

# Mission Trip Survival Guide



Hope for Nicaragua

I would like to dedicate this excellent guide and give all due credit to its author, Dr. Kim Campbell. Dr. Campbell is currently serving the Lord in Thailand.



This guide is full of good, useful and important information – please read through it entirely. Only a few minor updates and edits have been made so this is largely all the original work of Dr. Campbell and I can't thank him enough for all the time, work and Spirit-filled consideration that he put into this guide. Thank you to Kim and his wife Karen for their labor in the love of Christ and for being such an important part of my first mission trip to Nicaragua.

The Hope for Nicaragua team will be stronger and more effective by taking all of this to heart.

- *Eric Paulsen*

## Mission Trip Survival Guide

After my wife's and my first mission trip to Nicaragua, we took time to reflect on the trip – what we had seen the Lord do through and also to us. It truly was an amazing experience!

We also thought of the things that wish we had known in advance. For the first couple of days in Nicaragua, we were a bit disoriented and spent a considerable amount of mental energy just learning how to do basic things. To spare others that strain and to better prepare new missionaries, we have developed this “survival guide”. We hope the lessons we and other “veterans” pass along help both new and experienced missionaries be more effective in the field.

### Overview of the Mission

To give a broad idea, you will be a member of a team of Christians who will spend 8 days in travel and ministry on a medical evangelism trip to a Central American town or village. You will spend most of the first and last day in travel. You will spend the first and the last two nights at the BMDMI mission house in Managua. You will spend the other five days sharing, in many different ways, the Good News of Jesus Christ. Each day in the field will be between 12 and 16 hours of near-constant activity ministering and witnessing to thousands of people.

The climate is tropical with 90+ degree days, 70 degree nights and, 90+% humidity. The town in which you will minister will be a poor, rural, third-world town, likely without paved streets or sidewalks. We often set up in and minister out of the local school, which may not have modern toilets; safe, drinkable water; electricity; air conditioning; or hot water (These luxuries are available first and the last two

nights at the mission house in Managua). Conditions are basic if not primitive. Despite the conditions, you will be well cared for with pure, safe drinkable water, satisfying food, safe housing, and well equipped, experienced leadership. BMDMI has experienced field personnel whose reason for existence is to assist missions such as ours in all phases of the week's work.

This work of ministry is perhaps one of the most joyous and blessed experiences of your Christian life. You and your message are the testimony of the reality of Jesus Christ, and you will have the honor and delight of having the Holy Spirit work through you to glorify Jesus and give honor to the Father.

## Preparation

### Spiritual preparation

The most important things to prepare are your heart and spirit. There are myriad details that can distract you from what's really important – being prepared for the Living God to work *through* you. While God the Father can work through donkeys (see Numbers 22:21-35) and even pagan kings, His preferred vehicle to reveal Himself to the lost is a faithful servant, whose life reflects His character. Long before others read a page of Scripture, they will read you.

The mission field is a spiritual battleground. The Bible clearly tells us about angelic forces that influence and impact people. Those powers will do all they can to hinder the work of ministry. They can incite discouragement, fear, panic, depression, worry, antagonism, and conflict; they do so by targeting your (and others) *flesh*, those remaining sins, immaturities, and weaknesses that have yet to be submitted to the grace and lordship of The Master, Jesus Christ. Like any good soldier, prepare yourself!

If you are practicing a specific and habitual sin, stop it now – right now – right this instant. A Holy God prefers to work through a holy person. Put away pornography, drugs, alcohol, adultery, shady, criminal or illegal practices, sexual impurity, and all those vices that offend the Lord. Put a stop to any occult practices, like witchcraft, sorcery, invoking spirits, fortune telling, and astrology; these practices reinforce the power that satan and his host have in your life.

Next, get a handle on your “relationship sins”. The relationships we have with others, especially with other Christians, are supposed to reveal the character of a holy, gracious, forgiving, loving God. The Apostle Paul says that the Christian life should not display, “... enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying ... (Galatians 5:19-21),....” anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another... (Col. 3:8-9). The mission field is an intense and tiring place, and when we’re stressed, we often get into conflict with others. How we handle that conflict tells the world (and the angels, too) volumes about the kind of Christian we are. If we are devouring one another with arguing, griping, whining, and pettiness, we wreck our testimony about God. A plane ride to the mission field will not mysteriously turn you into a stable, gracious, forgiving person. God has given you a way to prepare for the mission field *tomorrow* by living *today* as a faithful disciple of Jesus with your family, co-workers, fellow students, church members. Of all people, the field missionary should get an A+ for “plays well with others”.

Learn to enjoy the Scriptures (that’s right – enjoy). People love reading letters and e-mails from friends that tell us what they think, feel, and value. The Bible is exactly that; it is the story of the family of God as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit works in people and history. It tells us what He’s like,

what He enjoys, what He values, what's on His heart. Spend time everyday reading the letter from God, and as His Word works in you, He will be preparing you for Nicaragua and, beyond Nicaragua, for eternity.

Talk to God often – all the time – everyday. Cultivate a life of prayer that talks to your Father about everything, from the most trivial need to the “big picture” issues of knowing God deeply and personally and awaiting His Son from heaven. As you spend quality time with Him, you will learn to discern His voice and His leading. Then when you're in the field, decisions that please God will come much more easily.

