

AMHERST/LA PAZ CENTRO SISTER CITY COMMITTEE  
Minutes  
June 7, 2017

PRESENT: Liz Etheridge, Nancy Milch, Kathy and Walter Mullin, Mary Santiago, Anne and Ed Stanek, Lydia Vernon Jones.

#### TREASURER'S REPORT

Kathy reports that basic costs for the scholarship program have increased so we will have to budget accordingly.

Kathy suggested that we ask Julio to charge Juan and family for electricity. They are staying in the small building next to the Community Center and have opened a business - a Torterilla. We had previously approved of their living there rent free as they are acting as caretakers of the Community Center. However, with the opening of their business, there is increased demand on electricity and we agree to Kathy's suggestion as a result.

#### COMMITTEE SURVEY

Committee members submitted thoughtful and detailed answers to the four questions proposed concerning our committee and our relationship with our sister city in Nicaragua. We are grateful to Ed for the hours he spent categorizing the answers. The results are attached to the Minutes.

We reviewed the results and decided two things:

- 1. Each of us will come to our September meeting with our three top priorities/goals for the Sister City Project.**
- 2. Mary will formulate the the beginnings of a similar survey for the residents of Felipe Lopez and present them to us for discussion/edit/additions at our September meeting. We felt it crucial to have input from La Paz Centro as part of our move forward.**

#### FOCUS GROUP

Kathy spoke with Julie Rappaport, who is kindly willing to give of her time to lead a Focus Group session, but asked for \$500 if we would like her to have three pre-planning sessions to create the core questions and identify members of the Focus Group. We would like to do our homework in order to help us decide on the basic questions so we will put the Focus Group on hold until we have completed our survey process.

#### TAG SALE

Thanks to Victoria who has found us some very nice furniture for the Tag Sale. It is being stored in Carol Wood's basement and the Staneks' garage. There is room for more in the Staneks' garage but not too much!

There will be a meeting on TUESDAY, JULY 18TH to discuss the Tag Sale, which will be held on Saturday, September 9th . Anne will put a request for donations in the First Congregational Church Register. Lydia will arrange for tables from First Church.

Respectfully submitted, Anne Stanek, Chair

# Summary Reflections on the La Paz Centro- Sister City Committee

6/6/2017

Response from: Liz Ethridge, Chuck Milch, Nancy Milch, Kathy Mullin, Walter Mullin, Mary Santiago, Anne Stanek, Ed Stanek, Lydia Vernon-Jones, Carol Wood

## 1. What are the Strengths of the La Paz Centro Sister City Committee/Project

### A. Amherst Committee

#### A.1. Commitment of Members

- Committed, hard-working members of the committee in Amherst
- We have a core membership who have been committed to La Paz Centro over a very long period of time.
- Core group of committed and talented people
- The town committee consists of a group of people who are highly committed to a global connection with the people of Nicaragua.
- Committed group of caring and dedicated board members
- Long standing commitment to project
- Great people to work with who are discerning, caring, flexible and have been committed for a long time
- Most of the committee have been committed to the community in La Paz
- Members willing to give time, creativity and physical strength to the project
- I really enjoy the relationships I have on the committee
- The committee has had an experience of strong leadership (Anne) and strong members

#### A.2. Special Members Skills

- The committee members enjoy each other's company and usually reach consensus
- Several committee members speak Spanish or have some ability in Spanish
- There have been members willing to make the trips to Nicaragua to check on things, to translate communications, etc.
- It is all volunteer

#### A.3. Special Connection to La Paz

- Our personal connections with members of the LPC community
- Personal relationships with people in LPC

- Most everyone has been to Nicaragua so understands and has relationships with the people of the community
- Every active member has been to La Paz and has a connection to the barrio and it's people
- Several of us have strong and personal relationships with La Paz Centro residents.
- I care about those families in La Paz Centro
- Committee members with intimate knowledge of LaPaz Centro and interest in improving the lives of the people in LaPaz Centro

#### **B. Fundraising**

- Fundraising activities and procedures in place
- Our funder base in Amherst
- The sister city is known in the community and people regularly give to the cause.
- Annual fundraiser is successful

