

Report on Delegation from Jiñocuaó to Takoma Park

A delegation of four women and two men from Jiñocuaó, Nicaragua visited Takoma Park Presbyterian Church from May 1 to May 9, 2011. This report summarizes that trip.

Summary of program

The delegation arrived just after midnight on May 1 at Dulles International Airport. There were about six people from TPPC to greet the delegation. Julio later commented on how much he appreciated the welcome committee.

Sunday: Sunday school, worship services, potluck lunch with 50 people, delegation meets TPPC Jiñocuaó Committee, youth group (with dinner) and night tour of Washington monuments.

Monday: Meet with Pastor Mark, tour of church, lunch with pastor at Mary Jacksteit's home, walk to library and municipal center, visit in Alfonso's apartment, Latino market and supermarket, tour of Mike Tidwell's energy efficient home.

Tuesday: National Mall East, Capitol, dinner with Session and committees at church.

Wednesday: Ridgecrest Elementary School, lunch in school cafeteria, Prince George's Community College, PG Plaza Mall, CASA Maryland.

Thursday: National Mall West, National Cathedral, Downtown Silver Spring, Zami Henkai and Madline Morsha-Taylor hosts delegation for dinner at their homes.

Friday: Agriculture Day (a visit to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Dairy Research Farm), second hand store, Baltimore Orioles play Tampa Bay Rays at Camden Yards (Jiñocuaó delegation was mentioned on scoreboard)

Saturday: Bible study and lunch with women's group studying Revelations, potluck lunch at church, Rebecca Phares and Dennis Huffman lead reflection, discussion and fun.

Sunday: Adult Sunday School, Confirmation Class, worship service, potluck lunch with 100 people, evaluation with delegation and committee members, cooking class led by Jiñocuaó women.

Accommodation of delegation

Generally, the members of the delegation stayed in pairs for two nights in each place. The following Takoma Park residents hosted the delegation in their homes. Those who have been to Jiñocuaó are marked with an asterisk:

- Susan Bundock* and Matt Johnson
- Joan Goodhue and Russ Alotta*
- David* and Jodie Olson

- Dennis* and Susan Huffman
- Sue* and Phil Wheaton*
- Roger Griffis and Donna Wieting
- Laurie McGilvray* and Walter Mulbry
- Karis Hastings
- Betty Anne Bell*
- Tina Hodges* and Rebecca Phares*
- Jo Hoge*

Evaluation of Jiñocuao Delegation

An evaluation of the delegation that took place on the last day of the trip attempted to identify the best things about the trip as well as the challenges:

Best things: The delegation mentioned the following as being the aspects they most enjoyed (in order of how many times they were mentioned): Relationship with church (3), hospitality/staying in homes (3), National Cathedral (3), farm (2), museums (2), CASA Maryland (2). One person specifically mentioned Pastor Mark and Alfonso.

Yaritza: "This has been an important step for us and our community. The most important thing is for us to discuss the purpose of the relationship from each side's perspective. The Bible says, 'If you're looking for me, the rest will follow.'"

Paula: "Visiting CASA, I felt both happiness and pain – happiness because of how they help immigrants and pain thinking what the immigrants have to go through ... Since I can't read and write, I thought I was going to feel inferior here, but I felt OK, not inferior."

Julio: "Before [on a previous delegation], I felt far from my own community. Having a larger number of delegates come helps us feel a connection between us and that our community back home was here with us. I liked having more independence – there was no sense of control and having to watch what you say, like on the previous trip."

The responses of the Jiñocuao Committee were more varied. Two people mentioned the friendship engendered by the visit. Others mentioned hosting people in their homes, potluck lunch, Sunday school, baseball game, involvement of TPPC members not previously involved and Prince George Community College.

Challenges: There really were not a lot mentioned during the meeting. Julio suggested that it would have been good if the delegation had been given a chance to sing some of their songs in church, or to have some other gathering where each church sings its own songs.

For several of the TPPC Jiñocuao Committee members one of the biggest challenges was trying to get as many in the congregation involved in the visit as possible because, up until now, the relationship has been sustained in Takoma Park by a very small group of people (mainly, the committee).

“For me, the most important thing was to involve the greatest number of people in our church who haven’t been involved,” said David Olson. “We need to build on this base and take it forward.”