Be real! People can smell phonies; they can see the hypocrite far more easily (and sooner) than the hypocrite can see him or herself. The best way to be real is to be accountable to some specific people on a regular basis. Not only can they help you deal with struggles, sins, and issues, God can use those people to grow you into a more mature and joy-filled believer, as they encourage you, share God's word with you, and pray for and with you.

The great missionaries of the Christian faith prepared themselves spiritually.

### Missionary Mentality

One of the most shocking things I heard before my first trip was the Team Captain say, “You're a missionary!” It's true! The short term missionary is just as much a missionary as the career overseas missionary, and what God accomplishes through a short-term missionary is not “second best”. In one week in 2005 the Strothmann team was used by God to minister to more than 5,000 people and to save over 1,000 – that is real impact! The time and effort that 60 people expend in five fourteen-hour days is equivalent to what one career missionary does in two plus years!

You are a missionary – not a tourist with the Gospel. Owning up to that reality will start a process in you that God will use to change you in some very fundamental ways. Be sure to thank Him for calling you and changing you!

### Finances

This is an expensive endeavor. The cost of this year's trip is \$1850.00 – not “chump change”. This sum does not include meals as you travel to and from Nicaragua, sightseeing cash, shopping money, or money for incidentals like soft drinks. Saving up this much may well require some changes in your spending and other personal priorities; be sure to thank God that He is changing your priorities to align with His priorities.

Almost all career missionaries have to raise their own support by asking God to give them people who will support them with time, prayer, and finances. So, it's more than OK to pray to the Lord to send you supporters for this work. After you've prayed about it, approach specific people and tell them of your desire and calling to serve the Lord. Ask them to help in any way they can, including financially. The Lord might well surprise you in how many people are willing to help.

There are all kinds of fund-raising methods. If you choose to use a fund-raising letter, make sure that it clearly presents your own heart's burden for this endeavor, and don't be bashful in telling others that you believe the Living God is calling you to this work. Don't overlook part-time jobs like yard work and baby-sitting to bring in extra funds.

Give your supporters options. If they can't support with money, perhaps they can donate items the team might need. God can even use old luggage, tools, cookware, food,

toiletries, and old sheets. God even used a pair of discarded boots to touch a man's life.

In addition to supporting you on the trip, they can support all of BMDMI's work, such as offsetting the cost of medicines and supplies, underwriting a Project Life patient, assisting in some of BMDMI's schools and pastors' training. Giving your supporters the "big picture" look enlists them more deeply in the ministry and gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to use each person uniquely.

Make your needs known to your church's leadership. They might, after prayer, be able to assist with direct support. They might also sponsor Church work projects (like car washes) that you and your team members can use as fundraisers.

It should be obvious that no missionary is to use guilt, intimidation, or browbeating to raise support. Be careful that emotional appeals don't step over the line.

## Passports

You are traveling to a foreign country to share Good News. It is absolutely required for you to have a passport. For more information, go to the U.S. State Department's website, [http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport\\_1738.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html).

Be aware you will need a *certified* copy of your birth certificate or some other forms of government documentation like a drivers license to prove you are who you say you are when you take your passport application to the clerk of court in your area for verification.

It takes six weeks to get the passport once all the documents are submitted; it may take two to four weeks to get your



certified birth certificate, so it could take two to three months to get a passport. This is especially true for minors under the age of 18. Getting a certified copy of your birth certificate may have a fee. Start today to get your passport, because you might be unpleasantly surprised how difficult and complicated it can get.

If you waited too late getting your passport, you can request an expedited passport.

Nicaragua does not require you to have a visa. Everything happens at the customs entry in Managua.

Before you leave the States make a color copy of the picture page of your passport. Keep an extra copy in your luggage.

When you arrive at the mission house, BMDMI will collect your passports for safe-keeping; carry the color copy out into the field, and leave your passport in Managua.

### Medical and Nursing Credentials

If you are a health professional, BMDMI will need copies of your medical or nursing licenses and academic diplomas, so you can be credentialed by the Nicaraguan government to practice in their country. Remember that the license must be your current license valid at the time of the mission trip. If your mission trip is in May, but your license expires in March, and you wait till the last minute to renew, you might find yourself in a bind. It's just best to renew your license as soon as you can.

### Health Issues

This is a spiritually, psychologically, and physically demanding mission. A person does not need to be

superman or a triathlete, but they have to be fit enough to endure the demands of the work and life in the field.

Foreign travel to a third world country requires immunizations. The U. S. State Department and the CDC recommend several vaccinations. (Refer to their website at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm#vaccines> for an extensive list of recommended vaccinations for Central America.) BMDMI, in our case, only requires a minimum of vaccines, because we spend such a brief time in the country and our exposure to the native environment is much more limited. They do require that your tetanus vaccination be current within the last ten (10) years. Vaccinations against Hepatitis A and B are recommended, especially for health professionals, but are not required. At your option, a flu shot, and, especially for those over 50 or those who have had a splenectomy, a pneumonia vaccination is in order. We do not require that missionaries be taking anti-malaria medications. Polio, rabies, typhoid, and yellow fever vaccinations are optional, expensive, and prone to serious adverse reactions.

The most frequent health risks on this trip are traveler's diarrhea (caused by impure water or poorly prepared foods), injuries, and poorly controlled illnesses and chronic health conditions that you brought with you from the States. BMDMI will provide bacteriologically pure water for drinking, facilities for sanitizing your own hands, safely prepared foods, and a team of physicians and nurses prepared to work in primitive conditions.

