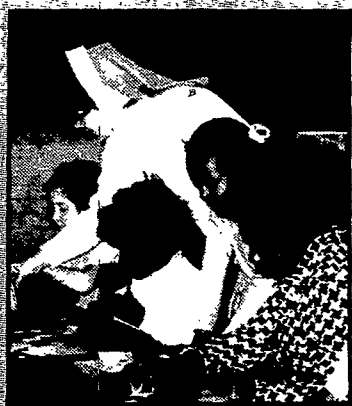


Selma spotlight

The Sisters of St. Joseph celebrate the 50th anniversary of their mission in Selma, Ala., and their role in bringing civil rights to the South. Page 6.



CATHOLIC COURIER

Diocese of Rochester

Thursday, March 22, 1990

50¢

20 pages

Election 'morning after' dawns on loss, hope

EDITOR'S NOTE: Freelance photographer and writer Carlos Guzman-McFadden, a Corpus Christi parishioner and bilingual social-studies teacher at Rochester's East High School, spent two weeks in Nicaragua last month as one of several sister-cities observers of that nation's Feb. 25 election. In this special report to the Catholic Courier, he offers an assessment of the electoral process and its outcome.

By Carlos Guzman-McFadden
Special to the Catholic Courier

EL SAUCE, Nicaragua — The night air was filled with the smoke of burning tires, placed strategically at every crossroad in the *internacionalista* section of Barrio Bolonia in Managua. The scene was reminiscent of the 1979 insurrection, but the mood was quite different — absent was the maddening, adrenalin-filled chaos of urban warfare. The emotion in the barrio this night was one of abject loss.

People milled about in the intersections, sitting down on the curbs, drinking beer and silently staring into the fires. The sounds of a guitar and a voice singing "Ay, Nicaragua, nicaraguita ..." were accompanied by the rhythm of victorious chanting blocks away in another neighborhood, where the victors celebrated their upset win — a win most of the world did not expect to occur.

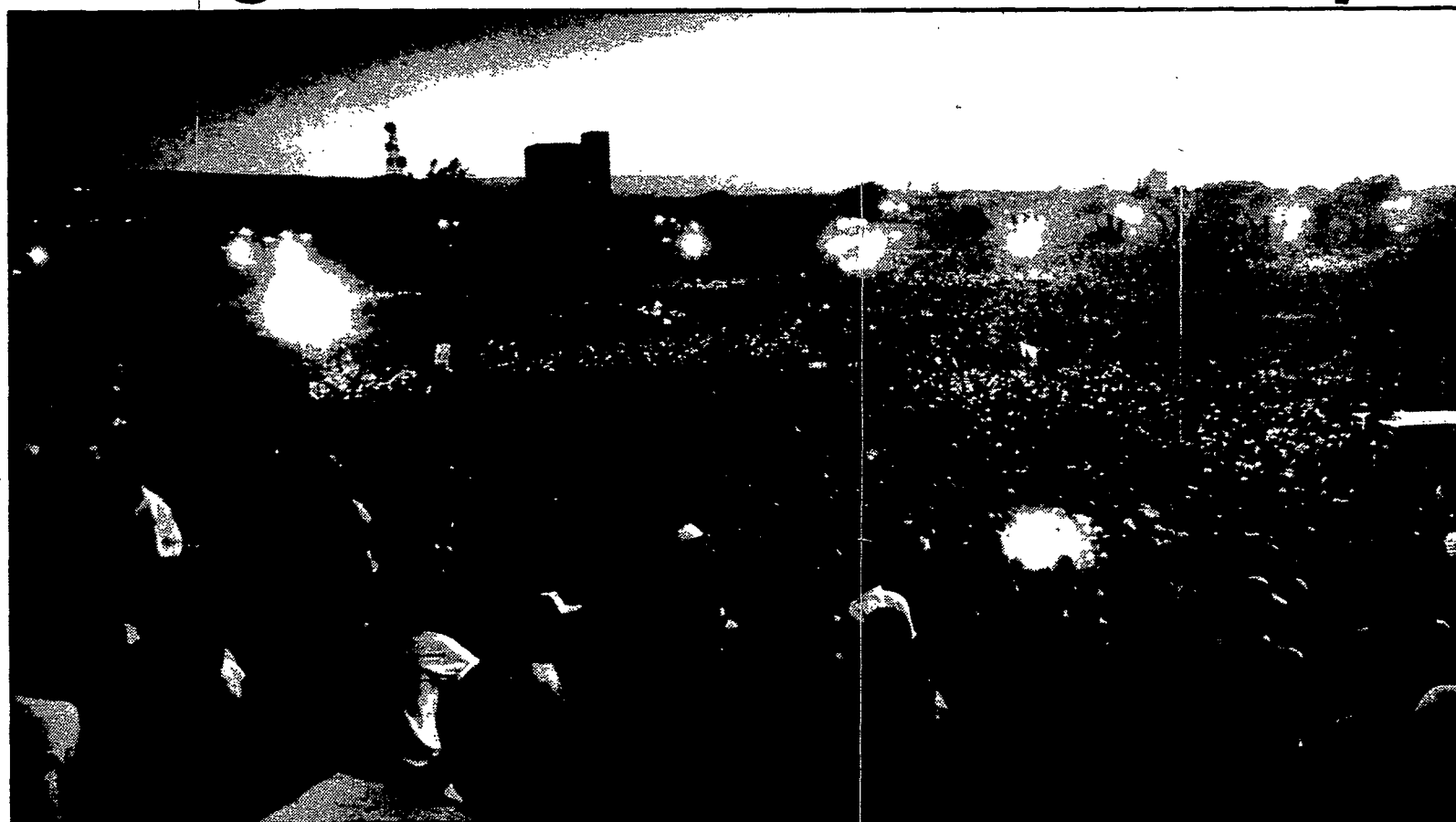
The scene had been quite different the day before in the little town of El Sauce, near the city of León in the northeastern region of Nicaragua. That was election day, February 25, 1990 — a day that had been held in the minds of all voting Nicaraguans as determining which of the two main parties — the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN or the *Frente*) or the National Opposition Union (UNO) — would guide their nation's future for the next six years.

