

Newsletter • Spring 2018

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Strengthening human and community development through the exchange of people and ideas between Minnesota and León, Nicaragua, since 1984.

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Spring Forum • April 14

IMMIGRATION AND THE SANCTUARY MOVEMENT

Challenges for Dreamers (recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals status), travel bans, strict immigration limits, and building a wall: many new policy proposals that affect many people have emerged the past year.

Join Project Minnesota/León for coffee, dessert, and dialogue about these changes, and learn about volunteer opportunities.

What: PML's Spring Forum on Immigration and Sanctuary Churches and Cities, cohosted by First Universalist Church Sanctuary and Resistance group

When: Saturday, April 14, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Where: First Universalist Church, 3400 Dupont Avenue South, Minneapolis

This event is free and open to the public, but donations to support PML's community development work will be accepted. Click [here](#) to download a flyer about the event.

Speakers

Alison Griffith, immigration attorney at the [Advocates for Human Rights](#) who handles asylum cases



Tammi Thompson, [ISAIAH](#) sanctuary church organizer for immigrants



2018 SUMMER TRIPS TO NICARAGUA



Most of Project Minnesota/León's trips are customized for groups from schools, colleges, churches, or family and friends. But PML also offers a couple trips each year that anyone may join.

This summer, PML is offering two trips to the public.

2018 Themes and Dates

- A Nicaraguan Cultural Tour: Exploring Art, Literature, and Our Relationships with Others (10 days in late July / early August 2018)
- Immigration and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement (August 11 – 21, 2018)

Groups will be finalized by the end of March, so plane tickets can be purchased. If you are interested in joining a group, contact Emily Wallace-Jackson, PML's director of outreach and development, at emily.mn.leon@gmail.com.

Go to our [website](#) or click "Read More" below for more information.IIFNOT:ARCHIVE_PAGEI*

[Read More »](#)



A Nicaraguan Cultural Tour Exploring Art, Literature, and Our Relationships with Others

(10 days in late July / early August 2018)

We will experience Nicaraguan arts, literature, history, music, food, and daily life in the city of León, the nation's intellectual center. Visit the birthplace of world-renowned poet Rubén Darío, the father of Modernism—a Spanish language literary and cultural movement, and enjoy the Festival Azul Dario celebrating his life and work.

The group will reflect on these experiences with daily guided writing and conversation led by author and group facilitator Karen Hering, literary minister at Unity Church —Unitarian in St. Paul. Together, the group will wonder about the many ways the arts help us to understand who we are and provide bridges connecting cultures and people.



You can learn more about Darío in this *New York Times* article, "[The Inescapable Poet of Nicaragua.](#)" Click [here](#) to read the trip flyer.



Immigration and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement

(August 11 – 21, 2018)

U.S. immigration policy is in the news, and people's lives are at risk. Join us to explore international migration from the perspective of the people of León, Nicaragua.

Learn from experts and the personal stories of Nicaraguans about the motivations for emigration and how they differ from other Central Americans. Learn about the impact of emigration on family members left behind.

The group facilitator is PML board member, ISIAAH member, and Lutheran pastor Ralph Baumgartner. Click [here](#) to read the trip flyer.



Although both these trips are facilitated by pastors, in partnership with PML's director in León, the trips are not religious in nature. All are welcome to participate!

Trips cost about \$2,000, including all expenses and airfare. Sign up soon!

Becas Estudiantiles Transformando Y Titulando Youth **ANNOUNCING THE BETTY FUND**



We are pleased to announce the creation of a scholarship fund for students in the San Carlos community, where PML supports development work.

The scholarship will pay round-trip school bus fare for selected students traveling from the San Carlos area to León. Fifteen students—12 in high school and three studying at the university—will receive stipends.

Background



In 2015, teens in the rural communities of San Carlos, El Pilar, and Los Mangos (all near León) began organizing themselves in response to the unique difficulties they face. In meetings facilitated by PML project coordinator Rosa Lira, the teens identified continuing studies after primary school as one of their biggest challenges.

Only elementary schools exist in the area; therefore, students must travel to León to attend classes at high school, a technical site, or the university. But families generally have limited resources to pay for the cost of the public buses students take to class. (The financial burden had already prompted the youth to successfully negotiate a reduced bus fare for students in uniform—a great accomplishment.)