People who have health problems or active medical conditions must have them under good control and be actively involved and compliant with a plan of care developed and overseen by a licensed health professional. Individuals with poorly controlled, poorly monitored,

unstable, or potentially life-threatening medical conditions should reconsider going, as they may become a serious liability to the mission, rather than an asset.

All members of the team are required (and we do mean required) to have fully and accurately completed a health questionnaire. These will be reviewed by the Medical Director of the team in co-ordination with the Team Captain. The Medical Director may require additional medical information from you or your physician, including a medical certification from your physician that you are physically fit for the trip. It is possible that medically unstable individuals will not be allowed to go on the trip or participate in the mission.

Please note that if you are a blood donor, you cannot donate blood to the Red Cross for one year after returning from Nicaragua, because of their concern about malaria transmission.

### Language

You need not be fluent in Spanish to function well on the mission trip, as we hire many local Nicaraguan university students to be our translators. We often have over twenty available and can add more if needed. Each and every department of the team has one or more translators. The best are reserved for the evangelists and the medical and dental clinics, because of the difficulty in translating theological and medical words and concepts.

### Evangelism Training

You do not have to be a trained, professional soul winner to witness effectively. The Lord promises He will inspire your words, even if you are reading them cold from a booklet or tract. And you will find the Nicaraguans are very open to the Gospel. Our team will have a large contingent of trained, experienced, and gifted evangelists (just what you'd expect on a medical evangelism trip), but one of the beauties of this

trip is that everyone is an evangelist. Everyone is a missionary.

We all should be able to share the basics of why we are Christians. How did we meet Christ? What did and does salvation mean for you personally? What wins souls is your personal testimony delivered in a caring and clear manner. It is important that you develop the ability to give your testimony in a relatively short time, like three minutes. Lengthy, complex testimonials make the Gospel seem confusing, and people miss the simple Gospel message.

We must remember, too, that humility is greatly valued by the Lord and we must never say anything that would even hint that we are “superior” because we are Americans. In fact, many of the values in third world countries are superior to some of ours.

It is still an excellent idea to become familiar with several tools for evangelism – the Four Spiritual Laws, the “Roman Road”, the small evangelism beads, or the evangelism cube. Become familiar with them. Look for someone in your local church who is a seasoned evangelist and soul winner; it would please them to no end to train and mentor you in this area.

### Clothing

“Pack light”, is the best advice for a number of reasons. You will be spending an extended period of time in a tropical climate without air conditioning, but you will not have the time to acclimatize to it before you are working 14 – to – 16 hours days. The clothes should fit the environment.

First, BMDMI has a strict dress code, so that we do not offend the native Nicaraguans. You will be a guest in a foreign culture that doesn't share the same values that North

Americans have. (We are not there to convert them to become Americans; we are there to win them to Christ!) From the time you leave your home in the US until you return, men must wear long pants and women must wear dresses or longer skirts. (There is no slack or tolerance for someone who might be trying to flaunt their Christian freedom or is self-appointed to “teach someone a lesson”. It is unacceptable for anything other than the Gospel *alone* to be a stumbling block to a lost soul.) Refer to the Team Covenant you agreed to, or talk with the team captain if you need guidance. Use I Corinthians 9:19-23 as your model.

The only exception to the paragraph above is in the case of female medical and dental workers *once we are in the field seeing patients in clinic*. This is the only place where women may wear surgical scrubs and scrub pants. In the evenings when we are out in the community, like at evening worship, BMDMI, though, wants female health care workers to wear dresses and skirts.

Teenagers take special note! Skin tight, low rider, belly-exposing clothing can be deeply offensive to Nicaraguans (and to some Americans, as well). Similarly for young men, hip-hop, “gangsta” style clothing is not appropriate in the mission field or in Central America. Instead, why not apply 1 Peter 3:3-4, “ And let not your adornment be merely external...; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.” If you insist on “being an individual” or “standing up for your freedom”, consider 1 Corinthians 8:9 “But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” No exceptions, guys. We have yet to leave someone behind in the States at the airport because of their dress or clothing style, but there’s always a first.

Pack light-weight and light-colored clothes. They're cooler. Light, woven fabrics are cooler than knits. Many people pack a change of clothing for each day, but it's fine to wear the same clothes for a couple of days. After a couple of days, everyone is used to feeling and being sweaty, and unless you're really rank, you won't offend the Nicaraguans. The seasoned missionaries pack each day's attire in a large one- or two-gallon Zip Lock bag; after squeezing the excess air out, they pack easily. The bag can also protect your clean clothes from odors and dirt on your dirty clothes.

Sturdy shoes are a must, as Nicaraguan streets are unpaved, strewn with discarded (sometimes sharp) objects, animal wastes, and litter. Wear shoes with thick, protective soles and protective uppers. It helps if the shoes can "breathe" to reduce moisture, which can lead to blisters or infections. If you're going to be on your feet more than your stateside routine requires, wear the most supportive shoes you can find, or you may become incapacitated by sore feet. "Flip-flops" are only appropriate as shower shoes; they are inappropriate (read that as "silly") for street wear in Central America.

Instead of packing and hauling everything back, prayerfully consider leaving your used clothing in Nicaragua (at the mission home). Often the people are overjoyed to have nearly new clothing. If you do this, the items should be in good shape, not all worn out.

