



SESSION TWO :



We journey in community

In spite of recurring natural disasters, the home and village life of Nicaraguan families includes lively progress out of poverty. Facing our own disasters, we yearn for the same quality of life in our own families!

BIBLE CONNECTION

“FOR JUST AS THE BODY IS ONE AND HAS MANY MEMBERS . . . SO IT IS WITH CHRIST. FOR IN THE SPIRIT WE WERE ALL BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY . . . AND WE WERE ALL MADE TO DRINK OF ONE SPIRIT.” (I CORINTHIANS 12:12-13) For the Corinthian Christians their common journey in faith was always a marvel, a gift of the Spirit in spite of the disasters of their daily lives. So, too, are the communities of God’s people who live in Nicaragua.

THEME

The backs-and-forths of life bring us face to face with disasters. Alone, we are consumed and washed aside by the sheer force of circumstance or evil. Together we stand solid, joined in work and worship. When the Spirit joins us together with Jesus Christ, our community of faith is not easily displaced in its identity or in its mission.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this session, participants:

- A. Demonstrate how their individual choices affect others.
- B. Find similarities with Nicaraguans recovering from natural and human disasters.
- C. Consider how they can honor the gift of God’s created natural world.
- D. See themselves as part of the “body of Christ,” a powerful force for God’s purposes in the world.



TEACHER BACKGROUND

A cruel comedian might talk about Nicaragua as a “disaster magnet.” Throughout its history, this largest country in Central America has suffered human and natural disaster of every kind. Colonial oppressions and occupations, corrupt governments, civil wars and the horror of massive natural calamities – earthquakes, volcanoes, forest fires and hurricanes – intermix and compound the difficulty of Nicaraguan society to prosper and grow.

A wiser and kinder observer might also note how, throughout their history, the people of Nicaragua have persevered. Oppressors and occupiers — notably Spanish, British and American governments and businesses — have been thrown off or their interests subverted. Tin-god rulers and iron-fisted dictators have been overthrown, with great and lingering costs. Countrywide initiatives to overturn poverty have turned the tide of misfortune and spread hope through the country. With considerable grit and determination, Nicaragua has recovered from earth-shakings, wind-batterings, forest-burnings, flood-buryings and lava-spewings.

The love and care of people around the world have assisted this tenacious people in their efforts to live beyond poverty. Especially in recent history — the past two decades — Nicaragua has been blessed by the forgiveness of overwhelming international debt (incurred by its former, corrupt governments), massive relief aid in times of international disasters, the presence of observant and caring members of the international community and continuing at this time, the work of faith-based relief and development organizations such as Lutheran World Relief.

In this session, participants see how the community of God’s people — in this case the people of the ELCA working with LWR — takes on the challenge of combating poverty and hunger in this country. The work is God’s own, and so we partner with Christ’s Spirit. We are blessed with this mission!

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

To get ready to lead this session, you might engage these tasks:

1. Familiarize yourself with the entire OWP: Nicaragua curriculum. That might mean watching all the video segments or reading this entire curriculum.
2. If you were not part of the leadership team for the introductory or previous sessions, review their contents or talk to one of the leaders for those sessions.
3. Read this session plan carefully, choosing the activities that you will use. As you read, plan how you will form a learning event that fits the interests and goals of your congregation.
4. Update the “Dollars and Dones” progress chart to reflect the current totals.
5. Preview the [video segment](#) for this session, making notes about its content and follow-up conversation. Prior to the session, double-check the video projection equipment to make sure that the viewing of the video will take place without equipment or software problems.
6. Write on the chalkboard or newsprint the questions you will use to follow the video segment.
7. Gather or photocopy materials for the activities you choose, in amounts sufficient for the group of participants you expect to attend.

