

life. Every donation, large or small, becomes an answer to the prayers of women like these."

Food For The Poor is making a difference. Since Hurricane Mitch in 1998, the international relief organization has distributed over \$100 million in emergency relief aid to Latin America.

"With the support of Food For The Poor, we try to make sure that mothers who live in high-risk areas with their families get the houses they need," says Monica Cuadra. Monica is one of a group of three women who got together after Hurricane Mitch to help women in crisis situations. Each day she works on a housing project outside Managua.

"We felt that we were in a more fortunate position and could help these women, and just decided that something had to be done," she says. "The need to help women find homes is paramount. Then, they stand a chance of looking for a better job if they know that their families have a roof over their heads."

According to Monica, in many cases, women are abandoned by the father of their children and have "no support whatsoever. All these women need is for someone to give them a chance and they will make it."

## Skills Create Job Opportunities

With support from Food For The Poor, Claudia of *Nicaragua Nuestra* (Our Nicaragua) organizes neighborhood associations and helps women work to find their own solutions. One solution is to give women training so they can support themselves and their families.

"We teach women how to hand sew, embroider, finish off clothes, understand sewing machine parts, and make clothing for the women in the community," Claudia explains.

After they graduate, the women also receive a sewing machine from Food For The Poor. This enables them to set up their own businesses. The demand for these women, who spend three months



learning how to sew, is great. Many work in the free-trade zone, where they earn a minimum wage of \$50 per week.

"After Mitch, these women didn't have the tools to work," says Claudia, remembering the devastation of the furious storm. "They only knew how to fish. But now, they have a tool so that they can support their families. With the help of organizations like Food For The Poor, we have been able to do that."

Claudia explains that there's already a long waiting list of women seeking entry into the course.

Reina Isabel Orosa, 40, considers herself blessed. "I got into the sewing program and now not only can I feed my children, I am also able to send them to school," she proudly tells us. With the help of Food For The Poor, Reina has also received a sewing machine. Now, each day after her children have gone to school, she sits in a corner of her house and sews skirts and jackets

for a local retailer. "He likes what I do so much and he supplies all the material I need each week. All I have to do is put it together for him," she tells us. She glances across the room at a picture on the wall of drawings that her children made at school for Mother's Day. "I know now that I can help my children," she says. "I know that they won't end up like me and will have a chance of a better life."

## Investing In The Future

But sewing is not the only program for women. Many women are set up in their own businesses such as "Pulperias" — small general stores — to help not only themselves but also the local community. "Well, you have heard the adage, 'Give a man a fish and feed him for a day, but teach a man to

fish and feed him for a lifetime," says Mahfood. "Food For The Poor wants to end poverty for these women, not put it off for another day."

The organization has done just that for Juana Areas Medina. Eight months ago, with the help of Food For The Poor, the 22-year-old mother opened her own store. Now each week, instead of going to the local village of Tipitapa, to beg, the mother of two goes to reinvest some of her profits and stock up on supplies of oil, rice, beans, flour, salt and sugar from the village wholesaler. "Now, I have money to reinvest into my business and help my community. I no longer have to worry if I'll have enough to feed my children," Juana adds, "I can feed my children, my sick mother, my brothers and sisters. There are always good days and bad days," she adds "but at least I'm not on the streets."

# Nun Seeks Help To Expand Slum School

Sister Margarita of the Missionary Order of the Light of Christ pauses at the door of a cramped classroom



and listens intently to the voices of the children inside. This "school" - located in a slum neighborhood of

San Patricio, Nicaragua - is little more than a shed with a corrugated metal roof, windowless walls and a small door, the only source of light for the teacher and youngsters inside.

The nun smiles. In spite of the condition of the school, the voices of the children are vibrant and full of faith. Simple as it is, the tiny school is an oasis of hope in the desert of poverty that parches most of Nicaragua.

"We try very hard to help the children go to school and get food. There are two terrible slums in this area - these children come from both places," she explains. "It is the

most needy who are offered a spot in this school. We try to help as many as we can."

Stepping into the classroom is like walking into a murky oven. The heat is oppressive and the darkness drains the energy from one's soul. Sister Margarita nods to the children who turn to see who has entered. More than 50 youngsters are jammed into the space - a shoeless, rag-tag collection of kids eager to learn.

"I want to thank Food For The Poor and its benefactors for giving me the resources to help these people. We have a heart for the poor, but we lack the food and other supplies to serve the community as much as we would like. The meat, rice and other things we get from Food For The Poor helped us expand our outreach," Sister Margarita humbly says. "To serve the community, we have two

shifts of students, morning and afternoon. My prayer is that someday we can build a school with six proper classrooms. These people are in such great need."

Robin Mahfood president of Food For The Poor, hopes to help make Sister Margarita's dream a reality.

"I don't know what the poor would do without these dedicated women and men. Without their selfless dedication, places like this school wouldn't even exist. They are the ones who deserve to be praised - and supported," he says. "It's our privilege to help them in any way we can."

As Sister Margarita walks away from the school, the children begin to sing. She pauses again and smiles. Even in one of the poorest slums of Managua, God's love and hope are still alive. This is a spirit worth preserving.

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