### Packing

"Pack light" also means that you should pack only what you need and no more. First, our air carrier to Nicaragua has weight restrictions of 50 pounds per checked luggage with a limit of two checked pieces per traveler. If you exceed those limits, rest assured your wallet will be much lighter after you pay some hefty surcharges. Second, no one is hauling your

luggage but you; don't pack what you personally can't lift, drag, or carry. Third, some Nicaraguans are offended (probably legitimately) by all the "stuff" we wealthy, affluent North Americans regard as "necessities". Fourth, packing too much stuff means you have to manage it all; that can interfere with your job as a missionary. Fifth, Nicaragua is a poor country; displays of excessive wealth can invite theft. Last, your last day in Nicaragua is a tourist day; allow some empty space to take gifts and souvenirs back home. Pack light! Note: Checked bagged fees may or may not apply at the time of travel, you will be responsible checked bag fees.

It is wise to pack in such a way as to avoid hauling all your stuff everywhere all the time and, to avoid losing critical items you have to be effective. What many do is pack both checked and (one) carry-on bags. Take a regulation sized carry-on *on the plane* with your next *two* day's clothing and with those things that you absolutely cannot afford to lose, such as your personal medical equipment (e.g., stethoscopes, diagnostic sets, medical texts, etc), *required personal medications sufficient for the entire week*, basic toiletries including feminine hygiene items, and anything else that is essential and irreplaceable in the field. The rest of your stuff with your remaining field and tourist - travel clothes is in the checked bag. In a worst case scenario if your checked luggage is lost or stolen, you will have packed enough to get by the entire week without impairing your effectiveness as a missionary.

Also, you don't have to haul everything everywhere; you can leave clothing and luggage at the mission house in Managua. Pack your checked luggage in such a way as to separate your "field clothing" from your "tourist clothing". When you land in Managua, transfer your "essentials" from the carry-on into the checked luggage with your field clothing, fill your carry-on with the end-of-the-week tourist

clothing, and leave the carry-on at the mission house. Take the checked luggage with your field clothing and essential items out to the mission field. When you return to Managua, you can live out of the carry-on luggage until you return to the US, and leave all your dirty gear and clothing in the checked luggage.

You need not (and should not) take all your cash and credit cards out into the field. BMDMI has a safe at the mission house; we will supply you with a ZipLock bag into which you can put your extra money and your passport. Remember to take your color copy of your passport page with you. An additional way to safeguard your cash is to carry it in some kind of money belt that you wear underneath your clothing. A fanny pack is a usable alternative, and many use them on the trip.

### Packing List

- *See the suggested packing list posted on the Hope for Nicaragua website.*

There are some items you should not bring. In general if it's something you'll worry about being stolen, don't bring it, as you don't need the distraction.

- ∅ Firearms. Illegal to import into foreign countries without tons of special permits. Unnecessary, as BMDMI and the Nicaraguan government supply security and sometimes arms guards. Doubly unnecessary, as the Lord is more than big enough to give you the protection He thinks you'll need.
- ∅ Expensive jewelry. It begs to be stolen and raises a socio-economic barrier between us and the Central Americans.



- Ø Irreplaceable personal items. Family keepsakes and personal pictures.
- Ø Tobacco in any form
- Ø Alcohol in any amount
- Ø Illegal drugs
- Ø Pornography
- Ø Racist or offensive materials
- Ø For medical people, do not pack sharps, scalpels, or surgical instruments. Preloaded syringes, like in our emergency bag items, can be taken through security after special screening.

The week before you travel, do a trial packing. Is your luggage big enough? Is it so heavy that you would be better off with two small bags rather than a giant heavy one? Do you really need an item? Is something missing? Plan ahead. Pack light. Use a scale to weigh your bags!

### Final Preparation

Before you travel, give yourself a “spiritual reality check”. Seek the Lord in prayer, to empower you as a willing servant and as a good follower of Christ. Pray for the situations you wish Him to put you in. Want to witness to someone on the airplane? Tell God. Want to develop a long-term friendship? Ask the Lord. Want wisdom? He’s generous to those who ask. Want to know if He wants you to serve full-time in the mission field? Talk to Him about it.

Involve others wiser than yourself in this reality check. Have a heart-to-heart talk with your accountability people. Visit with your pastor, and ask Him for his wisdom. Invite people you trust to speak straight with you. Teenagers talk and listen attentively to your parents.

Remember, the mission field is a spiritual battleground. Deal with known sin issues. Be strong in your relational skills as a Christian. Trust that the Lord is more powerful than anything you fear.

Seek the blessing of your congregation. Ask for a formal commissioning as a missionary from your church. You are a short-term missionary, not a second-rate one. Ask for their prayers; in fact, ask for a 24/7 prayer covering from the intercessors and spiritual warriors of your congregation. You would be amazed at what God does through prayer, but you'll never know until you and others pray. Pray believing He will do His work to glorify His Son!

## The Trip

You will have arranged to meet your team mates at the airport at a specific time. Be prompt, as your lateness can slow everyone else down. Know where you are supposed to meet your team. When you arrive, go to that spot and stay there. Avoid wandering around; just stay where you're supposed to stay.

Wear your BMDMI T-shirt (this is *required!*). Your BMDMI T-shirt readily identifies you as a part of the team and can assist you in ticketing and in security. It also invites questions from other travelers, which can become an opportunity to share your faith.

You may be given some yarn or ribbon to wrap around the handle of your luggage. This will help identify and retrieve it in Managua. You can also supply your own high-visibility markers.

When your leaders arrive, they will give some instructions how you should proceed through the airport. Everyone should know where to meet up after you go through security.

