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In the Footsteps of Gustavo



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Gustavo Parajon was one of my heroes and role models. Gustavo and his wife Joan were International Ministries missionaries in Nicaragua where Gustavo pastored the First Baptist Church of Managua and led in many medical and community ministries. In the wake of the 1972 earthquake that devastated Managua he founded CEPAD, an ecumenical relief and community development ministry. He also founded community health centers, a vision that has now taken shape in AMOS, the ministry directed by current IM missionaries David and Laura Parajon.



Gustavo was a role model for me in his work for peace and reconciliation ([Click here](#) for more about his peace ministry). Because of his stature in the nation for his healing ministry he was a member of a mediation team that helped bring about the first cease-fire that eventually led to the end of the long war in Nicaragua in the 1980s and into the early 1990s. Following the war he worked with local peace commissions to bring reconciliation to the grassroots, but also personally served on the national peace commission for reconciliation at the highest levels of the society.



Gustavo was one of the convenors with the Nicaraguan Baptist Convention of the Global Baptist Peace Conference held in Nicaragua in 1992. He was a keynote speaker. It was at that modest resort on the Pacific Coast that God's Spirit ignited the spark in my mind and heart

that led to my current peacemaking mission with IM. (You can read about that in my memoir [Peace Warrior](#).) That conference was my last time in Nicaragua until this year.

In March and April of 2017 I led a 10-day Training of Conflict Transformation Trainers (TCTT) in Mexico City with my IM colleagues Mylinda Baits and Ray Schellinger. Among the participants from 11 countries were two from Nicaragua: Freddy Solorzano and Debora Garcia Morales. Freddy is a Pentecostal pastor who is the current President of the board of CEPAD. Debora is a faculty member at both the Baptist Seminary and the Baptist university UPOLI. They invited me to come to Nicaragua, and I found myself walking in my dear mentor's footsteps. The training we were to do was for a special institute named for Gustavo Parajon.



Freddy engages a small group during a conflict exercise in the training

The major work I did was a 3-day training of over 30 young people who are CEPAD's "psychosocial workers." They work in various villages, their own communities, throughout Nicaragua to identify community needs and then train people and develop strategies to address those needs. Conflict is a huge issue, so Freddy asked me to do conflict transformation training with them. Since Freddy had been through our TCTT, we co-facilitated.



Training participants discuss social dynamics in the "chairs of power" exercise.

We had a great time both in giving these young Christian peacemakers and community activists new skills, but also seeing their creativity and passion fully engaged. They organized themselves to stay in touch, to work together and to support each other as they build their

work. I could see the work started so long ago by Gustavo growing into it's next chapter with this younger generation, the "grand-children" in ministry of Gustavo.



Area leaders share their strategies for maintaining the momentum established in the training.

Though Gustavo passed away in 2011, his work goes on. People like me were deeply impacted by him, and we often reference his example as we look at how to bring the love of Jesus Christ to communities such as those in Nicaragua. As they say in Latin America when they remember those who have passed on and left us a precious legacy: "Gustavo Parajon- Presente!"