

Local Ascension Parish Youth Travel to Nicaragua by: Liz Wahl Andre'

On July 20th, the Praise Church Youth Group of Praise Church in Prairieville, Louisiana left for Nicaragua on their summer mission's outreach. Pastor Sonny Wahl and youth pastors Jeff and Rhonda Jones led a large group, made up of 20 teens and 20 adults from St. James Parish and Ascension Parish, to Central America for the adventure of a lifetime. The youth group worked hard fundraising to make this trip possible. We want to thank the people of Ascension Parish who helped by making contributions.

Although there was much prayer and planning for this trip, nothing could prepare our young people for the poverty and tragedy that is an everyday reality for so many Nicaraguan people. The team went to an orphanage in Managua called the City of Refuge. The City of Refuge is a safe house for young girls rescued from abusive situations. The girls read a warm welcome speech, and danced and sang for our group. Many of the teens and adults "adopted" and bonded with the girls as they traveled with us, swam with us at our hotel, and ate with us in the restaurants. It was a real treat for the young girls to enjoy an outing with the American missionaries. After learning the heartbreaking stories of their backgrounds, it was amazing that they were able to trust and laugh again. It was a testimony of the Christian love and care they received at the orphanage.

The team then visited several mission feeding stations at various locations around Managua and prayed for the children. Children in poverty stricken areas are given hot, nourishing meals as the gospel is preached through "love in action." Our team also went to the pediatric ward in a hospital in Managua. We were permitted to pray for the children and their mothers. There were tears of gratitude from many of the mothers, and shy smiles from the children who didn't know quite what to make of these friendly "missionarios." We went to an impoverished area to walk the streets and offer prayer and hugs to those that we met. It really moved our group to see how open the humble Nicaraguan people are to receive prayer.

One of the highlights of the week was participating in a children's crusade in Managua where 7,000 children were bused in from miles around, making it the largest event for children in Nicaragua. The Hands of Praise Puppet Team from Praise Church ministered to the children with a lively puppet production. The noise from the laughter, clapping and shouting of the

children in the huge pavilion was deafening! Every child was fed a hot meal, as they enjoyed the show of clowns, skits, jugglers, and musicians. The children's crusade was televised and shown on national television. Plans are underway to have an even larger children's crusade next year.

The team also ministered at several of the Nicaraguan church services. At the last church service, the Nicaraguan church members honored our team with a surprise dinner, complete with the Praise Band providing the music and the girls from the City of Refuge dancing and singing for us. Everyone was humbled by the generosity of our Nicaraguan brothers and sisters who had so little, yet gave so joyfully. There was not a dry eye among us as we kissed and waved good bye to all of our friends.

On our last day in Nicaragua, we traveled to a volcano called Mombacho for the exciting "canopy tours." Outfitted with helmets, safety harnesses (fall gear) and leather gloves, we were hooked up to cables that were strung from tree to tree, about 70 feet in the air. It was exhilarating to zip through the rain forest, gliding to several different platforms in the trees on a 45 minute cable ride. What a great way to cap off an unforgettable trip! If our church goes to Nicaragua again next year, almost every team member wants to go back. We all left a part of hearts with the children of Nicaragua and now we have to return to get it back.

The members of the Praise Church Nicaragua Missions Team are: Joya Andre', Liz Wahl Andre', Claudia Bilbao, John Bilbao, Alex Bowen, Dan Hebert, Grant Hebert, Chase Hitchcock, Dakota Jones, Jeff Jones, Rhonda Jones, Sue Juneau, Barbara Laiche, Jennifer Lessard, Michelle Lessard, Dexter Gary, Calvin Mayeux, Kitty Beth Mayeux, Tyler McLin, Sammie Miller, Shawn Ruggles, Amelia Schexnayder, Sophie Schexnayder, Chelsea Sigur, Rachelle Smith, Tammy Spiers, Diane "Dee" Tripp, Justin Turner, Ben Wahl, Jennifer Wahl, Justin Wahl, Natalie Wahl, Sarah Wahl, Pastor Sonny Wahl, Cydney Walters, Harlee Walters, Rene Walters, Ciarra Wilkins, and Tyler Wilkins.

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit the orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" –James 1:27