Take a moment for a final prayer. Pray that the Lord will get everything and everyone to Nicaragua, pray He will prepare the village for your arrival, pray for those who seem frightened or uneasy, pray for your leaders that they lead wisely and as Christ would lead. And bless the Lord well and with feeling for His calling you to serve Him on the mission field!

### Airport Security

At the last minute, if you only have one checked bag, your leader may give you an extra suitcase filled with last-minute supplies to take to Nicaragua. When the airlines clerk asks for your ID, and they ask if you were given anything last minute at the airport, answer, "No." This question is to see if some unknown stranger handed you something last minute to take on the plane; your leader is not a terrorist, stranger, or smuggler. Use common sense, and say, "No." Don't get "hyper-scrupulous".

Proceed through security. Before you enter security, step out of the way, and put your watch, cell phone, billfold, change, car keys, pens, metal belts, and anything else metal into your carry-on; this avoids scrambling to empty your pockets at the last minute. (Some put their valuables into a Zip Lock or a mesh bag, which then goes into their carry-on.) Be polite, cooperative, and respectful to the TSA screeners. If they ask you to do something but you don't understand, just tell them you're a little nervous and don't understand, and they will clarify things for you. Put your carry-ons on the belt into the scanner, take off your coats, shoes, and belts with metal fittings, and put them into the bins, which then go

though the scanner. Keep your boarding pass and passport *in your hands*; don't put them through the X-Ray scanner, because you have to show your Boarding Pass to the agent checking you through the metal detector. You do not have to hand carry your passport through the metal detector, but remember, for this brief period this is the only ID you have to prove who you are. It's OK to carry it along with your Boarding Pass.

If you're stopped for special screening, go along with the TSA agent and be cooperative. After you are released, catch up to your team.

It's a good idea for someone on your team with a list of each team member's name to be the first one through security. After this person clears security, he can stay right outside of security and check off each person who goes through and can watch for anyone who has trouble and may need assistance. This assures that everyone makes it through and doesn't become separated from the team.

### Airplanes

Air travel is both exciting and boring at the same time. It's also an opportunity to get to know others in your team. Make the most of this opportunity. Ask people why they wanted to come, what they're expecting the Lord to do, all those kind of in-depth questions.

When changing planes, stay together in small groups as much as possible. You can help prevent each other from getting lost. Remember that departure gates often change, so keep a close eye on that.

As we fly to Managua, Nicaraguan customs will require you to fill out a form required to enter the country. Do this on the plane; don't wait till you land.

## Arrival – the First Night

We will arrive in Managua, probably in the evening. We get our carry-on stuff off, and deplane through immigration. Hand the Immigration Agent your passport, the papers you completed on the plane, and a \$10.00 USD bill to pay your immigration fee. He will review your passport, and when he's done, will stamp your passport and return your documents to you. Exit the customs point to the luggage carousel.

When your luggage comes up, grab it, step out of the way from the carousel, and wait together as a group to be taken through customs. Do not load or get on the bus yet! Most of the time the Minister of Health of the Nicaraguan government (or his/her designee) is at the airport to personally expedite our way through customs. Real VIP treatment! After you clear customs, then take your stuff out to the bus, where some very agile, strong, healthy young men will put your stuff on top of the bus and secure it for the drive through Managua.

It takes about forty five minutes to get to the mission house. When we arrive, our stuff will be offloaded from the bus. As your bag comes off the bus, take your own bags and go to your assigned sleeping area. The BMDMI mission house is divided into designated sleeping areas for men and women. Each area has showers (with hot water) and flush toilets.

In Nicaragua, you will learn very early to never flush your toilet paper down the toilet. Nicaraguan plumbing often can't handle it. Instead, you will find a waste basket next to the toilet. Deposit your used paper there; it's a bit awkward or different, but everyone gets used to it by the second or third day in country.

Also, from this point on, do not drink the water, even at the mission house. Central American tap water has a much higher content of bacteria that your gringo intestine is not used to. Even small amounts can get you quite sick and incapacitate you for the entire trip. Don't drink tap water until you are back in the USA!

At some point, we will have dinner. Sometimes, we eat a late meal first; other times, we get our stuff into the rooms, choose beds, and freshen up before dinner. Before we eat, pay attention to the instructions about hand sanitizing. You will do this each and every time before a meal through the entire trip! Everyone will file past some basins with bleachy, soapy water; wash and rinse your hands in that solution, and then dry your hands with paper towels. This is your main protection against dysentery; learn well. The stomach you save may be your own! Now you're ready to eat.

After dinner we have a short meeting, pray, and then get to bed. This is a good time to repack your checked and carry-on luggage if you plan to leave your tourist clothes at the mission house.

## Day Two

We get up around 6 AM, enjoy the hot showers, have breakfast, have a devotion, review some policies and procedures, gather our stuff, use the bathroom, and then load up. Bring your luggage to the collection area or out to the bus, and the strong young men will take it from there. If you have long legs, grab an aisle seat, as these school buses are meant for school children with children's sized limbs.

When we arrive in the village, the team leaders will walk through the school compound and decide where to set everything up. The remainder of us can conduct a prayer-

walk as we walk through the town. Be sure to smile and say hello (even if in English) to the people who make eye contact with you.

BMDMI will have already unpacked our main equipment and supplies that we shipped earlier from New Orleans. The next challenge is to physically carry each box and item to the room in which it will be used – clinics, dental, eyeglass, pharmacy, health kits – and unpack it. When unpacking, don't be upset if you move things around a few times. Your leader is trying to set up the room for the entire week, this is a trial-and-error process. Be patient, be helpful, and pray for them!

