

July 2019

Dear Friends and Family,

We thank God for His goodness and His abundant provision! We have been so blessed with good health, a fun-loving family, strong financial and prayer support and a love for Nicaragua. We have also seen God's provision in the generosity of all of those who gave to the scholarship program this year. While I was not sure I would be able to continue sponsoring all of the current scholarship students, I have actually been able to offer more new scholarships than I expected.

January is always the month of backpacks. It is probably the month when our kitchen/living area is the cleanest and also the messiest! I put away as much of our personal stuff so that we are able to store school supplies and backpacks for over 600 kids. This year because of an anticipated lower budget as well as feeling like the backpacks were not always being used, we packed 550 packs of school supplies into plastic bags for children and youth in our community. In a year of uncertainty about the current political crisis and when many missions and missionaries have left, most families were grateful for the continued gift of notebooks and other school supplies. For the three churches that we support, we did use backpacks and packed 110 full of school supplies. Thanks to Thomas' family we packed everything in one weekend. By the time we were done packing, there were backpacks and plastic bags in various rooms and hallways throughout the house - trying to keep them organized by which church or community they were for. By February 4th we had given out all the backpacks and had our house back! Then in February and March I began going to all of the universities and schools where I scholarship students. Because of last year's crisis, many university students were just starting to study again. And while the situation in the country has not been resolved, it is safer to be out and about. Three of the university students are working on their final course and should graduate this year!

In April I committed to teach English a couple of hours a day for 7 weeks with Word of Life. One of my students was from Mexico. She did not speak any English but is a new volunteer with Word of Life and would like to be able to help with teams and other volunteers who come from the States. We had a great time getting to know each other while I helped her learn the basics of the English language. May brings the hottest and most humid days of the year but once we survive those, we know the rains are coming which bring some cooler, more refreshing weather. We were all glad to be in the rainy season again. School ended in June and my parents came for a three-week visit. Samantha finished 5th grade, Anthony finished 3rd grade and Nicole graduated from Kindergarten. Sofia turned three and cannot wait to start preschool in August, and our little Alexander turned one. My parents were able to enjoy two birthdays and a graduation while they were here. It is always a treat to have them come and spend quality time with all of us.

It has been a challenging and yet good year so far. The political situation here is anything but resolved. Many of the political prisoners were released about a month ago, however, many are under constant surveillance and, from what I've read, did not receive their personal items back including their cédulas which are their identity cards. Without those one cannot do bank transactions or use a credit card here. The government passed an immunity law about a month ago exonerating everyone from their role in the protests. This law is two-sided because it allows the government to free the political prisoners and drop all "charges," but it also exonerates all the police and paramilitary from the crimes they committed against humanity and have never been charged for them. Just a couple of weeks ago the Organization of American States (OAS) voted on a resolution for the crisis in Nicaragua. Basically, it states: "If in 75 days the regime has not resolved the sociopolitical crisis through negotiations, releasing all political prisoners, and facilitating the return of international human rights organizations, as well as restoring the freedom of the press and mobilization, and an electoral reform that leads to early elections, the OAS Democratic Charter could be applied to the government." (<https://havanatimes.org/features/oas-steps-up-pressure-on-ortegas-government-in-nicaragua/>)

Please continue to lift up Nicaragua in your prayers. While the violence and protests have calmed down, life here is still anything but normal. Personally we have felt safe, but we do recognize that theft is on the rise and it can be quite unnerving to see armed police at every large intersection in Managua as well as truckloads of them driving around the city. Thank you for your prayers!!

Praying for peace,

Thomas, Amanda, Samantha, Anthony, Nicole, Sofia and Alexander Gutiérrez

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