

## Solidarity Group-Arenal (GRIDESA)

(February-March, 2016)

We're still dealing with our **third consecutive year of drought**, with apparently no rain on the horizon until July! This means another planting season lost.

In addition to the drought, the month of February began as a month of daily struggle for us, but ended on a high note of community accomplishment. The **government tried to punish our community school** because we are the only public school in the region that does not allow political propaganda inside the school. Without warning—and against the law—the education ministry **moved three teachers out of our community primary school**. Since we only had six teachers for six grades, this meant that every grade was automatically **converted into a “multi-grade” system**, making an already difficult teaching/learning situation even more difficult for students, teachers, and parents. Arenal parents responded by presenting letters of protest to local, regional, and national authorities, organizing the community against the illegal action . . . and **boycotting classes**. They would not send their children to school until all the teachers were returned to their classes, and all classes had their own teacher. After three weeks of protest, the **Minister of Education arrived in Arenal**, sent by the Presidency, to “put things in order.” The parents, however, remained strong, pointing out to the Minister-- with the law in hand--that the actions taken against the Arenal school were illegal. After hours of debate, the minister had to give in. She ordered that the teachers be returned to their classes, and that each class in the Arenal school have its own teacher. **A great victory for the children, teachers, and the whole Arenal community.**

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, GRUDESА celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Hundreds of friends came from all the surrounding villages, plus the cities of Masaya, Jinotepe, Granada, Rivas, and Managua. A great day to celebrate shared struggle, deep friendships, good music and dance, great memories, and good homegrown food. A terrific day!

In early March, the President of the Association of Nicaraguan Scientists came to Arenal to discuss with the community **Pope Francis' letter “Laudato Si”** and its relation to our national struggle against the planned construction of an interoceanic canal here in Nicaragua.

Pray for rain!!!

Fr. Rob