The 1990 Nicaraguan elections have been hailed as the most-watched elections in history, with more than 2,000 observers from around the world receiving accreditation from the Nicaraguan Supreme Election Council. These observers included teams from the United Nations; the Organizations of American States; a group led by former-President Jimmy Carter and such lesser-known groups as Witness for Peace, the Coalition of U.S. Sister Cities, and others. These groups, together with hundreds of international reporters, were involved in a process that perhaps will shape future elections in other places around the world.

The actual voting procedure was the fruit of many, many months of labor. Among the items on Nicaragua's electoral agenda were the establishment of the Supreme Electoral Council; formation of consensus among all involved parties on such issues as ballots and polling places; and, most importantly, the development of procedures to be used in order to eliminate the possibility of electoral fraud. All of these objectives were accomplished in a shorter period of time than originally anticipated, since pressures from forces outside Nicaragua forced the incumbent regime to move the election date up from November to February.

Election day

The day began at 4:10 a.m. to the angry sound of mortar fire in the nearby hills, where the Sandinista army and the Contra forces were engaged in battle at the town of Santa Rosa. By that early hour, electoral officials from both parties had already picked up the ballots and materials for their



More than 500,000 Nicaraguans attended a FSLN rally in Managua Feb. 22, 1990.

Carlos Guzman - McFadden



Daniel Ortega (left), former president of Nicaragua, and Tomas Borge, director of the Interior Ministry, speak with the public.

Carlos Guzman - McFadden

respective polling places and were heading for different locations around town. The officials heading for the outlying areas, or *comarcas*, of the El Sauce voting district had already left around 2:30 a.m. As a result of the skirmish in Santa Rosa — just outside the voting district of El Sauce — that town's polling place was closed.

By 6 a.m., all of the polling places in the town were manned, and the opening procedures had already begun. Workers assembled the ballot boxes, positioned the booths within the polling places, ensured that the credentials of all officials had been issued by the Supreme Electoral Council and that the voter-registration materials bearing each voter's identifying information — name, address, age, sex, thumb print and voter-registration number — were at the proper polling tables.

Most polling places did not begin to admit voters at the stipulated hour of 7 a.m., but did open shortly thereafter. The delay was not surprising, due to numerous complicated procedures that had to be carried out before a polling place could open.

The safeguards against fraud were many. Voters' choices were recorded on three separate ballots — the first for president and vice president, the second for the

National Assembly, and the third for the Municipal Assembly. Each of the three ballots was specially color-coded to the matching ballot box, according to a system agreed upon by the various parties.

A six-digit number — selected at random by officials at the polling places — was affixed to the back of each ballot, which was also signed by the two polling-place officials representing the different political parties, usually the UNO and FSLN.

When voters entered the polling place, they were asked to give their voter-registration cards to the president of the polling place, who then read the voters' names aloud. The voters' original registration folders were kept at the polling place, so that voters' names, registration numbers and thumb prints could be verified. Two computer printouts of voter names and registration numbers (from the original folios) were also kept by the other two officials at each polling place, in order to verify the voters' identities.

After a voter was registered, the president of the polling place explained the voting procedure and significance of the three ballots to the voter in a loud voice, so that everyone present could hear.

After the voters cast their ballots, their thumbs were cleansed and then immersed

in a indelible green ink specially produced by the University of Venezuela to eliminate the chance of people voting more than once.

"Other countries could take these elections as a model for their own," said George Wilcox of the Monroe County Board of Elections, who was in El Sauce to observe the polling process. "The precautions they have taken under such limited resources are amazing."

Wilcox's statement was echoed by Marshall Smith, a professor at Rochester Institute of Technology, who led Rochester's Sister City delegation to El Sauce for the election.

"When I was standing and watching the tallying procedure of the ballots at this one polling place, I felt that I was being witness to an incredible democratic process — that I was being a witness to history," Smith said.

The morning after

February 26 dawned with unusual stillness in El Sauce. The mood of the townspeople was a strange one — a mixture of shock and anticipation. For those who had voted for the FSLN, there were feelings of extreme sorrow and dismay.

A gathering took place at the house of Nimian Ortiz Torres, an FSLN activist who had been a polling-place official the day before. Among those gathered were observers from Rochester, Torres family members, and two women from a women's cooperative (AMNLAE) in El Sauce.

The meeting had not been planned, nor did it have an agenda to be carried out. Instead, it served as a catharsis for FSLN supporters who felt shocked and betrayed, and were attempting to pick up the pieces of a dream shattered only hours before.

The one person who stood out in the group was Ana Rosa, the women's cooperative director, who explained to the rest of the gathering what had transpired and her assessment of the FSLN's defeat. She also reminded those present of the people who had fallen under the regime of former dictator Anastasio Somoza, who was overthrown by the Sandinista revolution of 1979. She recited a litany of those who had died, as if reminding herself and the others that they had fought the revolution for a

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