8. If you choose, research more background on the realities of Hurricane Mitch. You can learn more by viewing the Summer, 1999 edition of MOSAIC, the ELCA video magazine, and the segment, "After Mitch: The Long Road Back." Order the video at 800.638.3522, ext. 6009 or visit the MOSAIC Web site at www.elca.org/co/mosaic/summer99.html.
9. Rehearse your version of the introductory activity, "Imagining disaster," so that it is believable and stays within time limits.
10. Sort the pseudo-"building materials" into bundles for the exercise, "Home, sweet home." Make sure that some of the bundles have ample supplies and that most have only flattened cardboard boxes, plastic drop cloths and rope.
11. Using newsprint or the chalkboard, prepare the following "market list" for the activity, "Can you live on \$2 a day?":

ITEM	COST IN CÓRDOBAS (C\$)
1 lb. rice	C \$4
1 lb. beans	C \$8
1 liter cooking oil	C \$10
1 tube toothpaste	C \$12
Small cup of coffee	C \$1.5
1 lb. sugar	C \$3
1 lb. tomatoes	C \$8
1 lb. onions	C \$8
1 lb. cabbage	C \$2
1 lb. potatoes	C \$8
1 liter milk	C \$7
1 soft drink	C \$5
New T-shirt	C \$33
1 bar of soap	C \$10
1 lb. chicken	C \$11
1 dozen eggs	C \$28

MATERIALS NEEDED

- 🌐 Video player or DVD player with projector and screen
- 🌐 Materials for friendship bracelets (See session plan for Introductory session.)
- 🌐 Materials for the "Home, sweet home" activity, including:
 - several rolls of duct tape
 - two 50-foot lengths of sturdy rope
 - 10-20 pieces of 1x2-inch or 2x4-inch scrap lumber (some as long as 6 feet)
 - 4-6 large cardboard cartons (such as appliance boxes)
 - 3 plastic drop cloths or picnic table cloths
 - other miscellaneous building materials (roofing shingles, large clamps, paving stones or bricks)

- 🌐 “Market list” copied onto chalkboard or newsprint
- 🌐 Lined notebook paper, pencils/pens, one each per participant
- 🌐 Handout, *“After the disaster,”* one copy per participant
- 🌐 Fine line water-based felt-tip markers, one or more sets per table group
- 🌐 Paper punch, single or three-hole
- 🌐 Scissors, several pairs per table group

SESSION AT A GLANCE

Introductory activity: Imagining disaster	(10 minutes)
Video segment and follow-up: Watch out!	(15 minutes)
Content activity: Home, sweet home	(20 minutes)
Connection activities:	(25 minutes)
• This is a disaster!	(15 minutes)
• Can you live on two dollars a day?	(10 minutes)
Travel journals	(10 minutes)
Concluding devotions: Posture prayers	(10 minutes)
Total session	(90 minutes)



As participants arrive

Greet participants as they arrive, pointing out the location for the collection container for “Dollars and Dones”. Direct participants to a table, and encourage them to spend time reviewing the entries in their travel journals, or working on their friendship bracelets. (By now some participants have finished their first bracelet, and may want to work on several others.)



Introductory activity: Imagining disaster

(10 minutes)

When all participants have arrived, welcome them briefly — especially newcomers. Introduce the following exercise with a word or two about imagination, its power and its ability to evoke reality. In the following experience, participants will imagine themselves as victims of a hurricane in Nicaragua, as it is happening around them.

As you turn room lights off — or to their lowest level — ask participants to get comfortable in their chairs and to quiet their minds by closing their eyes and imagining themselves traveling to the northern reaches of Nicaragua.

Take participants through the imaging experience using the following story. Adjust story details to match the capacities of participants, particularly young children, to understand the terror of a devastating hurricane.

In the middle of Mitch

At first Mama and Papa said it was just another heavy rainstorm. But I could tell differently. This time the wind and rain sounded angry and persistent, like an animal trying to break into our little house. Our house? It's made of concrete. Pretty simple inside; sturdy outside, though.

When the storm first hit, we stayed inside as long as we could. The wind was dangerous, Mama said. But soon we had to use the bathroom outside, and so we got soaked every time we went to our little outhouse. When the door opened, the wind pushed the rain in like a cloud of mosquitoes. It didn't take long before everything was soaked. The floors were slick with the rain and mud we tracked in with our shoes. The wind blew rain into our bedroom and our kitchen. Water everywhere. Outside the rain kept pouring like a wall of water, trying to pound our house into the mud. Our yard turned into a big pond. The pond was growing quickly.