In January 2018, a Girl Scout group from Minnesota spent a week training a new girls soccer team in San Carlos. During the immersion trip, one of the adult chaperones, Betty Shaw, was impressed with the dedication of the youth and expressed interest in supporting them in their studies.

Concerns about keeping teens in school and the cost of transportation had previously been discussed in both the San Carlos education advocacy commission and the youth group. So proposing scholarships to Betty was a natural progression, and the BETTY Fund (*Fondo BETTY*) was born.

Recipient Selection

The youth group's 24 participants met to determine selection criteria for the scholarship. They agreed recipients should:

- come from families with the most financial need,
- demonstrate a commitment to attending school and finishing the year successfully,

- actively participate in the youth group, which focuses on improving the community.

By secret ballot the first recipients were selected. Subsequently, heads of households representing the San Carlos community as OMEGAS (Organization of Women Entrepreneurs and Advocates of Alternatives and Solutions) confirmed the youth group's list and agreed to administer the funds. Families and students will be responsible for all other costs, such as snack, school uniform, and supplies.



How to Make a Donation

OMEGAS also plans to seek more funding to secure the future of the scholarship fund and to maintain support for the youth of the community.

If you would like to contribute to this fund, use [Network for Good](#) to donate. Or mail a check with “BETTY Fund” in the memo to Project Minnesota/León, 2315 Chicago Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55403. Your contributions are tax deductible.

Community Development Update, Part 1

CLEAN DRINKING WATER TO FLOW SOON



The San Carlos potable (drinkable) water installation project is proceeding at an excellent rate, with the hope of completion in April.

Starting with Rosa Lira

Project



Minnesota/León has been focusing its community development work for the past three and a half years primarily in the rural community of San Carlos on the outskirts of the city of León. The work began when PML hired Rosa Lira, a professional Nicaraguan community organizer, to work full-time supporting community members, so they can successfully advocate with governmental institutions and other nonprofits in order to bring about change. As a result of Rosa's work, there have been many

positive changes in San Carlos.



Since mid-October, an average of 30 people divided into two crews have worked each eight-hour day, Monday through Friday. That's 150 people per week, with only one week off at Christmas, to dig nine miles of trenches! PVC pipes laid in the trenches will bring clean water by gravity from a central water tank, where

water has been pumped from a well.

In addition to digging the main trench, residents are installing the pipe, digging trenches connecting the main line to the household meters, installing meters and shut-off valves, building a secure pump house, creating a safe platform for the water tank tower, and digging trenches to the water tower. In addition, each household must dig a trench and lay pipe from the meter to their house.

Each of the 140 households enrolled in this daunting community endeavor will pay a modest \$44 water meter hook-up fee. The fee can be paid in installments but must be paid in full before the household can connect to a meter.



Sharing the Work

Each family must contribute equally to the labor, and the San Carlos water commission is keeping detailed records of each work crew's contributions. Crew leaders meet weekly to determine who owes labor or must pay seven dollars per

day to hire other laborers, including community teens. The commission—after taking into consideration household members' age, health, or extreme poverty—has granted some households a reduced hook-up fee or a subsidy for labor contributions.

A recent all-community assembly was directed by the nonprofit well-digging organization SuNica to congratulate San Carlos residents on their terrific progress and to explain technical aspects of the work going forward. The local water commission gave a financial report and clarified how contracted laborers' hours are calculated and paid.

PML's Role

PML project coordinator Rosa Lira has been making daily visits to San Carlos during the water project to support coordination and logistics and works closely with the community's water advocacy commission (photo to the right).



Her administrative duties include distributing budgeted funds for fuel and maintaining communications among work crews, with SuNica, between municipal agencies, and with residents.

Rosa recently initiated a new round of small group meetings throughout the community to talk about concerns and correct rumors. PML is also lending its truck to the project to ensure that supplies, such as sand, and equipment, such as an operating backhoe, are available when needed.



Ongoing Challenges

One example of the ongoing difficulties of this complicated project is that although the mayor's office guaranteed San Carlos priority use of the backhoe for as long it is needed, the machine has been plagued with flat tires and breakdowns.