#### **C. Scholarships**

- Commitment to fund the scholarships
- Supports scholarships students in La Paz
- Our fundraising efforts have been very successful in providing support for up to 28 students - the scholarship program continues to be a strong project.
- The scholarships for high school kids has allowed them to stay in school. We might be apt to measure the success of the scholarship kids in terms of the things they accomplish after high school, but I believe there could be other ways to assess this --- some of which we may not really understand.
- Life time opportunity for success in life for the students
- Been able to meet the financial commitments to the number of students planned for
- Scholarship program is a low cost program that helps a lot of people

#### **D. Delegations**

- If we can find leaders, delegations keep the interest alive.
- Our extensive experience with delegations
- Working model for organizing community service delegations
- We have been solid backers of many delegations and are all personally familiar with La Paz Centro

- The way the town committee works in tandem with a delegation to visit Nicaragua is fabulous. Many people from the area have gone to Nicaragua and frequently they say the experience of visiting there is live changing.
- Provides an opportunity to experience and understand another culture first hand
- Enables personal connections between delegation and Barrio Felipe Lopez community members
- Provided opportunities for a # of adults and young people to experience and make friends with another culture
- We have created a chance to have delegations go to Nicaragua and build relationships with people in a small Latin American community that is very unique, including staying in their homes and helping with education, and pitching in on local projects. Many of the relationships are long term.
- The trips have included many teenage youth who later share how the experience shaped their lives in very positive ways.

#### **E. Values**

- Strengthens personal values to promote peace and by the shared commitment of committee members
- Provides an opportunity to work together for a worthwhile cause, while enjoying the comradery
- The committee provides the opportunity to think outside of our own community's needs and American culture, and learn from another part of the world.
- The members are always interested in understanding the way people there live and are willing to learn from them about things we might consider important in our own lives.
- Because of the work done in Amherst on behalf of Felipe Lopez, that community is "better off".
- The town committee has changed the Felipe Lopez neighborhood by community development projects.
- The role of officially representing the town of Amherst in this endeavor means a lot about the town and the citizens who live in it.

#### **F. Structure/Environment**

- Maintained a bookkeeping and committee relationship with the Town of Amherst - getting financial support for a yearly mailing
- Has established a positive relationship with the First Congregational Church
- As a town committee there is space available for meetings

#### **G. Other**

- Clear strategic goal to focus on educational programs for both Amherst and LaPaz Centro
- A committed coordinator in LPC

## **2. What are the Weaknesses of the La Paz Centro Sister City Committee/Project**

### **A. Amherst Committee**

#### **A.1. Membership**

##### **A.1a. Current Members**

- Retiring committee members
- Ageing of the general membership.
- Life stage issues of the general committee membership
- Committee members are older, have other responsibilities out of town
- Relatively stagnant and aging Amherst Committee membership
- Several of our long term committee members are interested in moving on to other pursuits.
- Committee members are no longer working on the committee to make opportunities for their own children
- I personally cannot do any more than I am doing so don't have fresh thinking about the future. I can't make it a priority - my not speaking Spanish kept me from taking up a slot on a second trip which might have strengthened my commitment.

##### **A.1b. New Members**

- No clear plan to include new members
- Inability to attract and keep new board members
- We are not attracting new members
- Difficulty recruiting new members in Amherst
- Difficulty recruiting and retaining new members
- Lack of younger members
- The committee has not succeed in bringing in new members and new leaders. In order for a committee like this one to thrive, it must find a way to incorporate new members and there should be a clear plan for succession of the leadership.