That afternoon, we looked outside right before it got dark and we saw that our outhouse had blown away. Our neighbor's roof was down the road, just a pile of tin sheets. How long would it be before we lost our roof? Papa brought us all to the center of our house when he heard the first trees start to crash down outside. Big trees, old trees. We had climbed them when it was sunny, but now they were ugly and dangerous.

The power had gone out hours ago, and now it was night. We were in darkness. Our matches were dry so we could light some candles, but they kept getting blown out by the wind. The sound of the wind! Never stopping, furious at us, trying to blow down our house and hurt us. Our dog Pepe whimpered in the corner; I think the noise hurt his ears. We didn't know what happened to our neighbors. We couldn't hear anything outside except the wind and the trees falling. I think I heard some yelling in the distance. My baby brother was crying all the time; I think he was more hungry than we were. "Dear God," I thought, "When will this stop?"

(Pause)

It's morning now; we didn't sleep except a little here and there. I think Papa and Momma stayed awake every minute, though, because they look very tired. Frightened, too, but they won't say so. Our roof stayed on – I'm glad Papa is a carpenter and built our house right. But three of our windows got hit by flying tree limbs, now the rain is blowing into our back room – that's where I sleep with my three brothers – and into our kitchen. We won't be able to cook any food at all for awhile. It's still raining. Hard.

The wind has slowed down now, and so we have looked outside. Trees and mud everywhere – I think there was a landslide yesterday, because I can't see the houses that used to be up on the hillside. There's a big gash there, like a big hand cut away a slice of the mountain. I can see trees upside down in the mud, some dead animals half-buried. And – I'm afraid to look again – I think I see some arms and legs sticking out of the muddy dirt! I think they're dead people!

The rain won't stop – it's getting stronger -- and now Papa says we have to leave because he thinks the river is going to flood our town. We put on our plastic ponchos – but we know they won't keep us dry because we haven't been dry for two days now. Mama says we'll have to walk about three miles to the next village where her cousin Lupe and husband Xavier live. Perhaps it will be safe there, Papa says. We'll have to go overland, because he's sure the bridges have been washed out. Papa knows the old trail he used to walk when he was my age.

We get ready to leave and walk out into the rain. It hits us like a waterfall, like it wants to drown us while we're standing up. We're all drenched within seconds. My baby brother is still crying. When I look back, I notice that our big coconut tree is leaning on the corner of our house and one wall is cracked. I wonder: Dear God, when will this rain stop? Will we ever come back to our home? Where will we live? Then I think: My mother and father and all of us children – we're still alive. We're together. I thank God and start walking.

After a moment of silence, ask participants to open their eyes slowly. Take a little while before speaking, and keep the lights turned down. In a quiet voice, ask participants their reactions to this exercise, using questions such as these:

- 🌐 What were you feeling as you heard the story, “In the middle of Mitch?” Why?
- 🌐 What frightened you the most?
- 🌐 What gives you hope or courage as you think about this family?
- 🌐 What have been your experiences with natural or human-caused disasters?

Note that in today's session, participants will think about the ways in which Nicaraguans face disasters together, and how Lutheran World Relief efforts keep them moving forward with their lives, even though hurricanes, earthquakes, forest fires and volcano eruptions are possible.



Video segment and follow-up: **Watch Out! - Before and After Disasters in Nicaragua (15 minutes)**

When time has elapsed, and with the lights still low, show the [video segment](#) for this session, which outlines the varieties of disasters – including forest fires and soil depletion – that Nicaragua experiences and how LWR projects help people diminish the effects of these calamities. When the video has finished, direct participants to talk with each other in table groups about any of these matters:

- 🌐 What did the video show that is one of the worst things you could imagine happening to anyone?
- 🌐 What in the video is a sign of God's people working together? (Hint: Sometimes “signs” are small and easy-to-miss.)
- 🌐 How does someone “prevent a disaster?”
- 🌐 Who in the video would you like to talk to? What would you talk about?
- 🌐 What amazed you in the video?
- 🌐 What truth does this video segment prove?



Content activity: **Home, sweet home**

(20 minutes)

Tell participants that they have seen enough about disasters. Now it's time to rebuild! In this exercise, each table group becomes a "family," and you will provide them with building materials. Distribute the bundles of building supplies, being careful to award most groups only the most basic supplies — plastic drop clothes, cardboard boxes and rope — and giving only a few groups a full range of supplies.

