

Friends of Batahola



The Center Celebrates 35 Years

***"Each morning, Sr. Margie would greet us singing,
"Good morning, my white doves!""***

In March the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte celebrated its 35th anniversary. To commemorate this moment, four women reflect on the Center's early years and the deep joy of knowing and loving its beloved co-founders, Sr. Margie and Fr. Ángel.

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The first chapel

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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.

Message from the President



Dear Friends,

My tenure as President of Friends of Batahola ended March 31. When I first visited the Center in 2005, I had no idea the special journey I was about to go on. I have learned so much about the Center and about Nicaragua and Central America.

I have made many friends here in the U.S. who are devoted to the work of the Center and in Nicaragua, and I cherish those relationships. I never thought I would have good friends in a foreign country, but I do in Managua, Nicaragua, and I'm thankful for it. I never thought my involvement would lead my youngest daughter, Kelsey, to become a Spanish major and, ultimately, a volunteer at the Center. It has been a great ride, and although I'm no longer President, I'm not done working for and with my friends who work so hard and make such a difference at the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte.

Blessings,
Mark Overley

The Friends of Batahola board members extend a warm thank you to Mark for his years of service on the board and for the devotion he has shown to the mission of the Center. You can read more of Mark's reflections on page 3 of the newsletter.

The Center Celebrates 35 Years (continued)



The first sewing class

Marta Centeno

I remember when Father Ángel and Sister Margarita came knocking on my door in 1982. They talked to us about all of the projects they wanted to start and invited us to Mass. They later asked the government for a bit of land to start a church for the people. We cleaned the rocks, garbage, and weeds off the land, and in 1983 construction began.

We were 20 women in the first sewing class. Sister Margie got us four donated sewing machines. One of us would sew for a bit and then another would use the machine and then another. We were a close-knit group that would all go on to study cosmetology and cooking, collecting money amongst ourselves to pay a small contribution, not even a salary, to the teachers.

Cony Melendez

We started with nothing. It was beautiful because it began with the community. We held Mass outside, standing the whole time, beneath a lamppost, with just a small table.

They started with the sewing class and then basic adult education classes. It was so exciting to finish



Where the first sewing, music, and basic adult education classes were held



Typing Mass leaflets

my elementary school degree here every Saturday. I learned much at the Center as a woman, especially about my self-esteem. I felt like a new woman, a new Cony.

Ileana Zúñiga

I came to the Center because I wanted to learn sewing to help support my three children. Once I was here, my eyes were opened, and I recognized myself as Ileana, a woman with rights. We had never dared to see ourselves like this before.

I remember Sister Margie told us to teach basic adult education classes. At first, I was afraid because I had never taught before, but Margie said, "You can do it! Take a risk!"

Just by looking at us, Sister Margie knew if something was wrong. She

had time for everyone. She never said she was busy. Each morning, she would greet us singing, "Good morning, my white doves!"

Cándida Martínez

"Our first building was the Guadalupana chapel, just a roof and a cement floor. Then, two wooden prefabricated homes were donated. That's where we held music, sewing, and basic adult education classes. We had no fence, so a group of us women were the "security guards" at night. We took turns in groups on the night watch and stayed up all night, talking and cleaning.

The next courses were cosmetology and cooking. I remember Margie met someone working at a restaurant in the airport and she brought her to the Center to teach us. Everyone took the course and afterwards Ileana and I would take what we had made and sell it on the street.

The classes were free. No one received a salary. Father Ángel started classes to help with our spelling. I wrote up the Mass leaflets on a typewriter, and I remember I had to redo them hundreds of times because Ángel was very strict. However, we always missed *something*!

READ MORE Online

friendsofbatahola.org/newsletter/spring-2018.

- Darling Solórzano, integrity personal growth facilitator at the Center, and Sonia Olivares, general coordinator at the Center, traveled to the U.S. in April to speak with donors and friends in Ohio, Minnesota, and Louisiana about the great work that continues at the Center. Read more online.
- Marvin Cajina is on a mission to reduce gender-based violence in Nicaragua. He is working at the Center with the We, the Heroines of Our Lives project. His goal is to recruit 160 men and change their ideas about masculinity. Read his inspiring story online.
- Friends of Batahola board members recently visited the Center for a few days jam packed with meetings, a spiritual retreat, fun, and fellowship. Read more and see pictures of the visit online.



