

Hi family and friends, I just celebrated my 30th birthday here in Nicaragua during the last week of January. I felt really blessed to be able to hike around a volcano and swim in a lagoon of a volcano crater. Yes, I realize that sounds pretty absurd and possibly like fiction, but Nicaragua is a beautiful country with many volcanoes and natural points of interest. If you feel like celebrating your birthday here, just respond to this email. Blessings, -Aaron

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At precisely the moment the money changer was explaining to me where a large evangelical church was located in Granada, a woman and her daughter walked up to him and unrolled a \$100 American bill. He pulled out his calculator, performed a calculation of the bank rate for that day and showed her the numbers. She nodded "yes." Her face was downtrodden and her daughter looked ambivalent. The enormous stack of bills in his hand flipped back and forth as he plucked out the colorful currency from large denominations to small. It sounded like a oft repeated rhythm here on this busy street corner.



(Street corner in the Granada market.)

She received her Cordobas (Nicaraguan currency) and they walked away. He continued with the directions to "La Iglesia de Restauracion" (The Church of Restoration) as if nothing outside our innocent conversation had transpired.



(Facilitator for Human Trafficking.)

I don't know exactly where this local woman had gotten such a large bill, but I think I can connect the dots in this particular situation. Like in many impoverished countries, with the high frequency of tourism and enormous economic poverty, women sometimes engage in prostitution. I don't want to give you the impression that this is what Nicaragau is like throughout the country or what it should be known for. That would not be true, nor would it be a fair representation to the beautiful countryside and Nicaraguan culture I have come to enjoy over the past month. Indeed, it is a complicated issue, an economic pressure driven by the divide between the rich who are in power limiting free market commerce from taking shape and the desperate poor waiting for more jobs.

According to the UN, Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere next to Haiti. Nicaragua struggles with unemployment, poor education, and a weak (but growing) economy. I do believe there is hope on the horizon though, as I've met with many churches, Christian missionaries, development organizations, and Christian and Catholic schools. They speak of a population moving out of poverty and the importance of the formation of good character as the nation continues to grow economically. Progress may be slow, but it is arriving.



I joined a group meeting last Wednesday of an organization called ACECEN ([Association of Evangelical Christian](#)

[Education Centers of Nicaragua](#) is proactive in its approach to changing the culture and the future of Nicaragua through education. They teach teachers how to educate children through learning modalities, technology in the classroom, and creating a curriculum that both imparts Biblical values and lives them out. I began to see what a powerful force education can be here.



(Map of human trade routes.)

Within their network, they deliver their program of training on a bi-weekly basis to schools and weekly to others. Many times they incorporate special subjects like preventing child trafficking throughout Central America in a partnership with Christian Reformed Church (www.crcna.org). As you look to the map here on the right you'll see that there are trade routes running in and out of this part of the country. As mentioned before, the drug trade, human trafficking, and illicit activities are not just problems of Central America, they are found in every part of the globe where there is poverty.



(Team of trainers for ACECEN.)

With Edify I have been visiting schools and meeting with organizations like ACECEN to see if they'd be a good partner for Edify as they currently work with Christian schools in Nicaragua. ACECEN "promotes the development and improvement of Christian schools, preparing students to excel professionally based on biblical principles so that they become agents of transformation in society."

The ACECEN team was receiving this special training to impart their program of educational services to the 150 schools in their network. They will carry this message of justice, hope, and redemption to directors, teachers and students. By starting with the youngest children they are laying a platform to help them understand what is good and

what is bad in the world and how to know the difference.

Isn't it amazing that education can become a weapon in preventing things like the drug trade, child trafficking, and prostitution? It all starts with providing a solid foundation of values and one value that ACECEN continually promotes is that school is a safe place and the teachers are protectors and believe in the students ability to succeed.

I think sometimes we have this image in our minds that the evils present in our cities or in the developing worlds are always shady looking strangers that pluck out kids from their homes and put them up to selling drugs or get them involved in illegal activities. Very often, it's not a presence or a force of bad examples, it can be simply a lack or an absence of the good ones. The values of culture, whether good or bad, are transmitted in the street, within neighborhoods, in markets, on TV and radio, all play a part in helping to form what is good and what is right in these young minds.

If we don't help provide good solid examples of strong, loving leadership, children will find examples of it as soon as they leave school. That is what scares me. Haven't we seen too many evils against children, and worse, youth against youth? There is a real and present battle for the minds of the youth, and I am encouraged to see organizations like ACECEN are out on the front lines loving children and teaching them how to live in this world.

That is our goal with Edify as well. We work with schools to help them provide a better education to their children, better routes to get sustainable employment through vocational training, and bring the hope of a real Savior who came to fight for them and defeat that which is evil.



I believe children need that.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14 NIV)



(Nicaraguan children playing in the street)

I pray that as you see opportunities to help the most innocent of our society, God gives you a way to participate.

Blessings to you and your families,
-Aaron

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