### **A.1c. Member Recruitment Issues**

- Barrier to new members due to 'friends group' relationship of current members.
- The couples/couples who have social relationships component of the core members of the committee may be a factor in folks relating to the committee - not sure how to say this but it can feel a little "ingrown" or exclusive
- Members enthusiasm has been fueled by experiences and relationships directly with La Paz Centro so new members would not have that connection initially
- There is no one on the board who is peer with the age group of potential members who would continue to carry the weight of the project

### **A.2 Delegation**

- Delegation leader
- The work of the committee depends on the delegation or committee representatives visiting every year. Without this, we lose contact and this is a threat to our initiative.
- Liability for delegations is an ongoing concern

## **B. La Paz Committee**

### **B.1. Membership**

- No real sister committee in La Paz
- Lack of members from Nicaragua
- Very limited La Paz Sister City committee membership
- There isn't an active committee in Nicaragua with which to partner
- We have never been able to organize a committee in Felipe Lopez and we seem unable to understand the reasons for this or the significance for not having this in place.
- Lack of input from broader community in Nicaragua
- Limited participation of LPC community in committee projects and decisions

### **B.2. Leadership**

- Julio
- Our connection to Felipe Lopez with Julio has never met our satisfaction. When visiting Nicaragua, it is easy to feel he is commitment to the people and politics. We have done well in

supporting his work. On the other hand, he never truly meets our needs (maybe they are very American in nature - still we need him to work with us!! E.g. receipts for expenses. )

## **C. Communication between Committees**

### **C.1. With Julio**

- Challenging communication with coordinator in LPC
- We struggle with communication with Julio - who is not careful
- It is very hard to work be sure of what is being carried over in La Paz because of a lack of documents and follow up conversations with Julio, as well as times of distrust.
- The committee in La Paz Centro has only one person who communicates with us so there is not a learn a variety of opinions and discussions about projects and opportunities

### **C.2. Issues**

- Lack of care about keeping accounts and sending receipts
- Lack of trust between Amherst and La Paz committee with respect to money
- Communication challenges due to dual languages and limited number of persons fluent in both languages.
- Conversations about what we can offer tend to be good brainstorming but hard to put into place without good communication.
- Lack of in depth communication with counterparts in LaPaz Centro
- We are not always sure about how the cultural differences impact our decisions

## **D. Scholarship Program**

- Frequently the Nicaraguan students drop out
- Tutoring program has been a failure. Inconsistent results and frequency
- Lack of data as to the benefits of scholarship program to the community

## **E. Vision/Goals**

- Unclear focus as to the vision and goals of the project
- Projects have been going on for such a long time that they appear mediocre
- New mission projects have not been identified in La Paz
- It focuses on a small issue in the world being over-shadowed by issues right in front of people
- LaPaz Centro community has never engaged in the projects except to host U.S. families

## **F. Structure/Environment**

Lack of connection to/support from local government in LPC

## **G. Other**

- Need for new and creative fundraising ideas that are less time consuming (ex - time/effort into coffee sales)

### **3. What are the Opportunities for the La Paz Centro Sister City Committee/Project**

#### **A. Mission/Goals/Projects**

- Creation of a new vision or plan
- Re-evaluation of our goals and mission with facilitator
- Find an additional project in La Paz Centro that might fire up interest.
- We live in a community that identifies themselves as concerned citizens. If we can find a way to energize the community, there may be new enthusiasm.
- I am assuming that the people of Felipe Lopez still have immense needs and we might need to find a way to better define these for ourselves. By doing this, we might notice a new way to be connected.

#### **B. Grow Amherst Committee Membership**

- Welcome new members to the Amherst Committee
- Recruitment of new members who will be able to carry on with the mission of the committee
- We could work on getting an article in the Gazette about looking for new membership, new leadership, and more trips.
- Send a recruitment letter to all past delegates to enlist participation in the committee or leadership on delegations

#### **C. Communication**

- Better means of obtaining input from the LPC community
- Recruit other leaders in LPC to do specific roles (share leadership with Julio) to engage more people in LPC

## **D. Fundraising**

- Explore new fundraising opportunities
- Keep requesting donations
- This is a wonderful project. It seems that the next step involves growth that could involve demanding work. For example – writing a grant and obtaining significant money to support a part of work.

