

Letter 3 – Deborah Elliott/Don Gibson – Nicaragua - November 10, 2009

Greetings to all of you, from the Sunny south.

No doubt most of you saw the news this past week regarding hurricane Ida. The Civil Defense took control of the city, the fisherman rushed to pull in boats and others risked their lives by heading out to sea to rescue men fishing on an island off the coast. By mid day the wind had picked up and the sky was hideously black. In the mid afternoon the hydro went off and stayed off until later in the evening. We felt a bit anxious but also knew that our house is made of cement and we are up in the air so flooding would not affect us. Many others were not so lucky. By 9pm we went to bed and in the morning it was over. The storm hit Bluefields and Corn Island, which is the southern point on the Atlantic Coast. Just south of us it headed inland, lost some power and headed west. There was quite a bit of flooding, lots of people were evacuated and so there was a mess to clean up. The work continues in the communities south of us.

We have been meeting with the retired pastors. Their dream is to have a store that generates income that can be used to help the communities. We are at the project writing stage.

I (Deborah) have been meeting with a committee organized by the Mayor to plan a Christmas Program in the Park. I told them about Lambton Presbytery Nativity at the camp and they loved the idea. So tomorrow we meet to finalize our plans for that event.

This morning we had our first meeting with a group of artisans. We are trying to help them form a cooperative. We made a connection with Ten Thousand Villages in Canada and we are hoping they can form a partnership relationship. There are about 80 different artisans in Bilwi.

It is an interesting thing here that no matter what kind of meeting takes place you always have a time of prayer. The assumption is always that everyone at the meeting is a Christian and usually Moravian. Of course that is because there are 18 Moravian churches in Bilwi, plus all the other denominations.

This past Sunday was our Harvest Sunday. The children from the Sunday School put on a pageant. The topic was to resist the evil of Halloween and support Harvest instead. The theology here is quite different from what we are used to however it doesn't hinder us very much. This is where they are so that is where we are.

The pageant had all the necessary ingredients. Small children looking adorable...both the youth and the children sang many songs. There were children born to act ...andthose not so brave. There were tender moments and the atmosphere was thick with the joy of proud parents. Some even had cameras. I forgot my camera and deeply regretted that because there were many Kodak moments.

Plans are underway to organize the next Synod meeting, which is at the end of January, and beginning of February. It will be our first time visiting Bluefields.

I (Deborah) have started visiting the members of the congregation. It is quite difficult because there are no streets signs or numbers on the houses. So I have passed out a list and asked for directions that I would give to a taxi driver. Sometimes that works and sometimes it doesn't. At least I am getting exercise as I walk around the community. The more I visit of course the more I get to know people.

We met with the police commissioner today. We had a long conversation about all the possibilities of working with prisoners. The situation in the prison is horrendous. Many men are cramped into a small space. Commissioner Lewis told us that he gets funding for food for forty men but has to feed eighty men.

They have limited education, job skills and life skills. Many of them have drug problems. We also discussed the possibility of Don working in the community with young men at risk. There are also young women who earn their living through prostitution. This is another group that is at risk.

We have both learned something useful here. We knew intellectually that the language was not written down until recently (Misquito) and many people in the outlying communities only learned to read and write in the past 20 years. However this week it struck me how that impacts on the culture. This is a very verbal culture and so meetings go on for hours because everyone needs to contribute. It doesn't matter if someone already said what you want to say because you can agree with the other speaker or you can say thank you in a different way or add to the conversation. Integrating this learning has been helpful because now I understand there is no sense getting annoyed that the meeting takes forever. It needs to take forever because everyone needs to speak.

Other learning's are about how incredibly gracious people are and how devoted they are to their church and their spiritual life. The prayer group meets twice a week and the Bible Study once a week and several women come to these groups and then also come for Choir practice on Thursday night.

I am getting to know the Sunday school children and some of the youth (there are about 35 of them) as well as the adults. Best of all we have begun to fall in love. There is always that moment for a minister in a new congregation..a moment when you realize how much you care for the people around you.

We have been told that in December and January it gets cold. Well our response is to laugh however it might be a nice relief because the past two days have been incredible hot. So life goes on and we are still enjoying the adventure.

God's blessings on all of you and please keep us in your prayers.

Don and Deborah