An Interview with Outgoing President, Mark Overley

How did you first learn about the Center and Friends of Batahola (FOB)?

I first heard about the Center when Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) Parish (Cincinnati, Ohio) began twinning with the Center in 2000. As a part of my job, I travel to Managua and thought I could take things to the Center as a part of my travel.

What made you get more involved with FOB?

In 2009, my oldest daughter, Lauren, and I traveled to the Center on the annual IHM immersion trip. That trip really opened my eyes to the Center and the great work they do. I didn't know it then, but that was the start of my involvement with FOB. Later in 2009 I was asked to join the board, and in 2014 I was asked to be President. I felt moved to say yes, and the rest is history!

Do you have one memory of the Center that stands out above all the others?

There are many memories that stand out for a variety of reasons. I have come to appreciate the Gender Based Violence Prevention Program as one of my favorite programs at the Center. Two years ago on our annual FOB board visit, we attended a violence prevention presentation by the men. To understand the power of this presentation, you need to know that the success of this program begins with the women and children and works its way to the men, so to be with the men was a very special moment. Each one had a unique story of how they came to understand the



Kelsey Overley, Gleris Ruiz Loredo, Mark Overley, Karla Zamora, and Claudette Overley

hurt societal norms were causing their wives and children. The stories of their awakening moments were emotional and moving. It struck me that I was witnessing firsthand a transformation of critical importance to the family and the nation. I love this program and have great respect for the people who work so hard to make a difference.

What are your wishes for the Center and FOB going forward?

I wish wisdom and vision for both the Center and FOB. It will take faith for both to see the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit helping them see their path forward.

Friends of Batahola: Tippmann Family

Jim and Nancy Tippmann are parishioners at Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. Because of IHM's twinning relationship with the Center, the Tippmann's became actively involved in the parish's fundraisers and other activities benefiting the Center. Jim and Nancy are also major donors to Project Education for Batahola, an IHM-sponsored program which provides sponsorships for students to enroll in classes at the Center, as well as to attend grade school, high school, and college.

Nancy said, "When Jim and I grew up, our parents expected us to go to college, and we did. Our educations greatly influenced who we are today. We know that there are children around the world who cannot afford to go to school. When we invest in education, we provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to change their futures."

In 2009 Jim, and our daughter Chloe, visited the Center. In 2014 Chloe returned with her brother, Cole. The family found these trips inspirational, seeing firsthand that people from different cultures have many things in common: They love to laugh, play, learn, and to praise God for their blessings.



Cole, Chloe, Nancy and Jim Tippmann

Nancy said, "I am a Friend of Batahola because God has given me the opportunity to help others. I enjoy reading the letters from students we have sponsored over the years. We have heard from young and adult students in a variety of situations. It is rewarding to be a part of that." Jim said, "Because I have been to Batahola, I've seen for myself how we can help those who are less fortunate. Even a small amount of effort can make a big difference. I support the mission of the Center."

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Our Students Succeed

"The scholarship didn't just benefit me economically, it changed my life."



Karina and her young son

When Sonia Olivares, then head of the Education Department, heard that Karina de los Angeles Galeano Perez was finishing high school, she called Karina to encourage her to apply for a college scholarship through the Center. Karina took her advice, qualified for the scholarship, and was accepted into the public university where she began work on a veterinary degree. She also began her volunteer hours in the library at the Center. (All scholarship students are required to volunteer, in return for their scholarships.)

"The scholarship volunteer program helped me so much with college," Karina remembers. "I learned how to be organized, speak in public, express myself, and manage groups of people."

Today, Karina continues to use these skills as a veterinarian who oversees the law enforcement canine health program. "I have to teach the canine administrators how to recognize if their dogs are ill or off, and I use the group management skills that I learned at the Center when I'm teaching," she said.

"The scholarship didn't just benefit me economically, it changed my life," said Karina. "Sometimes, one's economic resources are so limited that it's hard to succeed. This scholarship was a platform, a means that helped me to advance in my studies, graduate, and find a job in my field."