

# Friends of Batahola



## Speaking English Can Mean the Difference Between a Good Job, a Poor One, or Even None at All

A recent visitor to the Center enjoyed watching Friends of Batahola volunteers, Erika Coe and Kelsey Schrock, teach their English classes. He later wrote, "English can mean the difference between a good job, a poor one, or even none at all." Students at the Center benefit doubly because it is one of the few places in Managua where students will learn English taught by native speakers.

Student Duyni Romero said, "If you have computer skills but don't know English, you're at a disadvantage

*(Continued on page 2)*



*Our English students are dedicated to bettering their lives.*

## Message from the Board



Dear Friends,

Each year when I visit the Center, I invite people to come with me. I understand that being "friends" means fostering and renewing relationships. I especially love the women on the Center's administrative team, and I love hearing their stories.

Coni, whose casa I stay at when I visit, comes to mind. I remember her saying that even though her little house is only a few feet from the Center, for years and years, she'd watch other women going into the Center for classes but thought she wasn't smart enough to learn. It's what she believed about herself from childhood. (It's what most women have believed about themselves before coming to the Center.)

Once Coni attended her first sharing circle with other women, she made the great liberating discovery that she was not alone in the way she felt, the very same discovery that every woman in the group has made at the Center: that she is smart and capable and has great worth, especially when connected in community. It's beautiful to see these daughters of God coming into their own.

This issue shares stories of two women, two shining stars, Nercy and Leonor, who, like Coni, have also learned that they are smart, capable and worthy. Their lives have been enriched through education and relationships, and now they're enriching others' lives. Paying it forward. This is

*(Continued on page 2)*

**Subscribe to our e-newsletter! Go to [friendsofbatahola.org](http://friendsofbatahola.org), click Signup for Newsletter, add your e-mail address.**

## 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.*

## Speaking English (continued)

at finding a job or receiving better pay. Today, many companies that are hiring come from different countries, and even if the work isn't based in English, all of the technology used is in English. It's particularly important that we are being taught by native English speakers, especially in terms of practicing pronunciation. That's something other places cannot offer."

Other students echo similar sentiments, saying they are learning English to increase their monthly incomes to support their families. Employment at a local call center requiring English-speaking skills is considered a privileged position for many young professionals, paying as much as \$500 U.S. dollars a month. By comparison, public school teachers and nurses earn about \$175 U.S. dollars a month.

Twenty-five students, ranging in age from 16 to 52 are currently enrolled in the Center's 10-month English course. Erika and Kelsey know how important learning to speak, read, and write English is for their students, and they are passionate about teaching, joyfully putting in many extra hours of one-on-one tutoring.

## You Can Help

If you'd like to contribute to the work of the Center, please make a donation in the enclosed reply envelope. Together, we're rebuilding lives. Thank you!

## Message from the Board (continued)

the beautiful mission of the Center that Sister Margie, my fellow Sister of St. Joseph, friend, and co-founder of the Center, wished for each of us to continue.

Peace,  
Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ

## READ MORE Online

[friendsofbatahola.org/newsletter/spring-2015](http://friendsofbatahola.org/newsletter/spring-2015)

- The Center is growing! New construction is underway, thanks to generous donors and grant monies. You can read about the June "grand opening" and see under construction pictures online.
- Archbishop McNicholas High School students from Cincinnati, Ohio, prepare for summer immersion trip to the Center.

## One Very Excited Scholarship Student



One of our young Project Education scholarship students was so excited about having her student profile picture taken that she showed up for it in full princess attire! Project Education students take classes at the Center and attend grade school, high school and even college.

## Friends of Batahola: Charlie and Mary Ann Antrobus

By Sr. Sandra Blanchard, CSJ

As the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte continues to grow through the support of many loyal supporters, we are happy to honor one of the original founders of the Friends of Batahola (FOB) Mary Ann Antrobus, along with her husband, Charlie. Steadfast is the word that best describes their shared commitment. Coincidentally, I was recently reflecting on Psalm 25, Verse 6, which speaks of God's steadfast love. Words such as compassion, kindness, faithfulness, and generosity describe God's relationship to His people. Mary Ann witnessed God's love as she served as treasurer of FOB for 10 years (2001-2010). She continues to serve on the Board and is especially active today in its work in the Baton Rouge area.

In addition to serving as treasurer, Mary Ann speaks lovingly of "treasured moments" from her many visits to the Center: mornings of shared prayer with the

staff, Retreat Days, visiting classes, participating in beautiful liturgies, enjoying presentations by the students, celebrations where good southern food was sometimes prepared by her own hands, and late evening sharings on Coni's porch. But perhaps the greatest "treasured" memory was, and is still, witnessing young people growing up to become part of the administration or teachers at the very Center that served them so well.



To Charlie, a retired engineer from Exxon Chemical, we recognize his loyal support of Mary Ann. Both Charlie and Mary Ann have opened their home so graciously to many Board members and to many visitors from the Center. We pray that the positive spirit of Mary Ann and Charlie will continue to inspire others who likewise are being called to follow the ways of the Lord.

## Time for Joy and Celebration

### Happy 15th and 10th Anniversaries

This year is a landmark year for the special relationship that exists between the Center and Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) Parish in Cincinnati, Ohio. This year marks 15 years of the twinning relationship between the two communities and 10 years of the scholarship program, Project Education. God is indeed good!