Explain that on your signal groups will have only five minutes to build their new "homes" after an earthquake. For the purposes of this exercise, the homes should satisfy two criteria:

- 🌐 It should keep them safe from the sun and the rain.
- 🌐 The whole family should be able to sleep in the home.

Start participants on the task immediately, without time for further questions or discussion. As families work, circulate among them, encouraging them to solve their problems with tenacity and hope. They should make the best of what they have so that their family has a home quickly.

At the end of the five minutes, bring the work to a halt. Have families briefly describe their new homes, and how they went about building them. After a time of sharing, debrief the experience with any of these questions and comments:

- 🌐 How did you feel about the exercise?
- 🌐 What was fair, and what was unfair?
- 🌐 If some families complain about uneven distribution of home supplies, ask whether they asked other families to share.
- 🌐 Comment on instances of selfishness and of generosity. If any "families" decided to work together, ask their reasons.
- 🌐 What might this exercise have to do with the people of Nicaragua? (How does it connect to what we saw in the video?)
- 🌐 What might this experience show in terms of the relationship between the people of Nicaragua and the people of the United States?
- 🌐 If you were a staff member of LWR or one of its partners in Nicaragua, what would you do in situations like the one you've just experienced?



Connection activities:

(25 minutes)

This is a disaster!

(15 minutes)

Form table groups of between eight and ten individuals. Explain that in the activity they will have the chance to decide together what they might take with them from their homes in the case of an imminent forest fire. Because this activity moves quickly, young children may want to partner with older children, youth, or adults.

Distribute paper and pens/pencils to all participants. Ask participants to quickly list all the possessions they would take with them to a safe place if a forest fire was coming. Ask them to put no more than 10 items on their lists. One note: because they will be traveling to safety with other folks, evacuation space will be limited. So each partner will need some help in deciding what to take. After about two minutes, move through the rounds of this experience quickly.

Round One: Ask participants to trade their list with a partner. Directions: “Partners, take off the list two things that are not essential for survival.”

Round Two: Partners exchange the lists back. Directions: “We just found out that the evacuation must begin within the next few minutes. Cross off two more items that you will leave behind because the forest fire is threatening our town.”

Round Three: Partners trade papers one more time. Directions: “Cross off three more things because they won’t be helpful to others.”

Round Four: Direct table groups to reform around their tables, with partners still holding on to each other’s list. Ask the partners to share with the group the three things that are left on the list they are holding. Now comes the hard question: Ask the table group to decide quickly whether the participant who first formed that list would survive the natural disaster.

Can you live on two dollars a day?

(10 minutes)

Most families in Nicaragua live their lives on less than \$2 US per day. This is all the money they have to ensure survival for their families. For purposes of this experience, the rate of exchange will be C\$10 (10 córdoba oros - the national currency of Nicaragua) for 1\$ US. With that rate of exchange, you would have about C\$140 for the whole week. (At the time of this writing, the actual rate of exchange is about C\$16 to \$1 US.)

Refer participants to the “market list” you have prepared. Ask: If the people at this table were your family and only one of you was working for wages, what food would you buy for the week? What would be left for other expenses? If there is time, ask the group to reflect on the possibility that one person in the family gets sick and you need to spend \$10C on medicine for the week. What other unexpected “disasters” might greet your family in a week? What would you take off your list? How would that impact the family?





Travel journals

(10 minutes)

Distribute felt-tip markers, scissors and copies of the handout, *“After the disaster,”* and ask participants to begin completing the travel journal page using the directions printed on the handout.

While participants complete this session’s travel journal page, give some time to FaithQuest groups for reporting on their work. Save time also for a progress report on the “Dollars and Dones” appeal, complete with changing the progress chart to reflect the new contribution totals.



Concluding devotions: Posture prayers

(10 minutes)

The posture of prayer indicates our feelings towards God as we pray. Some praying individuals fold their hands, others lift them up. Still others hold the hands of others as they pray in groups. That’s the posture you’ll assume in today’s closing prayer.

