

Kenny's Testimony of Jesus Christ in Nicaragua



(After playing capture the flag and soccer with the boys from the local orphanage!)

Dear Mission Partners,

Peace be with you! I hope the Lord has been showering you and your families with many graces and blessings! Thank you immensely for the opportunity to bring the love of Jesus Christ to the people of San Marcos, Nicaragua. I am humbled to have had the privilege and responsibility to represent the three key North Texas communities I call home – St. Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Church, St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church, and St. John Paul II University Parish. Thank you for answering the call to support Jesus Christ's Catholic Church in the form of tithing towards this mission trip.

By now you are likely wondering what on Earth the team and I did while we were on mission in Nicaragua. There were 17 of us total – 5 fulltime FOCUS Missionaries (2 women and 3 men) and 12 University students (9 women and 3 men) – all from different parts of the United States. The 17 of us stayed at Guadalupe Gardens, a Catholic non-profit mission owned by American Paul Rush and his Filipino wife, Bing de la Cruz. Guadalupe Garden's purpose is situated around the promotion of the following:

“Life and dignity of the human person; healthy participation in family and community life; human rights and responsibilities to one another; charitable giving to help the poor and vulnerable; solidarity with the suffering; dignity of work and the rights of workers; and the care of the earth and environment”.¹



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Paul and Bing's Christ-centeredness and professional logistic support (transportation, food and water, coordination of events), as well as the hospitality of the family who lived with them and cooked for us (Ninoska, Douglas, and their son Ezekiel), all helped to foster the feeling of being at home during the mission trip.



(Paul Rush and his wife, Bing De La Cruz, with their daughter Miriam)

Although the 17 of us were strangers to each other at first, we quickly became family. This undoubtedly was because we centered each day around God. The rhythm of each day was as follows:

- Community morning prayer at 7:30 AM followed by breakfast
- Manual labor aboard the Guadalupe Garden Mission property followed by lunch
- Community service in the form of visiting the local orphanage, nursing home, home for peoples with disabilities, drug rehabilitation center, and ministering to the students at nearby Kaiser University (formerly Ave Maria University)
- Holy Mass and Holy Hour followed by dinner and community night prayer right before bed.

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(All of us serenading the blessed elderly with American praise and worship songs!)

The Lord's Holy Spirit was present the entire time. It wasn't easy though. Between lack of sleep, average hygiene, mild dehydration, sun burns and heat rashes, constant dust in our eyes and noses, bug bites and stomachaches, and the requirement "to be liquid" -- letting go and letting God -- the 17 of us all endured a small taste of discomfort. However, these discomforts paled in comparison to the actual and real hardships of the people we served in San Marcos.

The Nicaraguans we served did not have the luxuries of air conditioning, long hot showers, or even clean water whenever they wanted. In fact, the people in the same neighborhood as Guadalupe Gardens had to ration their water, waiting each week for the water truck to come by. In addition, they lived amongst the constant presence and discomfort of dust, irritating eyes, ears, noses, and reaching even into their homes. Furthermore, they didn't have constant access to the internet, food whenever they wanted, expensive cars, the newest phone, and the latest fashion.

Indeed, in the eyes of the world the Nicaraguans we encountered were poor. However, in the eyes of God, it is they who are rich and we who are poor. We who are distracted, even spiritually weakened by comforts like social media, food whenever we want, travel whenever we want, and the like. **(James 2:4-6).**



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The two graces I experienced while in Nicaragua resonated deeply with the following two themes: 1) **community** and 2) **detachment**.

First, I learned about and experienced the beauty of Christ-centered community. Our daily prayer routine fostered a lasting familial love between myself and the other students and missionaries, as well as the Nicaraguan college students who led us in service of their community. Although constant human interaction is inherently draining to me (I am an introvert and I 'recharge' best when resting in solitude), I learned that prayer is a way for me to recharge and regain my energy, in a sense, while 'on-the-go'. This allowed me to understand the constant presence of the Holy Spirit, which is only a prayer away. In addition, the virtue of patience was also exercised because of the familial nature of the trip. An example of this were the numerous times I bit my tongue, choosing to pray instead of acting out of irritability, namely because of tiredness. Our Christ-centered community fostered in me a tangible understanding and manifestation of the Body of Christ, that is, us men and women of the Catholic Church. Coming home from the trip was difficult though because I experienced the "retreat-high" and consequent spiritual crash. This was a simply because fostering community takes a lot more intentionality and effort when at home, doing our best not to fall back into our old habits or routines.

Second, I learned and exercised detachment. As a student at the University of North Texas, my schedule is just that – *my* schedule. It is simple and the same nearly every day, and so monotonous at times that God may seem distant. Contrary to that, and because this was the first time FOCUS sent a group to Guadalupe Gardens, we all adapted to "being liquid", that is, we put total trust in God's love and providence, choosing to submit to His will rather than exert our control over our circumstances. As such, we were not informed by the FOCUS Missionaries about the activities of the day because even they didn't know what to expect. Being liquid allowed me to I detach from my desire to control the flow of each day. Although this seemed negative at first, it brought a degree of freedom into my life during the mission trip. Being liquid, trusting in Jesus Christ and the will of God, filled me with peace, and allowed me to relax and "be as a child" once more, allowing God to totally be my Father, fill me with His Holy Spirit, thus empowering me and the others to bring the love of Christ to all those we encountered.

This mission trip was ordinary – we didn't save lives, tend to the sick and dying, or even endure an abnormal amount of suffering. We simply loved those God put into our lives, during each moment of every day, by doing little things with great love. God calls us to do the same, especially here at home in the grind of everyday life.

Mission doesn't have to be in a third-world country abroad. Mission is shining Christ's love into another with a sincere smile; holding the door open for a stranger, acknowledging their existence; giving money to the poor and homeless, asking for their names and for them to pray for you. We are called to



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be children and to love one another as Christ loves us, and I do believe we accomplished this command while in Nicaragua, and I challenge you to do the same here in North Texas (**Matthew 18:3; John 15:17**).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, your financial giving was a form of tithing to the Church. You directly aided the mission of the Church by supporting me in this endeavor. I know that many lives were forever changed for the better. You are family to me and I will continue praying for you. If there is anything new that I can be praying for, please don't hesitate to let me know. Many other things happened during the mission trip which, for the sake of brevity, I did not mention in this letter. If you have questions, would like more details about anything concerning this trip, or would like to reach out to me, please feel free to give me a call at any time – I would love to catch up with you all!

Thank you and may God richly bless you and your families!

In Christ,

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<http://guadalupegardens.com/about-us/>

Link to photos from the trip:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dzRbRCiBbtZTx280nE9kDcvRTTApVf_D?usp=sharing



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(Taking a break from working for this group photo, with Paul and Bing in the background!)

“You know well enough that Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the love with which we do them.” (St. Thérèse of Lisieux—of the Child Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church)