#### 15 Years as Twinning Partners

When members of an IHM Just Faith group were looking for ways to extend their outreach efforts, they focused on their relationship with the Center's co-founder, Sr. Margie Navarro, who had been principal for one year at IHM's elementary school. In 2000, IHM and the Center signed the first official twinning covenant. Recently, the Parish Council at IHM renewed the covenant. Since 2000, over 250 parishioners and youth from IHM and local Catholic high schools have visited the Center, and 17 staff members from the Center have visited and spoken at IHM and area schools. IHM parishioners support the work of the Center through ongoing individual prayer, prayer services, and fundraisers, including an annual garage sale and luncheon and a Shoes for Success program.

#### 10 Years for Project Education Scholarship Program

The student scholarship program, Project Education, began after a group of IHM parishioners visited the Center and brainstormed ways to sponsor students at the Center who couldn't afford the cost of education. Their ideas and dreams quickly turned into action and today, 10 years later, 1,990 parishioners have supported the education of 2,388 students and teachers at the Center.

**The Friends of Batahola send a heartfelt thank you to Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish for many years of walking in solidarity with the students, staff, and teachers at the Center. By working together, you are extending hope to all you help.**



*Immaculate Heart of Mary parishioners make an annual visit to the Center as part of its ongoing twinning relationship.*

## Shining Stars!

### What Our Scholarship Students Are Doing Today



*Nercy Mercado*

Nercy Mercado was a Project Education scholarship student who is now working as an Assistant Accountant for an engineering firm. She began taking computer and cashiering classes at the Center and later received another Project Education scholarship to attend college. Her job allows her to support her extended family. Nercy's grandmother raised her and her siblings, after their mother died of cancer when Nercy was four years old, and her father left Nicaragua in search of work. Nercy says she can't imagine what her life would be like without the Center and the scholarships.



*Leonor Lopez*

Leonor Lopez was a Project Education scholarship student who is now a lawyer working full time giving legal aid and support to women who face domestic violence in the Jorge Dimitrov neighborhood. She said, "I can say without a doubt that the Center has given birth to fundamental changes in my life. I have grown a great deal, and I have learned a lot about community service and the importance of giving back. This process of growing as a woman and person has led me to a place in which I hope to be an agent of change and empowerment for others, and, in a special way, for the women of my community."

**To support the education of one of our shining stars, go to [friendsofbatahola.org/Get Involved/Project Education](http://friendsofbatahola.org/Get Involved/Project Education).**

# amazon smile

Sign up at "Amazon Smile" and donate to our work without spending an extra dime! See how online at [friendsofbatahola.org/newsletter/spring-2015](http://friendsofbatahola.org/newsletter/spring-2015).

## Donate Now

friendsofbatahola.org  
Friends of Batahola  
P.O. Box 36159  
Cincinnati, OH 45236-0159

## Contact Us

friendsofbatahola.org  
bataholavolunteers.wordpress.com

### Email

president@friendsofbatahola.org  
secretary@friendsofbatahola.org  
treasurer@friendsofbatahola.org  
info@friendsofbatahola.org

 Like us on Facebook Friends of Batahola (English)  
Centro Cultural Batahola Norte (Spanish)

## Information in Nicaragua

Jennifer Marshall,  
General Coordinator  
jennifer@centrobatahola.org  
011-505-2266-7737

## Newsletter Volunteers

**Editor:** Mary Pommert  
mwpommert@aol.com

**Layout:** Photonics Graphics, Inc.  
photonicsgraphics.com

2364 Heather Hill Blvd., N.  
Cincinnati, OH 45244

PRESORT STD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
CINCINNATI OH  
PERMIT NO 1294

## Board of Directors

### President

Mark Overley

### Honorary President

Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ

### Honorary Vice President

Sr. Sandra Blanchard, CSJ

### Secretary

Jeannine Blatt

### Corresponding Secretary

Sue Keefe

### Treasurer

Andi Sebastian

## Board Members

Mary Ann Antrobus  
Pat Berning  
Richard Gruber  
Melissa Hess  
Terri Holman  
Michael Keefe  
Dotty McCrea  
Rebekah Menning  
Mary O'Toole  
Virginia Serio  
LaVette Ulichnie  
Anna VanHaverbeke

## Natural Medicine Class Changed Student's Life

Natural medicine has always played an integral role in medical care in Nicaragua, and the Center is one of the few places in the country that offers a formal course. This year 45 adult students are enrolled in Professor Roberto Ferguson's Saturday class which covers basic anatomy, taking vital signs, therapeutic massage, diagnostics, and phytotherapy which is the study of medicinal plants.

Roberto Martinez Torrez enrolled in the class because he has diabetes and wanted to improve his health, as well as the well-being of his family and community. He said the course changed his life completely. He and another alumnus of the class currently make 20 products, which they sell at local fairs and markets. There are many common ailments and uses for medicinal plants, including for herbal teas and soaps, remedies for indigestion and acid reflux, and leaves



*Professor Roberto Ferguson teaches the popular Natural Medicine course each Saturday afternoon.*

and tree bark to make natural creams for skin problems.

Some students taking the class hope to grow gardens so they can use their own plants to treat family members. One student plans to study psychology, hoping to treat patients both on a physical and emotional level. As for Roberto, he is now enrolled in a computer class at the Center and plans to use his newly acquired technical skills to support his small business.