We may gather for announcements and prayer, and then, if it's early enough in the day, begin the work. There will be an evangelistic church service, followed by people coming to the school to be seen in the clinics. This will start a process of a constant flow of people moving through the church and school. We plan about five church services a day, with 200 or more people per service – a thousand people a day. Then you will know what the disciples felt and thought when they looked out over the five thousand wondering how they were going to take care of all those people. But you will also know at the end of the day how capable to the Lord is to meet their need for help and your need for strength and love.

## In-Field Survival Skills

### Spiritual Survival

As said before, the mission field is a spiritual battleground. You will need (and want) to continue your spiritual discipline of conversing with God through prayer and reading His Word. Make and take time each morning to have a quiet time with your Lord, even if it means doing less in the mission.

Pray with others. When you're not immediately occupied look for others who have a few minutes of time, go someplace and pray for what's taking place before your eyes. Pray for the people, pray for the missionaries, pray for the people back home, and pray for the Lord to display His power and love. Pray for what he's doing in the tent ministry, in the street ministry, in the kitchen, with the veterinarians, with the bus drivers, in the schools, and in the hearts of the people of Nicaragua.

End the day with prayer and thanksgiving, asking Him for restful sleep and safety for all concerned.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless His Holy name.

### Intercultural Relationships

We arrive in Central America with two unspoken myths, but we're wrong. First, Nicaragua is not just like the United States, and second, people are not basically the same everywhere. This is a unique culture, and these people are different and have a different environment, values, and history. Our job is not to turn them into Americanized Christians.

Watch your facial expressions and body language because that is what you will be communicating 24/7, especially for those who don't speak the same language. Look at people! Make eye contact. Take off the sunglasses and let them see your eyes! Don't spend time talking (or boasting) about the US, our prosperity, our values, etc.; talk about Jesus Christ.

Latin culture generally maintains a smaller, closer, more intimate personal space. Touching, leaning on someone, and a 'kiss' on the cheek are very common. (Actually the



kiss is, generally speaking, in the air... touching cheeks.. and a kiss in the air *beside* the cheek). People stand and sit much closer to each other; they do not allow the personal separation distance that we do in the US. They are also quieter; what seems a normal voice volume to us is very loud to them, so tone it down.

Latin culture places a huge premium on politeness and respect. For instance, when people enter the clinic and come to my station, I stand, step forward to them with a big smile, grasp their hand with my left hand over our clasped hands, and respectfully and joyously tell them how honored saying, “Mucho gusto conocerle” (“I am delighted to make your acquaintance!”) If you don’t know any Spanish, then at least know “Gracias” (Thank you), “Por favor” (Please), and “De nada” (Loosely translated for “you’re welcome”).

Do not make empty promises! We often mouth meaningless phrases of commitment to each other that we have no earthly intention of keeping (e.g., “Let’s do lunch.”); they’re just our way of talking. But if you invite a Nicaraguan to look you up sometime when they’re in the US, count on it, They Will!!!!

We are guests in their country; be a gracious and grateful guest. Remember, the accommodations and food you may consider second class may be the best those to whom you are ministering have to offer. They know that Americans are used to good things, and it will be a tremendous testimony to them to see thankfulness in us. Be careful of any American smugness. The Nicaraguan workers aren’t our “help”; treat them with kindness and respect.

## Water

The water in Nicaragua is contaminated with a higher load of bacteria than what we have here in the US. If it gets in your mouth, you will (I guarantee) get sick. You can clean clothing in it, shower and shampoo in it, but do not drink it, brush your teeth in it (or even rinse your toothbrush), or get it in your mouth in any way at any time. This includes the tap water at the mission house in Managua.

BMDMI will supply more than enough filtered, pure water to take care of the entire team for the entire time in the field. Only drink this water, bottled soft drinks, or bottled water with an intact seal; if the seal is broken, don't drink it.

## Dehydration

The most common medical problem we will see among the team members and their leaders is dehydration. You will be working 12 to 16 hours days in a climate that you have not adjusted to. Unless you work outside, like a rancher or construction worker, you are not used to this and you will not drink as much fluid as you need. Very soon, you will become tired and weak. You'll be tempted to think that you're just working too hard, when in fact you're dehydrated.

Drink fluids constantly. We will have an unlimited supply of ice cold fluids, usually water or dilute GatorAde. You will need to drink one to two gallons (that's right, gallons) of liquid each day to sustain yourself in this heat and humidity. It is not weakness to give your body (that God created) what it needs. Keep soft drinks, coffee, and tea to a minimum, as these fluids dehydrate you.

We will have one or two (or possibly more) team members whose sole job is to replenish your water bottles. Take heed

to their encouragement. They are instructed to report to the Team Captain or Medical Director any person who is not keeping pace with their fluids and seems in the least bit ill. So drink up. To coin a phrase, “Six liters a day keeps the Doctor away!”

### Keeping Cool

Keeping your body temperature in a safe and comfortable range will be a challenge. First, we’re not acclimatized and won’t be there long enough to really adapt to the environment. We’re habituated to our Yankee air conditioning.

