

Waiting

Jeannie and I were flooded with emotions when we landed in Managua on November 14. We had come to Nicaragua to be part of the twentieth anniversary celebration of the Nehemiah Center.

We had rented a car. I had some apprehension about driving in Managua again. Could I still handle the traffic? What if we were stopped by the traffic cops? Had everything that we loved about Nicaragua changed with the political crisis of the last year?

Yet within five minutes we sensed we were home. This was still the Nicaragua that had been our adopted country for eighteen years. The accents and gestures of the people that surrounded us as we exited the airport were familiar. These were the people we loved.

And still we felt as if we were waiting. For certain, we were eagerly anticipating the anniversary celebration in two days. But we maybe we were waiting for more than that. Might Nicaragua herself also be waiting?

Waiting for the blessed hope

The Nehemiah Center had chosen Titus 2:13 as the theme verse for the anniversary celebration: "While we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

The Nehemiah Center had been birthed in 1999 in the wake of Hurricane Mitch. Mitch had left thousands dead, roads and bridges cut off, and crops and homes destroyed. We had chosen the name "Nehemiah" because in the Old Testament God had used Nehemiah to give renewed hope to a discouraged people, a people that had returned from exile to find their beloved city in ruins.

And we knew that in the twenty years since 1999 God had used the Nehemiah Center to give hope to many people. The Nehemiah Center modeled and taught a Gospel that was as big and broad as life itself. Lives were transformed as people heard the Good News of Jesus through



Joel speaking at the anniversary

fresh lens. Many people from all walks of life became agents of Gospel transformation in their homes, schools, businesses, and communities.

(You can see some of the testimonies in this video: <https://youtu.be/ngdxn2yEaGc>)

A movement not a monument

Yet we wondered whether we had come to Nicaragua to remember a monument or to witness a movement. Monuments are important because they speak of what God has done in the past. Movements are tangible evidence of what God is doing in the present. And movements wait with "blessed hope" for what God will do in the future.

Over three hundred people came to the all day workshop that the Nehemiah Center sponsored as part of the anniversary celebration. Delegations came from each of the major cities on the Pacific coast where the Nehemiah Center had worked. Some of the participants had traveled up to three hours by bus. Almost 200 people came to the gala dinner that evening. (Click here for a video with scenes from the anniversary celebration: <https://youtu.be/Urf3vXSOvsQ>)

But it was the stories and not the numbers that touched our hearts. People we did not know came up to us to thank us for helping to plant the "Nehemiah seed" in Nicaragua.

One of those people was Reyna Ivania from Esteli, Nicaragua. Reyna is one of the first people I met in Nicaragua. She was part a workshop I had done for teachers in 1998, at a time when I could barely speak Spanish! In fact, she gave a copy of the handout from that workshop. She had saved it all these years! Later, Reyna Ivania had participated in all of the workshops that Dr. John Van Dyke, a retired professor from Dordt College, gave for Christian school teachers over a period of five years in the early 2000's.

But what Reyna Ivania really wanted to share was the story of how the "Nehemiah seed" had grown in Esteli from one person and her family to impact many people and their families, churches and communities.

In my short talk that day I used Haggai 2:9: "The glory of

this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty."

The future of the "Nehemiah movement" will look different than the past. Some might even remember the former days as the "glory days." But the source of hope has not changed. It is still Immanuel, God with us. For this reason, we can continue to wait with the same "blessed hope" that motivated the founders of the Nehemiah Center some twenty years ago.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to each of you as we wait for the "blessed hope" of a Jesus who came in a Bethlehem manger, who continues to come to us every day through his Spirit, and who will come again.

Joel

An Invitation to Partner

Jeannie and I are grateful for the privilege to be able to see a little of what God is doing throughout the world. We are so thankful for your partnership in that over what will be twenty-five years in March! Each year we receive about a third of our annual donations through year-end giving.

We would love to have you partner with us this year!



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