Use the hymn, *“Señor, ten piedad,”* as the starting refrain for devotions, asking participants to join in singing this Kyrie — a plea for God’s mercy — over and over for a few moments.

Join the entire group in a large circle, asking participants to join hands. The joining of hands also means that none of us can get left behind or left alone in our life journeys. Invite prayer petitions from participants, concerns and joys that come from today’s session. Each petition ends with the phrase, “Lord, in your mercy,” to which participants respond, “Hear our prayer.” Add in this one change: As the group responds, “Hear our prayer,” all of you bow forward from your waist and then come back to a standing position.

Begin the petitions with one of your own. Wait for a few moments for participants to begin to offer their prayers. At the end of the petitions, end with “Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ your Son.” As you and the group say “Amen,” raise your hands high. Say “Amen” several more times until the entire group has raised its joined circle of hands.

Dismiss the group with your thanks. Remind them of the continuing “Dollars and Dones” appeal and the goal that has been set. This might be a good time to spotlight one participant who has done a particularly good job of encouraging others to give gifts to this appeal. Briefly characterize the experiences in the next learning event and invite participants to come.





Other activities:

FaithQuest service team activities

(30 minutes)

FaithQuest team have been working between this and other sessions, and now they continue, with the specific themes of this session. Some possibilities for team tasks or projects:

- 🌐 Research the history of your congregation or community, looking for times of great distress, particularly your congregation's or community's perseverance after experiencing natural or human-caused disaster. An historical presentation to OWP: Nicaragua participants might follow.
- 🌐 Visit the ELCA International and Domestic Disaster Program website, (www.elca.org/disaster/) to see how the ELCA responds to disasters anywhere in the world, even close to home.
- 🌐 Collect stories of individual members of your congregation who have found support and comfort in times of natural or human-made disasters. Make these stories the central focus of a devotions book given to all families in your congregation. (Hint: Your congregation probably includes members who have fought in wars, survived tornadoes or had their homes destroyed by fire.)
- 🌐 Begin planning an all-congregation Nicaraguan festival, a time to celebrate the completion of OWP: Nicaragua session and the "Dollars and Dones" appeal. A good place to start: reading about Nicaragua.

Bible conversations

(15 minutes)

The familiar text that forms the biblical connection for this session can evoke some personal faith sharing, and can raise important life questions. If you choose to include a time of Bible conversations, consider these items as possible content:

- 🌐 What, really, makes us "one body?" What's that mean in practical terms?
- 🌐 When do you most feel joined together with the people of this congregation? When do you feel least-joined to this community of faith?
- 🌐 Talk about a time when a small act of care or appreciation helped cement your soul to this congregation.
- 🌐 During worship, when do you hear and reflect on what it means to be "one body."
- 🌐 If Baptism brings a "commission to ministry" with it, and if we've all been baptized, what's the commission to ministry of this congregation?
- 🌐 Talk about your personal mission statement. How does this congregation help you fulfill that sense of life purpose?
- 🌐 Paul wrote these words before there was a formal, institutionalized church. What might he write about "the body of Christ" today, given that there is an organized enterprise called the ELCA?

Hurricane Mitch and no-name earthquake

(30 minutes)

- 🌐 Even though Hurricane Mitch occurred several years ago, Web sites still offer a wealth of information — including photos, first-hand testimony and factual data — about this devastating storm’s path over Honduras and Nicaragua. Start with the website for [Lutheran World Relief](http://www.lwr.irc.org) (www.lwr.irc.org) for basic information. You can learn more by viewing the Summer, 1999 edition of MOSAIC, the ELCA video magazine, and the segment, “After Mitch: The Long Road Back.” Order the video at 800.638.3522, ext. 6009 or visit the MOSAIC website at www.elca.org/co/mosaic/summer99.html.
- 🌐 With some technical wizardry, you might be able to construct a learning activity that offered participants visual and factual information about the hurricane and its lingering effects. The same kinds of information are available, albeit in more limited amounts, about the Managua Earthquake in 1972.

However you present the information about the problem, also include information, stories and photos that show how the international community — including Lutheran World Relief — responds to disasters for years after the immediate devastation.