To keep cool, keep hydrated. The fluids you drink will be evaporated through your skin which will cool you off. Next, get out of the sun at any opportunity, even for a few seconds. Light-weight, light-colored, broad-brimmed hats help immensely when you are out in the sun. Find a breeze, whether it’s from the wind or an electric fan. Our maintenance guys will be setting up numerous box fans all over the compound. This will help a lot. If you can, sleep on the verandas of the buildings; you’ll get some nice night time breezes. Some people use special neckerchiefs that have a cold gel in them; bring one if you have trouble with heat.

But staying hydrated is the number #1 way to keep cool; don’t forget it!

### El baño

The toilet or bathroom is called in Spanish by various terms – el baño, los servicios, are a couple of the terms. Using the bathroom was my first big challenge in Nicaragua. It was a school bathroom with a flush toilet, but the flushing system didn’t work and there was no running water.

If we are fortunate enough to have these toilets, this is how they flush: In the bathroom you should see a large barrel of water with a bucket floating in it. After you do your business, pour two or three gallons of water directly into the toilet bowl. This will start the characteristic swirling action, and flush things down the toilet. Remember to discard your toilet paper in the trash receptacle, not in the toilet.

If we are in a primitive village, we may have to use outhouses or even latrines. First, consider that these are very much like the American Porta-Potty, except without the chemicals. When possible, our maintenance man will secure and clean a separate toilet exclusively for the team's use. (We also take along our own "Gringo" toilet seat which will be an added luxury to the outhouse experience.) That toilet may have a padlock on it so our team can ensure it is maintained as clean as 'possible.' We will provide toilet paper and air freshener (It's debatable as to which is more important). You will need a flash light from dawn to dusk (and a "headlamp" is helpful to be hands free). Often the outhouses also include an assortment of bugs and insects so you may want to be sure you're using your repellent. One plus...you don't have to worry that you might forget and flush the toilet paper. Anything goes in the hole. There may (or may not be) a piece of wire or twine to lock the door from the inside. If it has a 'lock', be sure to use it, especially if it's a windy day!

Believe it or not, many people get constipated. First, you have had a major change in diet. Next, you may get behind in your fluid intake. And the less than sparkling conditions of the Central American bathrooms may deter you from using the toilet regularly. This adds up to constipation. Consider bringing some Milk of Magnesia; be sure to keep your fluids up and get a lot of fiber in your diet by eating more of the excellent Nicaraguan fresh fruits prepared by our staff.

## Showers

The most pleasant surprise I had in Nicaragua was the portable showers that BMDMI set up for our use. They are large folding, rectangular, free-standing steel shower stalls, fed through hoses by an electric pump that is in the bottom of some large water barrels. The shower heads have either a twist fitting to turn the water on and off, or they have a squeeze handle, like a water sprinkler to regulate the flow.

If the electric motors are off, look for a power strip with electric cords plugged into it. Turn the power strip on and listen to hear the motor start up. If you're the last person to shower, turn the power strip off.

The water is not heated. This was a luxury at the end of a hot, sweaty day, and it was the ultimate "waker-upper" in the cool of the morning. You can shower twice a day if you like.

The showers are unlighted, and we usually finish work after sunset. Bring your flashlight (or headlamp), and use that for light in the shower. You might be able to balance the light, or leave it lying on its side. You might be able to hang it from some small metal rods at the top of the stalls, if your light has a loop or ring at its base.

## Shaving and brushing

Men, it really is possible to shave in a Styrofoam cup. Get some hot water from the kitchen, moisten your beard, apply your cream, and rinse the razor in the hot water in the cup. You can then rinse off the residue with plain "unsafe" water, and dry as usual. Amazing!

Likewise, a cup of cold safe water is enough for brushing your teeth and rinsing afterwards.

## Meals

No one ever goes hungry. The food is excellent and very satisfying. Most of it is American style food, but we supplement with lots of local, Central American fruits and vegetables. The cooks are meticulous about cleaning the fresh foods to avoid contamination and dysentery.

The team captain will announce when meals are available. Most likely we will eat in staggered shifts, depending on when the work in your particular section starts, so expect meals to be available for two or more hours each meal.

Remember to wash/rinse your hands in the bleachy soap solution. Remember whose intestine you are trying to protect. Remember, too, if you choose to ignore this procedure and get sick, the Medical Team will have to take care of you, which pulls them away from the work of the mission.

## Illness and Injuries

Don't be a hero! At the first sign of an illness or immediately after an injury, head to the medical clinic. And get treated. Early treatment when the problem is simple avoids dealing with a neglected, complicated, intensive problem. We have medicines, antibiotics, intravenous fluids, and everything else (actually a lot more) than your family doctor's office has. But trying to play John (or Jane) Wayne means your getting far sicker than you needed to be, and the medical team working far harder and longer than they needed to. They're glad to help, so take them up on their offer of early treatment.

We reward informers! If you know of someone who is ill or injured but hasn't reported to "sick call", report them to the Team Captain or the Medical Director. You remain anonymous but deeply appreciated.

Here is the place where being in good health pays off and why the Medical Director screens every health form. The people who get the sickest the easiest are those whose general health is poor, either because it just is or because the person did not manage their health well. So use the months preceding the trip to get those chronic medical conditions under good control!

### Sleeping

At the end of the day, many of you will push aside the supplies and tables in your work area and make your bed in your station, often right on the floor. We will also have both a men's-only and a women's-only dorm-style sleeping room if you don't bed down in your work station; in the stations, we segregate into men's and women's areas there, too. We will do our best to set up curtains and partitions for privacy. Whether you use the BMDMI foam pads, your own air mattress, or a cot, you will be responsible for setting up your own bed. In the morning, the first thing you should do is lean your mattress up against a wall to get it out of the way, set up your work table, and get ready for the day's work.

