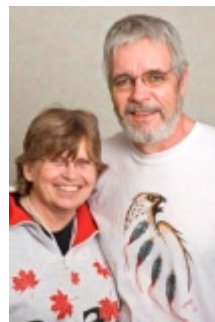


Letters from Overseas

Deborah Elliot and Don Gibson Write from Nicaragua

January 2010

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." (Matthew 2: 1–2)



Well, Epiphany is upon us and the Christmas season is over. It has been a busy few weeks. The White Gift service was delivered by the youth and was enjoyed by everyone...King Herod was particularly ferocious, which got lots of laughs. The Christmas Eve service included a dramatic reading done by the elders and a huge crowd came out.

Christmas morning the Sunday school students did the service and everyone was delighted by their performance, and after the service we all went to the hall so they could knock out the piñata and eat candy and play games. We managed to get some whole chickens and made stuffing. In the middle of the night I woke up with the thought that we had no cranberry sauce. It is funny the things you miss.

Next were the Thanksgiving, the Song Service, and the Watch Night service, all on New Years' Eve complete with a Love Feast (an agape meal of chocolate drink and bread). At midnight as the pastor was saying the blessing (the retired pastor did the last service), the bells were tolling, and the fireworks exploded outside. This was not organized by the fire department as in the North American concept, but rather it was spontaneous and continuous for the next hour. In fact all week the firecrackers have been exploding as a prelude to this magical moment. The cacophony of sounds of joy climaxed at this moment.

This past week we have been celebrating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. What that means here is that every night there is a prayer service with a different theme that is laid out in the *Book of Daily Texts*. This might sound onerous to those in the Northern churches who are uncomfortable if you ask them to do spontaneous prayer. It is a bit challenging for me, even, because I am not accustomed to praying in the same way they do here (but I am rapidly learning.)

All I had to do was announce in church which committees would be responsible for which night, and behold the week unfolds. Christians here, particularly those that play leadership roles on committees, are expected to be able to pray with ease or teach the Bible. Yet at the same time they really enjoy the Bible studies.

There is no doubt that folks here know their Bibles. Most of them spent their youth in Sunday school memorizing Bible texts. Many of them know the actual words much better than I do. If there was a Bible word competition they would put the rest of us to shame. The people in the Bible study group are not afraid to talk about what they believe. My challenge is to help them put it into the context of everyday living. We have been having fun doing this and I get good feedback about it, which makes it even more rewarding.

The youth are away this week. They have gone to Ciudad Sandino for a retreat with the youth in that city. Our son went with them and is helping to provide some of the leadership. (He is 25 and in his third year of theology). They return on Friday.

I did my first funeral on Christmas Eve and have had one baptism. I have two more requests for baptism for later this month. There are also two memorial services this week. Pastor Steadman Bent is doing both of those. Synod is at the end of the month, which means a trip to Bluefield's, which we are looking forward to with pleasure. Neither of us has been there before.

On a personal note, we are both doing fine. Aside from an encounter with an aggressive rat we are enjoying life. Don is relatively pain free. He has recuperated from a three-day flu that knocked him on his back for a bit but yesterday was back to work. I am convinced that the heat here has made a miraculous impact on his well-being. He no longer complains of cramps or spasms. He is still working at ADSIM [the Development Department of the Moravian Church] for Pastor Steadman and will continue to do so for the next little while. I am feeling fine as well.

The rain continues despite it being the dry season, and the nights are cooler. That also means the water in the shower feels colder but we manage to take short showers!

It is time for Bible study so I will say *adios y vaya con Dios* (Go with God).

Deborah and Donald

Deborah Elliot and Don Gibson are United Church of Canada overseas personnel serving with the Moravian Church in Nicaragua. The work of this ecumenical partner and the work of overseas personnel are made possible through your gifts to the Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada.

