

# Barrio Edgar Munguia 2001: Hospitality in a small house

Our Benedictine sisters from Mexico have two local residential communities in Nicaragua. One is their Mission in San Nicolas in the north of the country, where hurricane Mitch devastated the region in 1998. The other is their House of Formation (or novitiate) in the capital city of Managua.

The sisters have decided to establish this community for the novitiate in a neighborhood called Barrio Edgar Munguia.

It is a poor barrio, about four irregular blocks from the Jesuit University (UCA), that was formed as families squatted on vacant land surrounding a wealthier area of the city. The families try to support themselves by going to sell various items on the city streets or by doing domestic work.

Sister Fidelina and Sister Matilde, with the two novice sisters, Carolina and Yerenia, live in a very small house, into which each one of us is joyfully and lovingly welcomed as we come within its walls. The house, roughly 20' x 30', is set on a parcel of land that is 20' x 45', approximately the same size as the plot each family in the barrio has on which to live.

Thirteen brothers and four sisters from Mexico City, who have accompanied us in the name of the entire congregation of sisters, bring our numbers to 21: a houseful!

Yet there is enough room for all of us as we gather for common prayer, discussions, relaxation and meals. The way in which the sisters have embraced the value of hospitality, as lived by the poor people of their neighborhood, ensures that space and something to share is never a problem.

The house has two bedrooms, one about 6' x 24' and the other a little larger. The kitchen is roughly 6' x 8' and their chapel is 8' square. The front meeting room is more ample, where all of us brothers and sisters find space to sit together on plastic chairs along the walls.

The sidewalls of the house are also the sidewalls of the neighbors' houses, and the roof, constructed of sheets of corrugated, galvanized metal, appears to be contiguous with neighboring roofs.

The house and small courtyard is fronted by a narrow dirt road, dusty in the dry season and muddy in the times of rain. Piles of trash accumulate in the road and attract the many homeless dogs that roam the barrio. From time to time, people in the barrio take turns cleaning up and disposing of the trash, and try to wet down the dirt road to stop the dust.

Everything is right next to everything else in a locale where houses have no street numbers and the streets have no names. Street addresses are indicated by section of the city, by distance in blocks from a name-bearing intersection or a traffic light, and by how many doors distant from a conspicuous building. But people find their way to the door of the sisters.



The sisters' house: San Benito

In the two and a half years the sisters have been there, they have made good friends with many of the people in the barrio. Some of the friends often join the sisters in their daily prayer. It is wonderful for us brothers to experience the Benedictine community life of the sisters among the poor in this barrio of Managua.



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