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*Centro Escolar San Ignacio de Loyola*

February 8, 2018

Dear Sisters, Associates, Family, and Friends,

School days, school days...may they be wonderful school days in this new scholastic year. Both schools have gotten an extensive makeover that will make them far more pleasant in numerous ways, both in their outward structure and especially the scholastic plan for IBRA. The former thanks to our new National Director who was able to get projects approved for the much needed work.

- Both have been painted inside out, cleaned, and the Offices totally restructured for better service and more intelligent use of space, especially for San Ignacio that now has two urgently needed classrooms, storage space which was non-existent, and cement walkways connecting all the buildings. The latter much appreciated since in the rainy season one practically had to swim to reach some of the buildings.
- IBRA has a whole new design for their studies. The students had expressed that they were bored with classroom presentations, yet no longer wanted to go out for practice on the farm which is crucial in an agricultural school. One understood that they dirtied their uniforms, needed boots, came back hot and sweaty to class and return home in that state. Also we were losing students, especially boys, whose fathers saw no need for school, but preferred them to stay and work on their plots with them. They had learned from their fathers and that was good enough for them.
- The response was to design a whole new way of getting their agricultural degrees which responded to these concerns and has some very interesting new components. This new plan was presented first to the Director and his staff, then the teachers, followed by students and parents. The presenter, Albert Paredes, is a walking encyclopedia of any facet of agriculture, able to communicate it in a painless humorous way that is both enjoyable and informative and enlightening. A great plus is that he is an excellent teacher who knows how to listen.
- Previous to that he had met with the staff to explain the importance of analyzing the soil in the different areas to see what it contained and to apply the fertilizer needed, not just because it worked for someone else. In the past too often if something worked in one area, (it) was applied everywhere when the ideal was to produce in quantities. Now the purpose is to improve the quality of the product. Much has been done to improve the nutritive value of the staple crops for this country: rice, beans, fruits and vegetables, so as to improve the diet. So many times a worker is labeled as lazy when his physical state is actually depleted from a poor diet, which we also know affects students output and performance.
- Another important factor is our reality: For so many years, it has been a struggle to become self-sufficient, yet what is produced barely feeds those that plant, with little extra to sell and improve their quality of life. This is the reality of IBRA also. So, with Albert leading us, we went off in pairs to do a survey of the town market to see what is sold, where it comes from, prices, peak seasons, etc. so we can produce what we know sells and the seasons. Some previous investigation had been done. We have the mayor's approval to set up a stall for what will be produced. Slowly with the improved seeds, more nutritive food will be available to all. We are already working on chickens, eggs and garden vegetables.

- There is great hope in this plan. Already, having found out the great demand for green (cooking) bananas, 1000 trees were planted Christmas week which will be ready for harvesting in October with a guaranteed profit. Our one serious problem is water in this arid area. Our source is good but it needs to be pumped to a container, and we had to rush and replace a part for the pump, which unexpectedly needed a trip to the next town, but that has been solved.
- It was stressed with the staff and teachers the importance of participation by all, organization, and responsibility. It is of vital importance to communicate the difference and importance of these improved seeds for improved health and quality of life to the students, yes, but also to the parents. At the end of each session, there is a palpable sense of hope with this integral plan, even though realistically, one knows this may take generations. The profit is a great motivating factor.

The last bit of news is service to the community. Both schools do their part by offering computer classes to the larger community. San Ignacio offers baking classes for women, and IBRA as an extension of what the students learn about bee-keeping, has grown to a full-fledged project with several women's groups who now feel empowered since they are able to earn money to contribute to their family's needs. The quality of the honey is of the best and people are coming from out of town to buy it. As soon as the Production Room is finished and equipped in IBRA, they will be able to pass inspection and sell in supermarkets. Understand that these are rural women who before were confined and isolated.

Because of personal interest, our Administrator from IBRA is very involved in forming and leading these groups. Recently she was funded to take a course in El Salvador, where she learned so much more about the bees themselves and the derivatives from the honey making process e.g. soap, lotion, perfume, etc. This was funded by the group Swiss Contact who paid half. This group also paid for her to attend a course within the country in Tipitapa. We are fortunate to have her. She is the type that anything she does, she does very well. One can always count on her.

On the national level, Nicaragua is very proud of one of its best authors: Sergio Ramirez who recently was awarded the Premio Cervantes which is the equivalent of the Nobel Prize for Spanish literature.

This will end with a thought I found some time ago and worth mentioning, though I am paraphrasing: What a wonderful world we will have when there is 0 poverty, 0 unemployment and 0 emissions. Mohammed Yunis, a Nobel Prize winner.

All the wonderful improvements mentioned above were due to projects approved, but even then the everyday items without budget and even some items for approved budgets need to be furnished. So we are grateful for your donations that make all that possible. Then there are always emergencies. Blessings to all generous donors.

Sincerely,  
*Sister Rachel Pinal*

**Donations to: Development Office  
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 281 Masonic Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94118-4116.**

**On a separate notepaper, state: For Sr. Rachel Pinal's ministry.  
 Please make checks out to *Sisters of the Presentation*.**

**Thank you.**