## **E. Scholarship Support**

- Continuation of our support for scholarship students in LPC
- We could try to get sponsors and expand the scholarship program to include college level education.
- Follow up with scholarship student graduates to determine outcomes and impact on LPC
- I want us to think about what it would do to the school that the students go to if we withdrew our support and think about a gradual decrease or warning about the possibility of their having reduced enrollment

## **F. Delegations/ Cultural Exchanges**

### **F.1. Goals/Objectives**

- Continue to promote understanding and friendship between the 2 cultures through cultural exchanges and delegations
- Extend the philosophy of mutual understanding/respect in the Sister City project to additional people (primarily through the delegations)
- Strengthen cross-cultural understanding

### **F.2. Format/Funding**

- Delegations with new and different format and funding
- First Church probably won't do the Appalachian project next year so there might be a little more help for another delegation if teamed with other churches
- Recruit delegates in parent/student pairs to reduce liability and supervision responsibility of the leader
- Hand the delegation off to the high school

- Offer adult trips for people who could pay and wanted to do projects down there
- Engage LaPaz Centro leadership by having them visit Amherst

#### **G. New Ideas**

- We could create a website for the project
- New ways to improve education in LaPaz Centro—engage adults and former students
- Tap into the high school Spanish teachers (initiated by Anne) and other colleges and youth groups at churches to engage in cultural and language exchange via pen pal, participation in delegations, community service
- Use of Community Center for education programs

#### **H. Collaborations**

- Collaboration with existing youth groups
- See if there is some other close sister city we can team up with.
- We could connect with other, more successful non-profit projects and learn from them. Examples: Share Foundation (Cambodian non-profit); Daisy's Children (Honduran non-profit); Other Nicaragua Sister Cities such as New Haven

### **4. What the Threats/Challenges to the La Paz Centro Sister City Committee Project**

#### **A. National/Global/La Paz Situations**

##### **A.1. National/Global Situation**

- Changes in priorities for global issues
- National environment
- The political situation in both countries is a problem. News from Nicaragua at one point was that the government did not want our type of groups visiting. Our political situation is bad.

##### **A.2. La Paz Situation**

- Changes in the community in LPC over the years

- Apathy in La Paz
- Possibly La Paz needs have changed and we don't know what they are
- Our involvement in LPC is becoming obsolete as Nicaragua becomes a more developed country
- Lack of interest on the part of La Paz Centro residents - Julio runs the committee by himself and doesn't seem to find others who are willing to commit without pay to running projects over there.
- Getting good information about the needs in La Paz
- It's possible that a lot of the committees' purpose is done. Life in Felipe Lopez has changed and in some ways, they have moved forward. I believe they like the scholarships, but are they tired of us!!!
- Julio leaves or stops working with community

## **B. Continuity**

- Gaps between visits to LPC by Amherst committee members
- Lack of visits to Nicaragua
- Amherst committee falls apart before a more vibrant group can develop

## **C. Amherst Committee**

### **C.1. Current members**

- Aging board
- Retirement
- Changing life situations of present committee members in Amherst
- Ageing and life stage changes of the committee (e.g. we have grandchildren who we need to visit, we cannot lift heavy objects, our energy has changed etc.
- Finding times to have a meeting when enough people are in town
- Amherst Committee lacks youth connection due to children aging out, reducing commitment.
- Lack of young, strong participants in our annual tag sale.

## **C.2. Committee Focus**

- We lose local support due to lack of committee interest
- Waning interest on the part of our committee members here in Amherst
- Amherst committee becomes like a business committee, focusing on budget and raising money
- Having a committee that is of interest and joined by new members regularly.

## **C.3. Committee Structure**

- Possibly the town pushing us to be something that we aren't
- People in Amherst are busy. Many people do not like to go to meetings --- they find them boring. These people may be more willing to help with a specific project and give money, but they do not want to go meeting – especially if we talk repeatedly about the same problems.

## **D. Communication**

- Difficulty communication
- Only one coordinator, who makes decisions and carries out our mission in LPC
- Leadership and accountability in La Paz - Julio.
- Good communication with the La Paz Centro committee that supports the ability to effect good support in La Paz Centro
- Distance

## **E. Delegations**

- Finding leaders for delegations.
- Loss of delegation opportunity for our youth.
- Finding a way to keep the delegation going every other year by securing a new leader
- Finding a pool of known teens to go on a next trip

## **F. Funding**

- Lack of funds to continue to provide as many scholarships

- Finding times to do fundraising

#### **G. New Needs**

- People from Central America who live here needing support