The backhoe was out of commission for a week for lack of a \$12 replacement part that was available only in Managua. A mechanic arranged for a driver going to Managua on city business to purchase the part and paid for the part out of his own pocket. PML reimbursed the mechanic, but PML staff doubt it will be paid back through the municipal government's slogging bureaucracy.

SUCCESS!

After one and a half years, with PML's support, clean water will be coming to San Carlos. The community has succeeded in navigating a tangle of bureaucracy and built the system with their own hands and tenacity. PML staff and supporters who have witnessed the effort are deeply impressed by the work that has gone into obtaining something so basic and essential: clean drinking water.

Community Development Update, Part 2

ENCOUNTERS ON A SOCCER FIELD



The San Carlos youth group worked hard for weeks to welcome and plan activities for a group of Minnesota high school girls who play on the Tonka soccer club team. The Minnesotans organized a week of soccer clinics for the San Carlos girls.

Click [here](#) to watch a lively video overview of the week.



From Games to Gleaning

One morning was set aside for a soccer fun-day for the primary school kids in the area. On the final day, the Minnesota girls were challenged to a game by the Nicaraguan boys. The crowd was definitely cheering for the girls. Neither team scored, though the ball was controlled during most of the game by the Minnesota girls. The Minnesota girls were proud to display their physical and leadership skills and felt like they truly gained the respect of the boys in this exhibition game.

An eye-opening experience for the Minnesotans was an afternoon tour of León, guided by the Nicaraguan girls. It culminated in the girls gleaning a peanut field. Working for an hour, 30 people managed to collect only one bag of peanuts worth four U.S. dollars!

The week ended with a despedida (farewell party), which included classic dances, piñatas, and a grand finale: all the teens dancing the Hokey Pokey!

Organizer Isla Horscroft Reflects

Isla Horscroft, a sophomore at Minnetonka High School, organized the soccer trip as part of her Girl Scout Gold Star Award. She reports that the trip was a great success and offers these reflections:

On this eight-day adventure, we encountered many different things that we don't see here in Minnesota, horse and carts being one, and 2000-foot-high volcanoes being another.

There were stark contrasts in Nicaraguan society. We saw wealth, and we saw poverty. We were happy because the people made us feel welcome, but we were also sad to learn not all children have access to clean water. We were shocked to learn about the low income of the families in San Carlos. One girl told us that for her full day of labor digging a trench for the water project, she only gets paid \$7 a day. A day!! Many of us can get \$10 an hour for babysitting. Babysitting is easy compared to anything they do.



I feel very fortunate to have experienced what life is like in San Carlos, and it's made me consider how I think about my own life. In fact, this trip has changed my outlook on life completely. From things like taking clean drinking water for granted to being able to afford the bus, it's easy to forget that many people in the world don't even have the small things that we don't think about.



Yet though there were differences, we also share many similarities. We all bonded over our love of soccer, and we all love being around people that make us happy. While there were language barriers, we were able to break through them and make lasting friendships. I will never forget this unique experience in Nicaragua and really hope I have the chance to return.

BIKER BILL COMPLETES HIS JOURNEY



Bill Dickey dreamed of an epic overland adventure from Minnesota to León, Nicaragua, and he reached his goal!

Photo: Bill and longtime PML supporter Lane Ayres visit the San Carlos community water project.

Due to physical injuries, Bill was forced to change plans. Rather than bicycling the four thousand miles, he traveled by motorcycle. The trip was promoted by PML and set up as a fundraiser. Contributors donated [\\$1,985 to PML!](#)

Bill's thoughtful blog documented the trials and triumphs he experienced.

I met the PML family at the Fiesta Fundraiser in 2016, and I have had a blast working with the staff and volunteers of this awesome organization ever since. Even though it was a solo journey from Minnesota to León, I had the support of my family and the PML community with me the whole time, which motivated me to complete the trip.

After arriving in León, I was able to see the full scale of the organization. I was very impressed to see the hard work and determination of the women in San Carlos to achieve a better standard of living for their community. PML has been instrumental in helping the San Carlos community achieve their goals. The staff and volunteers of PML are very dedicated to their work.

As someone who has benefited deeply from travel, I really appreciate PML's initiative to facilitate trips for groups of all ages to Nicaragua. I had several influential travel experiences as a teen that made me a more open, globally minded person. Any groups that make their way to Nicaragua have a warm and welcoming place waiting for them. There's no better place to have an immersive travel experience than León, Nicaragua!

