

Alongside Ministries en Nicaragua A.M.E.N.

Evangelism Through Relationships

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Dear Friends,

This month we are asking you to join us in prayer for the political status of Nicaragua as we approach the presidential election less than a month away. The name no one really wants to hear about, Daniel Ortega, is hard to miss as huge campaign billboards and the party colors, black and red, dot block after block in Managua and elsewhere in the country as well. The following article will give you a picture of the status of the elections, the candidates and what it takes to become president here in this country.

Please pray that God's plan for this country will be accomplished in the polling booths. Pray, too, for peaceful and honest elections and a good voter turn-out. Thank you.

Serving Together,
Halle and Kathy August

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Old revolutionary tries a comeback in Nicaragua

By **Marc Lacey** The New York Times

Published: September 29, 2006

MANAGUA Washington's old Cold War nemesis, Daniel Ortega, is as divisive a figure as he ever was as a 30-something revolutionary who took on President Ronald Reagan.

After three failed attempts to return to power in the last 15 years, El Comandante, as Ortega is widely known, is once again smiling down from

campaign billboards across Nicaragua. Now 60, balding and with a slight paunch, he stands his best chance yet of returning to power in elections on Nov. 5.

Though opinion polls give Ortega about 30 percent support, he is the leader in a race splintered among five candidates. Yet the sentiment against him is broad and the scrambling to head off an Ortega victory is intense, and not just in Nicaragua.

The prospect has stirred deep anxiety in the Bush administration, which envisions him as a new ally for President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela in challenging U.S. policy. Chávez has lent his support to Ortega, while Washington has sent word in no uncertain terms that aid will be re-evaluated if Ortega is elected.

The latest in a string of visitors to Managua was Representative Dan Burton, a Republican from Indiana, who is chairman of the House subcommittee on Western Hemisphere affairs. While insisting that he was not telling Nicaraguans how to vote, he made it clear to local reporters that he opposed Ortega and that relations between Nicaragua and the United States would suffer should he win.

Ortega's fiercest opposition, however, is homegrown. He is not just a candidate. He is the main issue in the race. Nicaraguan politics continues to revolve around Ortega, a former Marxist who led this country during its darkest hour, when domestic divisions and Cold War politics left the lush countryside bathed in blood.

"This decision that the voters are going to take on Nov. 5 is a question of national survival," Edmundo Montealegre, a onetime government minister who has the blessing of Washington and is the candidate of the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance, said in an interview. "With Ortega, we're not going to survive."

Another candidate, Edmundo Jarquin, an economist and diplomat in the leftist former Sandinista government of Nicaragua, criticized Ortega for being "all about conflict," intent on riling the United States at every opportunity.

Still another candidate, José Rizo, a former vice president from the pro-business Liberal Constitutionalist Party, said Ortega's first stint as president, to which he was elected in 1984, was marked by human rights abuses and a failed economy, compounded by a trade embargo imposed by Reagan.

There is a fifth candidate, but he trails well behind the others.

The plethora of challengers has only boosted Ortega's chances, especially since his party orchestrated a rules changes several years ago allowing a presidential candidate to win with as little as 35 percent of the vote and a five-point lead over the next rival.

That electoral math may allow Ortega to squeak out a victory in the first round of balloting, many of his critics fear. Should he fail to do so, his chances are considered slim in a runoff, where the anti-Ortega vote would dominate, said Alejandro Serrano Caldera, a political analyst.

Ortega regards himself as so much of a target that he avoided a televised debate this month that the other four candidates participated in.

Ortega wears heavy boots and a white collarless shirt on the campaign trail. He shakes every hand he can but strides quickly past reporters seeking to question him.

His stump speeches are vintage Ortega, passionate appeals to the poor in this the most down-and-out country in the Western Hemisphere, except for Haiti. But Ortega says his Marxist days are a thing of the past.

After seizing power in 1979, the Sandinistas confiscated private property and formed alliances with Cuba and the Soviet Union. The United States responded by backing the contras, fighters intent on toppling Ortega. In 1990, after a long, destructive war, a peace deal led to new elections, which Ortega lost to a coalition of opposition parties.

Ortega attempts to soothe some audiences by insisting that his presidency would be different this time around. He speaks now of his desire to tame "savage capitalism" by, for instance, renegotiating the trade agreement that Nicaragua and other countries in the region have signed with the United States.

When he gets out into the countryside, Ortega still insinuates heavily that the landless ought to get plots of their own. This approach has won over some new converts, even as Ortega has fallen out with longtime loyalists, who consider him a sellout to the revolution.

The years have shown Ortega to be far less of an ideologue than he used to be, when he railed against the West. A shrewd political operator by any measure, Ortega has tried to widen his base by embracing old rivals, including some in the Liberal Party.

Carlos Chamorro, a political analyst and the son of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, the candidate who defeated Ortega, said: "Ortega is like a pendulum who moves from one side to the other and is more pragmatic than ideological."