



# insider

**Volunteer Update  
March 2008**

Interfaith Service to Latin America  
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## **JOIN US FOR A MISSION TRIP TO JALAPA, NICARAGUA!**

Are you looking for an adventure this summer or fall? A full team of ISLA volunteers will be leaving for Jalapa on March 22. While it is too late to join this group, sign up now for one of the upcoming trips to Nicaragua! Share your unique talents with both your team members and the wonderful people of Jalapa! Teams will be traveling from June 16 -27, 2008 and from October 11 – 22, 2008. The deadlines for registration are April 1, 2008 for the June team and August 25, 2008 for the October team. The Trip Brochure and Application may be downloaded from the website [www.isla.cc](http://www.isla.cc). You may also find information there about the new trip discounts!



**Give your young adult children the experience of a lifetime! Consider traveling as a family to Jalapa and working alongside the Nicaraguan people. All talents and gifts are welcomed!**



## OUR MISSION

ISLA'S mission is to partner with communities in Latin America through health, education and construction programs to become self-sustainable.

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# January Team Highlights

January 15-26, 2008

## Medical

- A total of 158 patients were seen by the January team, including 94 pap smears, 20 colposcopies and 33 mental health visits.
- Three trunks of eye glasses were given to the Red Cross for distribution.
- Nine St. Olaf students conducted about 200 health surveys in six communities. Meetings were held by ISLA team members with local dentists, with Dr. Ramón Ivan Zeledon, Jalapa Hospital Administrator, and with various community groups including Fundación de Mujeres Jalapeñas, Pieat, Red Cross, Oyanka and others.

## Construction

- The January Construction Team assisted in installing a concrete floor and porch at El Carbón School, in cooperation with community members and local masons.
- Plumbing maintenance work was done at Jalapa preschool.
- At El Junco, a 20' x 52' school with slab on grade and masonry walls was built. More than 20 community members, including men, women and children, were on hand to work on the project. They will complete the steel roof, windows, doors and termite protection. (see photo below by Dean Neuburger)



## Education

- 116 high school scholarships and 18 post-secondary scholarships were distributed, as were additional funds for bicycles for students.
- Financial support for 68 schools was distributed.

## Reflections of a Volunteer

By Lu Lindstrom – Team Member,  
January 2008

The January 2008 team was a unique one. We ranged in age from 20 to 80 but one would never have guessed it. All had a wonderful time together sharing the day at Mama Chunga's restaurant where we ate our meals or on the veranda at El Hotelito where we relaxed in the evening.

In addition to the work the respective crews did, we had extras like a visit to Lester's father's farm where we saw everything from papayas to bananas to cacao (chocolate beans) or a trip to the falls by pickup truck with a long walk back downhill. And there were some who ran or walked at 6 a.m. each morning.

Of course the adorable children were around saying "photo." You would take their picture, show it to them, and they would smile or giggle when seeing themselves in the camera.

We experienced the friendliness and generosity of the people. They invited us into their homes and to their church. A number of us endured the wild ride over the pot-holed roads to worship at the Community Church in El Junco, the community where the school was being built. We were greeted with handshakes and smiles, and they even had the sermon translated for us who speak little or no Spanish. It was based on the passage from Nehemiah telling about building a wall. How appropriate.

Finally, we saw the determination of the people to educate their children. To receive their school support money, the school had to have two community people sign with them. A couple of them either signed their name with an "X" or with their fingerprint so their children could have more opportunity than they.

# Learning and serving in Nicaragua

By David Gonnerman (St. Olaf '90) with Kari VanDerVeen

In January Northfield resident Nancy Carlson '82 led a class of nine carefully selected St. Olaf students to Nicaragua, where they worked to assess the health of rural residents in one of the poorest parts of the hemisphere.

Carlson, a nurse and a graduate of St. Olaf's nursing program, led the students on a two-week trek to serve the area through the Interfaith Service to Latin America ([ISLA](#)) program. Over the past quarter century, the nonprofit ISLA has developed a solid relationship with the city of Jalapa, Nicaragua, through its construction, medical assistance and educational programs.

Accompanying Carlson were medical doctors Roger Lindholm '82 and Mary Wilkens '78 and dentist Paul Chadbourn '72. Before and during the trip the four alumni served as mentors to the students, many of whom hope to enter the medical profession -- including Andrew Chadbourn '09, who wants to follow in his father's footsteps as a dentist.

It had been determined that the St. Olaf students would best serve ISLA by conducting health surveys around Jalapa. Soon after they arrived they were trekking through the area's highlands, often just one student paired with a local interpreter, to ask rural residents some basic questions about health. Earlier, just after the group arrived in the capital of Managua, Northfielder GERALYN Sheehan, who currently works for a microenterprise development program in the city, addressed the students. She told them how to see past the poverty to determine a community's assets. "She planted an amazing platform that we all used," Carlson says.

"When we went to these communities the deficits -- dirt floors, latrines, chickens running everywhere -- were pretty obvious. But what were the assets? Who are the people who make herb drinks for different sicknesses? Whom do people talk to when they feel depressed?" asks Carlson. "So we did the health surveys, but we did a lot more qualitative questioning, too." Such data (later added to a database) provided a more complete picture, she explains, that helped local inhabitants express the health needs of their own communities rather than being told what they need by their visitors.

Carlson, who says she got her first taste of the wider world when she participated in the St. Olaf Term in the Middle East as a student, admits that she didn't know what to expect with this new program. But she's grateful to see how the experience, which she hopes will be repeated next year, "truly embodied the mission of the college" through its service to the area and education of the participants.

"Healthcare, history, education, sociology -- it all came together under the liberal arts," she says. And, adds Carlson in reference to the sights, sounds, tastes and textures of a foreign land, "there's no substitute for overloading the senses."



**In just two weeks Carlson and her nine students completed some 200 surveys that will help assess the health of rural inhabitants near Jalapa.**

**(This article was reprinted with permission from the "St. Olaf College Posten: The Community Newsletter of St. Olaf College", Winter 2008)**

ISLA  
P.O. Box 50715  
Minneapolis, MN 55405

**Yes, I would like to support ISLA in  
partnering with the people of Jalapa,  
Nicaragua!**

\_\_\_ Please send me information about upcoming trips to  
Jalapa.

\_\_\_ Please send me more information about ISLA's  
programs.

\_\_\_ Please send me information about making a gift of  
appreciated stock.

\_\_\_ Enclosed is a donation:

\$500    \$250    \$100    \$50    Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Check Payable to ISLA  
P.O. Box 50715  
Minneapolis, MN 55405**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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*ISLA is a 501(c) 3 charitable organization and  
contributions are tax deductible.*

**From the ISLA Mailbox...**

**By Bob Mullin, Educational Program Director**

This letter is from Professor Bertha Gadea, Director of CEDA, a special night school which offers grades one through six to working children and adults. Some of the children are the shoe shine boys we know. Many of the adults are young working mothers trying to graduate from primary school.

*To our ISLA friends,*

*By means of this letter we wish to express our most sincere gratitude for the voluntary, unselfish, and very affectionate support you have given our Educational Center for Working Children and Adults. It is difficult to express in one letter how very grateful both we and the direct beneficiaries of your aid, feel for what you have so generously put into our hands.*

*Nevertheless, it is appropriate that you should know that your efforts get translated into program development, and even more, into substantial support for those persons of scant resources who daily confront high levels of poverty. In fact, you have become an integral part of the educative process in our town and a respected ally in the educational struggle that goes on in our country.*

*Thank you again,*

*Sincerely,*

*Prof. Bertha Gadea*

*Prof. Nubia Rios O'Connor*

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