

Costa Rica 2018



Left to right: Steven, Isaac, Elaine, Faviana, Melanie, Denisse, Michael, Tony, Dr. Eva, Stephanie, Dr. Gene, Gladys, kneeling – Carlos Lagos and Giovani (Liz the nurse and Martha, one of our translators, are not pictured)

Overview – Unlike last year, we mostly saw Nicaraguan refugees. Some of them have heartbreakingly become sex workers at age 50+ to survive (photo right). We were a team composed of 8 different churches who came together to operate as one Spirit-connected unit for the week. We saw 144 patients and 39 prayed to allow Christ to pay for their sins and accepted Him as Lord of their lives. There was such an eagerness for HOPE. An update on the humanitarian crisis in Central America is included below.

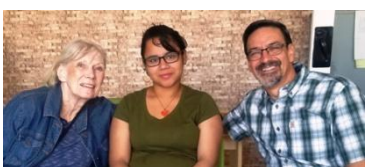


Refugee Fear - Our week started off slowly because the refugees thought they needed ID's or we would call the police on them. When they learned that our heart and services were totally open to them, they came in droves!



Ms. G and Jama – It is extremely difficult to help others when you are recovering from having been a sex worker for 40 years yourself. But that is what these two women are doing. Ms. G. (story from last year) was so encouraged to be supported by our team this week, and she thanks each of you who have given to make this happen!!

Just stay in your country? – William, 66, stood in front of troops to stop them from killing protestors and got his picture taken which put him on a dissident list. So he fled Nicaragua for his life that very night. He wept uncontrollably about the loss of his country. He has official refugee status, but to keep that he can never return to his homeland. Anyone who had an official refugee card was always eager to show us. Lagos connected William with a group that hires seniors, which gave him hope.



Miss E. breaks our heart – We started the week by meeting a wonderful young lady. She had been raped repeatedly by her father. Miss E. came in because she had just miscarried and couldn't stop the bleeding. Sadly, many patients had been raped or badly abused. We met two whose terrible experience was very recent.

Hiding from the Mob – Mr. R's ended up working for the Italian Mafia, but he wanted out. So he escaped to CR where he was robbed of his money and passport. For five months, he has been on the street trying to find work. Mr. R was so angry with God about his suffering his "head was about to explode." But after accepting Christ as Lord of his life, we discussed what Lordship means. "If Jesus is Lord, He gets to decide how long this present suffering continues." At that, his whole countenance changed and we saw him every day with a huge smile on his face. He is a pizza chef, so Carlos is helping him get a job which has brought him great hope.



Marlon sees visions – He was addicted and lived on the street. After seeing visions of what he thought was a dark spirit laughing at him, he threw away his drug paraphernalia and felt led to our clinic. He had been clean for 5 days. He accepted Christ with Denisse our nurse, and there was a total change to his countenance. He spoke of how Satan was at his shoulder laughing at his attempt to change, but now he is on a new path with a new spirit and a new spiritual family. He brought me a pineapple Friday in thanks! The transformation was so incredibly evident when he saw him the next day.



Elaine prays and prays – At 84, Elaine is a formidable prayer warrior. We felt like we were cheating when she was praying for our Gospel sharing time, because God used her and Steven’s prayers powerfully to soften hearts for the Gospel.

Rony needs a break – After breaking his leg, Rony has to literally hop around, but the church helped him get into rehab (he starting doing drugs when he was 8 years old). After accepting the Good News eagerly, he said, “I have heard all of that before, but never so clearly.” With this encouragement, Tony was convicted that he needs to be sharing the Gospel more often!! Ronny had many cutting scars on his arms. We told him that Satan will want to remind him of the pain he had suffered that caused those scars, but God wants him to remember the scars on Jesus’ body that paid for his eternal life.



Oscar and Mario – We had been chatting with Oscar (pictured) all day, and he had been listening for hours while we shared with others. When it was his turn, he told how he was desperate to leave drugs and start over. He had been using for 5 years. So as he prayed to allow Jesus to wash him clean and give him a fresh start, his face lit up. Carol (from the church, not pictured) helped him get into a rehab center that day! His friend Mario (not pictured) was tougher, he had been addicted and on the streets for 22 years – he is now 37 – I wanted to just move him along, but the Lord wouldn’t let me. In a very short time, his heart broke as he sought forgiveness and help. Carol was so awesome showing him sternness mixed with kindness in just the right ratio.



God can forgive anything – This gentleman was a former Columbian Sicario who was diagnosed as a psychopath, and was off his medication for 3 days! He told us about the people he had killed and the things he had done. You could see the tension building in him, so Tony was tempted to pray for him and move him along. But God whispered to us to tell him that He can forgive anything. He tearfully accepted God’s grace and forgiveness. We have never been more excited to have a former assassin for a brother! We saw him the next day all smiles and hugs!!!! The power of the Gospel is incredible.



Shirley the last will be first – All week Steven worked the pharmacy and prayed diligently for us, but he wanted to share as well. Near the end, he got his chance with Shirley (pictured beside him with Gabby his translator and Shirley’s mom). Steven only shared once, but God used him mightily in that moment as Shirley accepted Christ and looks totally different from her picture below.



Three stories in one picture

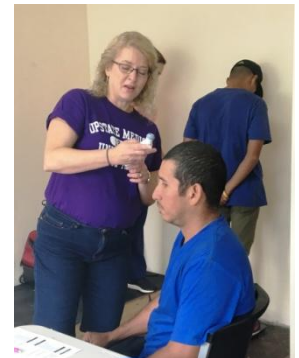
– Shirley in the front row before Christ. Giovanni, pictured with the mushroom, came to Christ with our team last year and is doing great a year later – he served with us all week. It has been a hard year for him, but he is so appreciative to have a new life and a new family.