The rooms can be fairly warm, despite the electric fans that will run all night. Some sleep outside on the verandas, as it's a bit cooler. Wear shoes or sandals any time you are up, especially if you go to the baños, to avoid sharp items or insects.

Respect your room mates. Extended late conversations, audible music, etc. should be moved outside to allow others to sleep. Remember your ear plugs if you are a light sleeper. If someone's snoring is causing you a problem, tactfully discuss it with them in the morning.

## Beggars

It will break your heart to see the poverty in Central America. Know for certain that you will be approached by people, usually children, begging for money or other items, often food. It is in their and your best interest to politely decline. If you give, you will be swarmed by innumerable other children or people, all clamoring for more than any one hundred people can give. Your generosity actually reinforces begging as a behavior, which is counterproductive.

If you want to give anything, give the Gospel. Tell them you have something much more valuable than gold or silver or U.S. dollars; tell them about Jesus.

## Attitude

**Be very much on guard about your attitude;** the wrong attitude can be a turn off so severe that someone will be unable to hear the Gospel.

No whining, griping, or pouting about *anything* – not the food, not the heat, not how wonderful air conditioning is back home, not the people, not your team members, not the leadership, nor their decisions. This is the place to heed and diligently apply Paul's words in Ephesians 4:1-3, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Be sure to cut your leaders some slack; they're thinking on their feet and will not make every decision the way you would. Learn to be a good follower!



How we treat each other and the Nicaraguans is critical! This is our opportunity to do for them what God in Christ did and does for us. Just love 'em. Value them. Honor them. Make eye contact. Be their equal. Respect them. Listen to them. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Never regard them as "domestic help" or as second class citizens; God is no respecter of persons.

Your smile and the joy on your face tell people that your message is true and that our God is a real miracle worker. John 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Be aware that your leaders on this team will speak with you if your attitude is harming your co-workers or the mission.

## The Last Day

On the last day, we will work a little over half the day. As your area concludes seeing patients, begin packing up your area under the direction of your leader. It helps a lot if you have packed your personal luggage right after you got up in the morning. When you're told, haul your stuff to the designated area, so the fit, young, agile men can load it onto the bus to Managua.

Look around to see if you can help someone else.

Try to stay out of the way of those working or loading. Find a cool, out-of-the-way place, and hang out there. Be sure to stay hydrated, but be sure to keep your bladder empty. What could be more miserable than a three (or more) hour bus ride with a full bladder?!

We should leave the village by three 'clock. When we arrive at the mission house, get your bags, get something cold to drink, and head to the showers. Air conditioning never will have felt so good! Change out of the scrubs; they're done for the trip, and get into your regulation BMDMI street clothes.

We have dinner and a worship time, and then off to bed.

## Tourist Day

We have a lot of flexibility on our last full day in Managua. Many people go shopping, eat at a local Nicaraguan restaurant (definitely not Tex-Mex), or go up to a volcanic lake outside of Managua. Or you can just hang out at the mission house and rest, read, think, and pray.

In the evening we have a celebration with a big meal and testimonies. You can dress up festively, if you like, as this is a special time.

It's best to get to bed early, as we leave the next morning for the airport at around 4:00AM (ouch!).

## Re-entry

We're awakened *very* early to load up and go to the airport. We often get there before the ticket agents do, so stay calm and relaxed. After clearing security and customs, the Managua airport has a great place for breakfast (on your own). Rest as you can, and be ready to board when the flight is called.

The flight back is a wonderful time for reflection, and sometimes it's best to think out loud. Ask a trusted friend to

“de-brief” you about what you’ve seen and how this trip has been changing you. Spend some time in prayer, thanking Him and asking Him what’s next.

It’s hard preparing for the shock of returning to the United States. So this is what they mean by “culture shock”. People react in different ways to our nation’s wealth and how much we squander on affluence and vices. Some are saddened, some are angry, some are thankful, and most are just a bit disoriented. Be aware that there’s no one right answer, but make allowances for other’s viewpoints. Listening doesn’t mean agreement, but it is still listening. Isn’t the diversity of the Body wonderful?!

## Home at Last

As we proceed through the airports, other team members from other cities will split off to go to their own flights home. It is a mixed time of sadness and satisfaction at having this person impact your life but having to leave them.

The flight home for me was filled with promise and deep joy. I had been part of a group of people who were called by God to go out into the fields white with harvest. The Lord Jesus tells us, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." Matthew 9:37-38. *You* were the answer to another Christian’s prayer that God send workers into the harvest; He sent you!

Make a special point to have dinner or coffee or some open-ended face-to-face encounter with everyone who sponsored you. Bring your pictures (and any others the team members have shared). This meeting tells your sponsors

how the Lord used *them* in the harvesting. You will have lots of stories to tell, and because of this, lots of praise will ascend to our God. Perhaps, the stories you tell will inspire someone else to go into the harvest field.

## Feedback

The Team Captain and those who helped him lead will want your feedback about the trip. What was good, and what was bad? What and how could something be improved? Make it a point to share your thoughts and ideas, because this helps us prepare for a year later when we will go to Central America at the Lord's calling.

Be sure to give your Father in heaven some feedback, too. You will come back a changed person, and I am sure He'd like you to tell Him all about it. He's that kind of Father.