

Dear Friends and Family,

We hope you all enjoyed a wonderful Thanksgiving! Honestly, even during hard times, many of us have SO much to be thankful for. Two weeks ago I had a knee operation to remove a staple that was used during my ACL reconstruction four years ago which had started bothering me. The surgeon was the same one who had done my ACL reconstruction, and he and I had agreed beforehand that it was worth it to go inside my knee to check on my ACL and everything else around it. Much to his surprise he found that 70% of one of my meniscus had torn. He ended up stitching it back into place, but it would mean a longer recovery than just having the staple removed. While I am very thankful that I decided to have surgery and thankful for the doctor's wisdom in repairing what we didn't even know was broken, it has been tough being on crutches and wearing a big brace while trying to do life with five kids and help with all of their homework and extracurricular activities. Thankfully, I have had a lot of extra help: meals from friends, rides for my kids from school, help from my husband and children around the house, friends willing to drive me to doctor's appointments while Thomas is busy at school, and friends and family just checking in from time to time to see how I am doing. Thank you, thank you!

As I look back on this year, here are some other things I am thankful for. I am thankful for the opportunity to teach English with English 4 Life this year. It has been a rewarding experience helping young Nicaraguans better their English while also seeing them grow in their faith. I am thankful for St. Paul's Methodist Church and many individuals who helped make the scholarship program a success once again. The program supported 43 university students and provided 32 other scholarships. Three of the university students finished their degrees this year, and one of the deaf students graduated from high school. The program also helped provide school supplies for over 600 students at the beginning of the school year. Another program I am thankful for is a new soccer club started by a friend of ours in our area. Both Anthony and Samantha have been a part of the club and enjoy having their friends from school as well as the neighborhood participate. As a family we are thankful for good health and those who support us both prayerfully and financially.

Thomas is thankful for another good year at Nicaragua Christian Academy. While unemployment rises because of the political situation, he is thankful for a steady job in a Christian atmosphere where he is also close to our children. He coached the high school girl's soccer team again this year and is thankful for a good season. He is also grateful for our financial stability that allows us to help others out during this time of economic uncertainty. Thankfully, the violence and political unrest have been much less this year; however, under the surface there is still a lot of frustration and disagreement with the government in power and how they continue to harass those who oppose them. We are thankful for our safety and that the area where we live has not been subjected to the police forces around the city.

As we transition from Thanksgiving into the Christmas season, I recognize that being thankful fills us with joy. And out of that joy we often give to others around us, whether that be financially, a helping hand, a word of encouragement or in some other way that God leads us. We invite you to join us in that joy by giving to the scholarship program, the soccer club or the English for Life program. Thank you for giving us the joy of serving in Nicaragua!

Giving joyfully,

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