The committee members mainly thought that that had been accomplished. “We’ve gotten to the majority of active members of our church,” said Rebecca. Jo Hoge estimated it at three-quarters. The committee was pleased to see the participation of so many people in one or more of the activities who had never been involved in the relationship before.

“The biggest challenge for the church is to join CEPAD [Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua] so that we can have a steadier relationship with Jiñocuaó,” said Jo. “They will help us in our relationship by helping with communication, knowledge of the needs and how to proceed, especially during storms and other disasters.”

One long-time member of TPPC wrote this to a member of the Jiñocuaó Committee after the visit:

“Thanks to you and all the others who were involved in making the visit from the Jiñocuaó delegation such a great success. I think that a great part of the success was attributable to the fact that you had more translators involved than I remember when they visited previously. That obviously made conversation much more possible. I especially enjoyed the conversation I had with Julio, which you translated, over lunch on Sunday, and I learned more about him, and his role in his church, and what he does as a teacher, and his outlook on politics in Nicaragua (and the future electoral prospects of Daniel Ortega) than I did anytime else during the visit. I think was a great way to have a conversation. You might suggest to the other planners that if there are more visits by a delegation, which I assume there will be, that you schedule some very small group meetings, where each person from Jiñocuaó meets and talks with only two or three people from Takoma Park, and a translator, for more intense conversation. I feel that I learned a lot more that way than I did in the very large group discussions.”

Hopes and Dreams Discussion (during second Sunday potluck)

Here are the hopes and dreams mentioned during the meeting, followed by the number of people who mentioned that item and a sample of quotes from the discussion:

1. Strengthen relationships as sisters, brothers, friends/learn about history of relationship (7):
“That the wounds and hurts of the past can heal and we can move on to a hopeful, happy future relationship.”
2. Resource sharing (6): General (3), education (1), involve in Alternative Gift Fair (1), and sports uniforms, shoes and chalkboard (1): *“Explore the possibilities of local economic development projects;” “Want to give, but how to do it without being the Big Daddy.”*
3. Spiritual enrichment between churches (5)
4. More communication/sharing between communities (4): *“We would like updates from Nicaragua shared with TPPC; it’s like a family; when you know what’s going on, you feel closer.”*
5. More delegations in both directions and TPPC to Jiñocuaó in 2012 or 2013 (3)
6. Youth exchanges/support (2)

Discussion of Financial Relationship

There was a discussion regarding the possibility of TPPC financing development projects in Jiñocuaó (Number 2 above). One TPPC person cautioned about money possibly hurting our relationship. Another one wanted to help financially but was concerned about becoming a “Big Daddy.”

A Jiñocuaó person said “Giving money won’t hurt the relationship, and that “We want to see any money that’s sent to go to those with the greatest need.” That same person said that if Jiñocuaó did something really well, they would have that success to build on. That said, there might be things they couldn’t control, like the weather.

Another Jiñocuaó person said: “In another church in Jiñocuaó, when one person gets a cow, they give a calf from that cow to another person. I like the idea of a revolving loan fund.” [NOTE: This sounds exactly like the Heifer Project approach].

Communication between Churches

A TPPC member asked about the best ways of communicating with Jiñocuaó. Julio said an e-mail to him, and, in an emergency, Paula’s house or Julio’s neighbor Dora.

Julio’s neighbor Dora: 011-55-87391949

Paula and Gumercindo’s house: 011-55-88794524 (they’re always there)

Yaritza and husband Heriberto’s cell: 55-89735301

Julio’s land line once it’s installed: 011-55-87171597

As it is difficult and expensive to use these cell phones, it was also suggested that we go through CEPAD, especially when sending cards and letters.

Bible Verse

David cited a Bible verse that he thought really spoke to the delegation’s visit. Hebrews 13:2: “Do not neglect to give hospitality to strangers; one might be an angel in your midst.”

These are the people involved in the evaluation mentioned above:

Delegation: Julio Huete, Rosa Erpidia Martinez, Maria Otilia Flores, Paula Carrasco, Roberto Ponce, Yaritza Solis

TPPC Jiñocuaó Committee: Tina Hodges, Jo Hoge, Dennis Huffman, Laurie McGilvray, Deb Nelson, David Olson, Rebecca Phares, Sue Wheaton