

Friends of Batahola



Gerardo Arias Shares His Mural Talents in the U.S.

Gerardo Arias is the resident muralist and art teacher at the Center. If you've ever visited the Center, you've seen the vibrant murals that decorate almost every inch of its walls. Many of the stunning images are the work of Gerardo. He began drawing and painting classes at the



Art Teacher Gerardo Arias and the new mural at Archbishop McNicholas High School in Cincinnati, Ohio

age of six. He remembers back then that art was done mostly in black and white. The reality in Nicaragua at the time was one of war, and access to the arts was nearly nonexistent. "There was no room to dream," he said.

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President's Message

Planting Seeds of Hope



Dear Friends,
Spring is here in all its glory and the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte is no exception to the fresh look and feel of the season. Our spring newsletter shares stories of generosity; a fresh new life for Amanda Otero and her husband, Melvin; the arrival of new babies for staff members; and, always, stories of hope.

I was lucky enough to be one of several Friends of Batahola (FOB) board members to visit the Center in February. We were welcomed by the new FOB Volunteers, Erika Coe and Kelsey Schrock, and by our newest addition to the staff, Joe Connelly, International Communications Liaison. We are blessed once again with outstanding young adults in these positions.

One of our glorious days was spent in retreat with the Center staff. (See story Page 3.) At one point during the retreat, I was asked to share with the Nicaraguan people how we raise money to further the work at the Center. They got the message loud and clear that the majority of funds come from generous people of faith. You, the Friends of Batahola all over the United States, help us plant the seeds of HOPE and watch as they grow into jobs, skills, scholarships, empowerment, and confidence!

Gratefully,
Terri Holman

Mission Statement

Friends of Batahola supports, sustains, and promotes the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte in Managua, Nicaragua, through prayer, financial assistance, solidarity, and building community, thereby responding to the call of the Gospel.

Godspeed, Amanda!

In December, 2013, Amanda Otera completed her work at the Center as the International Communications Liaison. For two years, Amanda promoted the work of the Center locally and internationally through social media, visiting delegations, volunteers, and work on the Friends of Batahola (FOB) Communications Committee. Prior to that, she worked for two years as a FOB volunteer at the Center.



Amanda is known and loved by everyone for her passion and positive energy. Her passion was contagious, spreading to all those who had the privilege of getting to know the Center through her. She plans to continue her involvement in other ways with the Center "because both

Batahola and FOB are communities that are integral to who I am today."

We wish Amanda and her husband, Melvin Hamilton, a former scholarship student at the Center, all the best as they begin a new leg of their life adventure in the U.S. We know they will be lifelong ambassadors of the Center's work and living examples of its most important values.

Violence Prevention Program Attracts Youth

Twenty young people from the Center have joined the *Violence Prevention Promoters* (VPP) program, led by Ivania Pineda, staff psychologist and facilitator. This group of young people will facilitate violence and human rights workshops in the community and for younger youth at the Center. Erika Coe, a Friends of Batahola volunteer said, "I'm learning that one of the greatest parts of the Center is that you don't just come to take a class and then leave. Groups like VPP offer youth an opportunity to keep coming back and be part of a safe and loving community."

Gerardo Arias Shares His Mural Talents in the U.S. (continued)

Gerardo is currently in the U.S., painting a series of murals in collaboration with Cincinnati, Ohio, students at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish (IHM), St. Ursula Academy, and Archbishop McNicholas High School. He also plans to visit classrooms to talk about life in Nicaragua and at the Center, as well as to strengthen the Center's twinning relationship with IHM through home stays.

Gerardo says he feels honored to represent the Center in the U.S. and has always seen art as a medium for crossing borders and expanding relationships. Visits like this, he said, fill him with energy and make him feel more committed than ever to work for a better future for all the young people at the Center.

Friend of Batahola: Emoor Samuel Bordelon, Jr.



When Sam Bordelon died in January, 2013, and left \$20 thousand in his Will to Friends of Batahola (FOB), the board members were astonished! During his life, Sam had never made a single donation to FOB. Who was Sam and what was his connection to the Center?

The connection was St. Jean Vianney Catholic Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It has supported the work of

the Center since 2000. Sam was an involved parishioner there, active in many ministries, promoting the love of God, so he was aware of the work of the Center.

Sam's sister, Mary Garon, said that Sam was a very spiritual person. He was first a Brother of the Sacred Heart and then a Dominican monk. He pursued a high school teaching career in Soda Springs, Idaho, where he taught for more than 30 years. When his mother became ill, Sam returned to the Baton Rouge area to care for her. Mary said her brother's gift to the Center reflects his compassion for humanity and his desire to assist women in need.

Board and Staff Members Gather for Spiritual Retreat

Friends of Batahola board members and the Center staff gathered together on February 23 at the Kairos Center just outside Managua for a spirit- and soul-nourishing day of reflection and prayer. Honorary Board President Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, and poet and activist Magdeleno Rose Avila facilitated the retreat which focused on

"strengthening community and our sense of spirituality." During the retreat, the group wrote a Batahola Prayer, which included these powerful lines: "We decide to take the risk of being instruments for peace, for both individuals and society, so that we might construct a world that is more just and free of violence."



Board members and Center staff renew their solidarity during day-long spiritual retreat

Congratulations... It's a Boy! It's a Girl! It's a Boy!

The Center is abuzz with new life! In the last few months, three staff members welcomed new babies into their families: Accountant Faviola Espinoza (son, Dorian Zahir Castro Espinoza), Security Guard Ricardo Calero (son, David Josue Calero Jarquin), and Violence Prevention Promoter Yahosca Urcuyo (daughter, Jaleska).



Violence Prevention Promoter Yahosca Urcuyo and daughter, Jaleska, born February 2

Ricardo summed up what all the new parents are feeling: "God has blessed us once again."

You Can Help!

If you'd like to contribute to the work of the Center, consider making a donation in the reply envelope. We count on your financial support. Any amount is a blessing!

Student Spotlight: Marcela Gonzalez

Age 22



Marcela started an English class on three occasions but quit each time because of financial problems. When her daughter, Sofia, turned two-years-old, she was determined to find a new opportunity to study and was

grateful to discover the Center where an English class was offered at an accessible price.

"Becoming a mother changed everything about me. I take my life and my decisions more seriously, and I am much more motivated to finish my studies," she said. Marcela hops a bus and walks 35 minutes to get to her 9 a.m. English class. Her goal is to study psychology at the University of Central America and to work on her English public speaking skills to get over the shyness of speaking a new language.

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Celebrating International Women's Day

Free to Be, Free to Learn!

On March 8, the Center celebrated International Women's Day with a theater presentation on violence prevention at the Center and at

a local grade school, a personal testimony, a discussion on gender roles in Nicaragua, and performances by several music groups. The staff at the Center is predominately women, 75 percent, and 72 percent of students at the Center are female.



Staff Psychologist, Ivania Pineda, and Staff Arts Promoter, Tania Molina, were among many staff members who helped plan the day's events.

Sadly, nearly every person connected to the Center has experienced gender violence in some form or another, but every day at the Center, you can see the participation of all ages and genders working together...a wonderful, positive example. Students are invited to take part in violence prevention groups led by Staff Psychologist and Facilitator Ivania Pineda, a program that's both educational and sustainable... empowerment is something that cannot be undone.