Last, I'm very happy with how the fundraiser turned [out](#), and I send a huge THANK YOU to everyone who supported the motorcycle tour!
—Bill

ANNUAL REPORT ON FINANCES

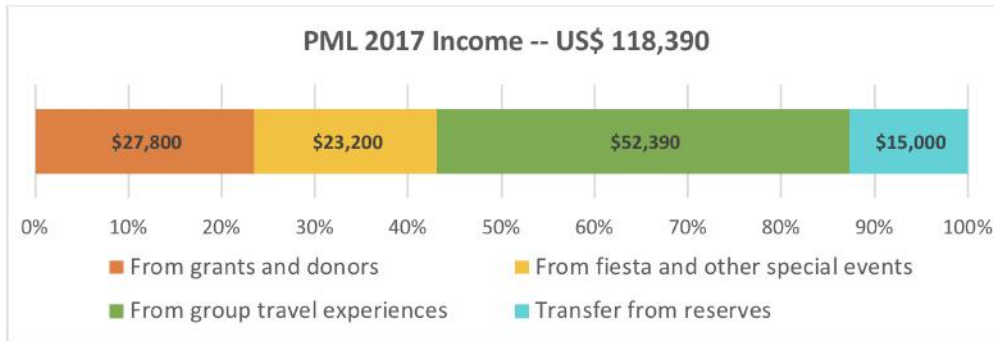


Thanks to donors, volunteers, immersion-trip participants, and other supporters, Project Minnesota/León had one of its best fund-raising years in recent years.

Below are bar graphs showing income and expenses.

Income from immersion trips covered trip expenses and a portion of the salary for PML's development and outreach director, Emily Wallace-Jackson. Her efforts are paying off, with four trips last year and three or four planned for 2018.

Coming into 2017, PML required a boost from financial reserves, but the organization recovered most of that loan, which will be carried forward into 2018.



PML GOALS FOR 2018



In these times of great division, our nonprofit seeks to promote cross-cultural understanding and celebrate our common humanity.

Project Minnesota/León's hopes this year are to (1) continue our successful community development work in León and (2) deepen the relationships between the

people of Minnesota and León.

We especially hope our immersion trips will broaden the horizons of Minnesotans and foster empathy for the challenges immigrants face when coming to the United States.



Finding a New León Director

Our most immediate task is finding a new León director to replace Elizabeth Sander Moreira, pictured to the left doing a craft project with teens from San Carlos. She will be retiring in August and moving back to Minnesota. Our León and

Minnesota hiring committees have interviewed a number of candidates and will be making a final decision by mid-March.

Community Development Work in San Carlos

Community development work in this semi-rural village on the outskirts of León has been awe-inspiring. Among other projects, residents are engaged in an enormous effort to bring clean drinking water to their village. They hope this work will be completed by April (see separate article).

They will then focus on procuring a recreation field for the youth, who need a safe and adequate space to play baseball and soccer. (They currently play on a nearby dusty, bumpy farm field.) Hopefully, this area can include a playground for younger children and perhaps in the future a community center.

This year and next, the board will consider how to begin closing out our work



with San Carlos, while leaving their new community organizations healthy. PML's project coordinator, Rosa Lira, can then transition her community-organizing work to a new location in or near León.



We are also brainstorming ways PML's León board members can be better integrated into the community development work and our immersion trips. Board member Jean Lubke and I went to León in early March for a mini-summit with the León board to renew friendships and discuss these items.

Immersion Trips

I hope you will consider joining one of the summer trips described in this newsletter. There's also still time for PML to customize trips for groups from schools, including colleges; churches; and family, friends, and colleagues to organize trips for the coming year.

The environment/sustainability trip planned for this year has been postponed to February/March 2019. We already have a list of people interested, so please contact us if you would like more information! Check the website (mn-leon.org) for details and flyers about all our trips.

Upcoming Events

- **April 14: Spring forum** (announcement above)
- **July: Conversation between Rosa and PML friends** when she comes to Minnesota to help chaperone the San Carlos youth who will be visiting their Minnesota Youth Cultural Exchange hosts for two weeks.



- **October: PML's annual fall Fiesta Fundraiser**

Thanks so much for your continued support!

Deborah Allan, Project Minnesota/León Board President

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