

May 2018

Dear Friends and Family,

My heart hurts for the country that I have come to call home. Over the last three weeks Nicaragua has been plagued with civil unrest. Much of it started because of changes made to the Social Security system here affecting workers, businesses and retired folks. However, after attempts at peaceful protesting were met with police repression and violence, the protesting escalated in numbers and in causes. The reforms were reversed days after the protests began, but the death count was already on its way to 25, and many people were angered by the government's violent response to those protesting. What started as protests against a Social Security reform quickly became voices throughout the country calling for a change in the government leadership, free and transparent elections, an end to police repression, and a right to protest peacefully.

Over the last three weeks my emotions have been all over the place - unsettled, nervous, angry, sad, and frustrated. Being in my third trimester of pregnancy and dealing with the heat and humidity have only added to the stress of the situations at hand. Daily we are unsure of what might happen in the city. Our children's schooling is a daily unknown as to whether it will be a normal day, half day or even happen at all. We are constantly checking the news and social media to know what is happening where and to know if it's safe to be in certain areas of the city. On Wednesday there were two opposing marches, and the streets were packed with people. Many businesses and schools closed early and whole sections of the city were blocked off. On Thursday it was relatively calm, and I was able to go into the city to pay scholarships at one of the universities where many youth have supported the protests. In getting there early I saw the beginning of what throughout the day would become taxi strikes throughout the city protesting the ever increasing rise in fuel prices. Thursday night there was more police violence against university students which caused us to wake up Friday morning to discover barricades in the streets throughout the city as well as into other areas of the country. Literally, since April 18<sup>th</sup> we have not known what each day will hold.

When you stop and think about it, though, that is true of every day. However, when life is going smoothly or more or less how we think it should, we are not that concerned with the unknown. But, when all of a sudden the circumstances around us involve violence, civil unrest, protesting and political disagreement, our first reaction is often the emotions that I mentioned above. Turning to God, I find a peace that passes all understanding, a peace that shows me an image of God holding this country and this world in His hands, a peace that is eternal since that is the gift that He offers in His sacrifice on the cross. This peace does not make today's unknown any more certain, but it does give me the strength to put my emotions aside and pray with tears in my eyes for His peace to be known in this country spiritually as well as in the present circumstances. Please join us in praying for peace for Nicaragua!

As a family we are doing well amidst all the unrest. Living outside the city a little, we do not experience the sights and sounds of the protesting while in our home. We are looking forward to the birth of our fifth child in late June. And we are hopeful that Amanda's sister and her family as well as her parents are able to come visit during June and July.

Praying for peace,

Thomas, Amanda, Samantha, Anthony, Nicole and Sofia

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