” Mary explains. “In addition, we try to put together at least four medical outreach trips each year made up of local doctors, nurses and volunteers.”

“When the teams come to a town like Madroñal, they work mostly with general medicine,” she says. “They see skin problems, gastrointestinal problems, parasites and respiratory difficulties. In addition, they try to diagnose and treat chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.”

Frequently the team sets up a clinic in a school, or preferably, such as was the case here; they use a church that they divide into examination rooms. Mary sets up a pharmacy and dispenses medicine prescribed by the doctors. Because the building is so small and has only one room, others help with counseling and health education outside under trees or tarps.

Each medical caravan treats around 100 to 120 patients a day.

Medical education is also an important part of the ministry. "We present workshops in these communities to help educate the people about health," explains Fatima Guevara Lanuza, a Nicaraguan from the city of Estelí, who joined the ministry earlier this year. "We help them understand the importance of washing their hands when they prepare food, of having clean teeth and purifying water, of avoiding insect bites that can lead to malaria and dengue fever and AIDS prevention," she says.

While the medical component of the work is important, Mary and the other missionaries use it to open doors for other forms of ministry. "We work with the community ahead of time, organizing people from the church to help with the outreach clinics," she says. "Some will help register the people; others will provide counseling or do evangelism." Mary says that this involvement helps church members learn how to serve others in their community.

"Our ministry helps us to strengthen local churches," explains Alcides, a CFCI missionary from Costa Rica. "Seventy-five percent of the pastors here have not completed high school and 80 percent have had no theological training." CFCI's ministry in Nicaragua provides workshops and other training resources for pastors.

"It's a blessing for us to be able to minister here," Alcides says as he walks the stifling hot, dirt streets of Madroñal. "Many people don't have the money for medicine. So, if they go to a doctor at a government clinic, they can't afford the medicine."

Mary believes that the follow-up that a Christian ministry offers is very important and sets its work apart from others. "Our job as Christians is to restore the value that people have in Christ," she says. "Our doctors can take time with patients and pray with them. We value the people who come through the clinic. It is an opportunity for us to show them the love of God."

Mary and her team are looking for medical groups who can work in CFCI's medical outreach ministries in Nicaragua. "We need doctors, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, pharmacists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists," she says. "We encourage the visiting work groups to bring a few extra team members to organize a children's program, or to participate in a construction project in the community."

She says that an ideal size for medical teams is around 15 people.

To learn more about medical short-term ministries in Nicaragua, write to Medical Mission International, P.O. Box 815, Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, E2L 4C3 or go to [www.medicaldentalmission.com](http://www.medicaldentalmission.com).

More information about Christ for the City International can be obtained on line at [www.cfi.org](http://www.cfi.org) or by writing to Christ For the City International, P.O. Box 241827, Omaha, NE 68124-5827, or by calling 402 592 8332 or toll free, 888 526 7551.

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