Mrs. S., back row center, was a Nicaraguan police officer who refused to kill her fellow citizens. So she was to be thrown into a secret prison for political prisoners. The next day she fled to CR and leaving her husband and two kids (13 and 7 yo). She is now living on the street where she became extremely sick. She slept on our hard plastic chairs most days with that mushroom for a pillow. There are Nicaraguan Special Forces undercover in San Jose tracking down people like Mrs. S. When they find them, they disappear. The church will attempt to help her because she is at such extreme risk.

Liz don't play

– If they talk back, she puts them up against the wall until they behave. Or maybe Denisse (our other nurse) is getting his weight. Was such a blessing for Liz to be feeling better this year so she could work with us again.



Economic Update

CR's economy continues to decline since the microprocessor business left (see last year's report).

- Government workers have been on strike for 14 weeks because their benefits were cut (but they still get paid). Due to the strike, tourism is down – for 4 weeks cruise ships stopped docking in CR. Now the government is printing money to pay workers, devaluing currency. Just this week the Colon went from 587 to 626 per \$. So people are moving their savings from Colons to Dollars, putting further pressure on the currency. It is believed the Colon will drop to 2000 per \$ by end of year!! This will be devastating to everyone, but those who are the poorest, will feel this change the hardest.



Immigrant Pressures

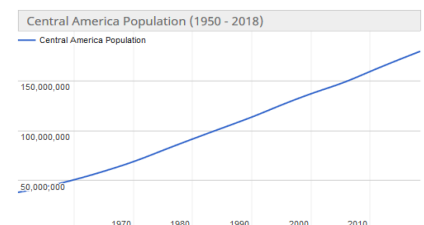
- There are 2 valid sides to this issue. When we met poor Costa Ricans, they said they work for a day or two, then “Nicaraguan’s take their jobs because they are willing to work for less.” Even the sex workers are being displaced by the Nicaraguans. Poor immigrants put the greatest pressure on the poor in their new country. My heart breaks for this beautiful family to the right. I was so blessed to spend time with them. But because he is a very hard worker, their coming to CR will impact the local poor directly as he will take a job that a poor CR could have gotten.



Obviously business owners don't mind this because a larger labor pool means more choices and depressed wages (The Law of Supply and Demand).

Central America in Crisis?

– In Honduras, instead of a few people gathering to flee, now 40-60 are assembling in parks to make the journey to the US. So it is easy to say, “just let them in; it is only 8000 people,” but the reality is that **20-40 million people** live in dire risk of being killed, or are in the 50%+ living on less than \$3000 per year in Honduras and Nicaragua. All of this is added to the economic pressures on CR. Central America is a powder keg ready to explode without DRASTIC intervention by the whole world. And absorbing 20-40 million more people into the US and Costa Rica would be devastating for the poor in those countries (even if it would not directly impact most of our middle to upper class lives personally).



It is believed that there will be a caravan of at least 100,000 people by year's end. By traveling in large caravans, they avoid the need for \$7000 per person coyote fees, they protect themselves, and they cross rivers by linking arms instead of by boat. The \$7000 coyote fees have actually served to drastically limit the number of refugees.



Solutions – Frankly there are no easy solutions. And while governments have a responsibility to protect and provide for the poor in their country, we individuals are commanded to help our fellow man however we can. Both things can be true at the same time.

What is next for Costa Rica and Total Health

We are working on a proposal for what can be done to help the regional refugees based on the 100+ people interviewed this week. The bottom line will be associated with offering HOPE through system navigation, Trauma Informed Care Counseling, and Christian worship / community.

Total Health San José - Total Health is planning to partner with GCLA San José to create a **Mental Health Clinic** to provide psychological counseling to the ladies they serve.

- 100% of the patients are dealing with extreme trauma (PTSD) that makes it impossible to recover without help. We must deal with what got them on the streets in the first place if we hope to continue the success Carlos' team is seeing.
- To date 10 of the 13 people they have helped are still off the streets and out of the life (the normal success rate is 3%, so this is a great place to invest).
- We are also investigating certain types of testing. HPV is a very serious issue with the sex worker population. Statistically a 3rd of them will die from this even though it is treatable if found and dealt with.

This past 12 months has been brutal for their team, but they are coming out of that stronger. They moved into their new church building 3 weeks ago, and that is where we set up the clinic this year. It was an incredibly different atmosphere from last year even though it is only a few blocks from Calle Ocho. It was a place of peace where God did miraculous life changing work this week.

We will need to raise about \$24,000 a year to start this Mental Health Clinic.

- Ms. G. wants to be the first client for our counselor 😊



Mountain Top Vision – Though much has changed since the April uprising in Nicaragua, Carlos spent 3 days in March literally up on a mountain top asking God what they should be doing to help transform the lives of the ladies on the streets of San José. The need is so great and the work so difficult, he needed God's clear answers. Those answers are:

- 1) A woman's dormitory - most dorms serve men, so a safe place for women to sleep is needed.
- 2) A woman's revitalization and training center. The greater need is a place where 14-20 women can live and learn skills for a year while receiving the psychological help they need to recover from a life on the street AND maybe more importantly, whatever trauma put them there in the first place.
- 3) Sunday morning service for people on the street – First, they must be in the dorms by 4 or 6pm Saturday evening B. They feel uncomfortable with the happy families at Saturday evening service.

There is a possibility to partner with a Salvation Army property on some of these visions – so pray for that!