You can present that information in any of these ways:

- 🌐 A booth or learning center table, where participants take time to read and look at the information you have assembled.
- 🌐 A PowerPoint presentation of the photos and data you have found. On a CD, the disk can be a take-home resource for families.
- 🌐 A special page on your congregation’s Web site.

Hula Hoop® connectedness

(30 minutes)

This game helps illustrate the interconnectedness of natural and human-made disasters, their causes and their lingering effects. To offer this activity, you will need several Hula Hoops® and plenty of floor space!

Combine three or four table groups of participants into several larger groups, or make this an activity for the entire group of participants. Each group receives a Hula Hoop®. Place each hoop in the middle of its larger group. The hoop represents a natural or human-made disaster that you name. (For example, a strong earthquake, land-mines over the entire countryside, forest fire, volcano eruption, flood, hurricane, civil war, a famine.) Now direct three or four participants from each group to climb inside the encircling hoop, facing outward. They will be the “victims of disaster” and the hoop will represent their being trapped by its effects.

Each group now names its ideas about some of the likely causes for the disaster. (For example, human greed or pride, fault lines deep within the earth, deforestation, drought.) As each cause is named, one person comes to the hoop, facing inward. The naming of causes of disasters continues until group members surround “the victims” or the group runs out of ideas. Participants who are “causes” should remain standing around the hoop.

Now to the matter of effects. The remaining members of the larger group start to name some of the effects of this disaster, including immediate and long-range effects. (For example, poor water quality, lack of work, polluted atmosphere, crippled children.) As each effect is named, a member of the group stands by “the victims” and “the causes,” facing outward. The naming of effects continues until you run out of ideas or participants!

With the entire group now on its feet, surrounding “the victims of disaster,” talk about the experience in any of these ways:

- 🌐 Which makes “the victims” feel more helpless, the inevitability of the causes or the lingering effects? Why?
- 🌐 If you were trying to diminish either causes or effects — through ELCA World Hunger Appeal and Lutheran World Relief, you are! — where would you start your work? Why?
- 🌐 Even if you feel like it, why won’t you give up?
- 🌐 How are we going to get “the victims” out of this situation?

When you’ve finished with one disaster, repeat the experience with one or two more disasters and debrief the experience (see above). After several rounds, bring the entire group together and talk about these matters:

- 🌐 What similarities (differences) did you notice about causes, effects and victims?
- 🌐 What similarities (differences) did you notice about our ideas in solving these matters?
- 🌐 What were your feelings as you encountered these disasters?

This activity can be adapted to spotlight the matter of individual disasters — home fires, financial ruin, suicide — and can serve as a way of heightening awareness of the necessary function of the church as unified evidence of God’s love for the world.

Build a volcano

(45 minutes)

The [OWP: Nicaragua website](http://www.openaworld.org) (www.openaworld.org) includes directions for building or portraying a volcano eruption. Consider engaging in this craft activity as a way to understand the power of a volcano in Nicaragua’s natural environment.

News search

(45 minutes)

If Nicaragua becomes news-worthy, you might take advantage of that situation and turn it into a source for learning. Gather newspapers, magazines, reprints of Web pages — all can become the source for a variety of learning activities. They might include these:

- 🌐 A bulletin board of “Nicaragua News,” planned, constructed or maintained as part of an OWP: Nicaragua learning event.
- 🌐 Presentations or discussions about the current situation, what it means and what might happen next.
- 🌐 “Investigations,” in which participants look over news articles with specific questions in mind, such as: “What’s behind all this?” “What’s the truth here?” “What are the facts and what are the opinions?” “Where’s this leading?” and “Who could tell us more?”
- 🌐 A time for praying about the news, especially if it’s grim or horrific.
- 🌐 Special pages for participants’ travel journals, with current Nicaragua news as content.

Because international news is sometimes hard to find in some U.S. news sources, consider visiting a Nicaragua-specific website, such as the [National Bank of Nicaragua](http://www.bcn.gob.ni) (www.bcn.gob.ni) or the Nicaragua page on [CountryWatch](http://www.countrywatch.com/cw_country.asp?vcountry=126) (www.countrywatch.com/cw_country.asp?vcountry=126). And don’t forget the resources of your local public library!

