

*March 2013 Mission Letter from United Methodist Missionaries,  
Nan and Miguel*

*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. John 10: 10*

Dear Friends,

Warm greetings from Nicaragua where it is hot and dry but the bougainvilleas are in bloom. In the last few months we have had visits from a VIM team from Manito UMC in Spokane, Washington and from University UMC in Chapel Hill, NC. They repaired and painted the park in San Francisco Libre and helped with the construction of the Youth Center. Both groups raised money for programs and projects like the Park, the Youth Network Against Violence and the Youth Center. Thank you for your faithful support of missionaries through the Covenant!

Maria Felix Arauz is the psychologist with the Women and Community Association where we work. Maria and Nan were invited to speak at a Conference on Women's Health sponsored by the General Board of Church and Society in 2012: Healthy Families, Healthy Planet. We share here Maria's testimony and we suggest below an action to improve women's health.

Wishing an abundant life for all of you,  
*Miguel and Nan*

Maria's testimony about her life and work:

I come from an impoverished rural family; when I was young I didn't have access to contraceptives, or to basic information about my body or how to prevent pregnancies and illnesses. I didn't even know how to calculate what time of the month I was fertile.

I got together very young with a man and had three children. When my third child was two I had the opportunity to begin attending *Integral Health* training workshops with Women and Community in my village. I really liked this and within a year I was a very active health promoter and had learned about contraceptive methods, illnesses of sexual transmission, HIV and AIDs and many other themes.

I remember well when they facilitated the first workshops about violence against women – I remember this because my husband abused me. I went to talk with the facilitator and asked her to give more workshops on themes related to violence.

Soon thereafter I separated from my husband and began my life as a single mom – now I wasn't abused. But he didn't take any economic

responsibility for his children, so it was very hard for me to provide the basics for my kids.

In 1998 I began to work part-time with Women and Community doing literacy training with illiterate women. Along with learning to read and write the Women learned about their rights not to be abused, their rights to equality and their rights to good information and methods for family planning.

I have worked fulltime with Women and Community since 1999 providing psychological attention for women, survivors of violence. Women and Community provided me with a college scholarship and I finished by formal education five years ago. Now, along with being a psychologist, I am the coordinator for different programs with women like legal attention and formation of legal advocates, facilitation of ten mutual support groups, group therapy with women who have recently come in to denounce a violent man in their life; a women's clinic; work with pregnant teens and promotion of economic initiatives with women including a microloan fund so that women can have more economic independence.



Women and Community team: Maria Felix is in the center

Here is one story about the health rights struggles of a woman with whom we work.

Marta lives in a remote rural village of San Francisco Libre. Marta had never had a health consult with a doctor to check on her reproductive health. A village midwife attended her six births. Marta says her husband never let her go to consults, even when the government sent health teams to her village. Much less did he let her go to the municipal seat to visit the Women and Community Women's Clinic.

Historically with the patriarchal system it was typical in the countryside for men not to let women leave the home or yard area. It is basically sexual control of women by the men, with the conscious or unconscious notion that if the woman doesn't leave the home, he is more certain that the children are his.

One of Marta's daughters participates in training workshops facilitated in the villages by members of the Youth Network Against Violence. This Network is the result of leadership training with youth by Women and Community. Now there are 50 organized youth from 20 villages who educate 300 other youth about themes related to sexual abuse, violence prevention, promotion of gender equity, and reproductive and sexual health and rights. They also organize to exercise their citizen rights to lobby the local government for changes that favor youth.

Marta's daughter, Yeimi, had participated all year in six trainings. One day she asked her mom why she doesn't visit the Women's Clinic for checkups. Marta told her that her husband (Yeimi's dad) doesn't like for her to be seen by doctors. Yeimi encouraged her to go, and told her that the doctor at this clinic is a woman, and that the Papanicolaou exam could save her life through detecting, early on, abnormal cells on the cervix – thus avoiding full-blown cervical-uterine cancer. And that is how, at the age of 38, Marta went to the Women's Clinic for her first Pap exam.

When Marta returned to the Clinic a month later to get the pap results, Women and Community's nurse, Maura Delgado, explained to her that the pathologist found abnormal cells.

When she first told her husband about the problem he got mad and accused her of having been with other men. She made him see that his idea was ridiculous and explained to him what the nurse had explained to her: Probably he passed the Papiloma Humana virus to her twenty years ago when they got together and she has had the virus all these years without knowing. She reminded him that he had other relations before they got together. The nurse had explained to her that the abnormal cervical cells result from this virus.

Maura accompanied her to a clinic in Managua for a procedure to remove the cells. So that is how we were able to help Marta: We could pay the pathologist, pay for the procedure to remove the cells and cover Marta's travel costs, all because we receive donations from United Methodists through the ADVANCE for Christ.

Now Marta is using contraceptives and plans to get a min-lap tubal ligation soon. Her husband's attitude has changed and he doesn't block her from attending to her health and family planning.

Marta says that despite the fear she felt when she was told she had abnormal cells, she feels a lot better now that she goes to the Clinic and is using family planning. She and her husband have better communication about these important themes. She says there are many women who aren't aware of the importance of the pap exam and she is encouraging her sisters and neighbors to get the exam.

Marta's story is just one example of how the work of the Women and Community team of youth and women can bring a better life with more health.

[You can take action! Tell Congress to invest in Mothers and Families for a Healthier Planet.](#)

We encourage you to take action; please go to this site: [www.umchealthyfamilies.org](http://www.umchealthyfamilies.org). Choose *Take Action* to write a letter to your member of Congress in support of increased U.S. funding for international family planning, so that we may ensure that all families of the world not only survive, but thrive.

[This is the sample letter from the GBCS website:](#) "Family planning is critical for the health and well-being of women and children around the world. By empowering women and men to make healthy decisions about the timing and spacing of their children, family planning ensures better health outcomes not only for individual families, but also for entire communities. Unfortunately, more than 220 million worldwide would like to prevent pregnancy but have no access to safe, modern contraceptive services.

The United Methodist Church has a history of support for family planning services. Social Principle 162 states: "People have the duty to consider the impact on the total world community of their decisions regarding childbearing and should have access to information and appropriate means to limit their fertility." It goes on to say: "We affirm the right of men and women to have access to comprehensive reproductive health/family planning information and services which will serve as a means to prevent unplanned pregnancies, reduce abortions and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS." Investing in family planning is critical to ensuring the basic health and well-being of all persons. As United Methodists, we believe that health is a basic human right and a responsibility."