

## CENTRAL AMERICAN REGION

### Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama

Official Language: **Spanish**

#### Vision Statement

*Our religious missionary being finds its authentic expression in living together in fraternal harmony, giving witness in our personal and community prayer and our readiness to go and work where the promotion of the kingdom of God requires our services. We strengthen our community by respecting and appreciating the particular gift of each confrere, in search of harmony in diversity.*

#### Mission Statement

*Being Divine Word Missionaries from diverse countries and cultures, we come to proclaim, in communion of life and mission, the Good News to all who desire to give welcome to our Lord Jesus and to follow his teachings.*

#### 1. Social Setting

**Nicaragua:** The official name is Republic of Nicaragua. It is a country of America situated in the Central American isthmus. The capital is Managua made up of 15 divisions and 2 autonomous regions. Nicaragua is a volcanic and tropical country; also in its interior are two large lakes: Lake Managua and the Great Lake of Nicaragua.



The people of Nicaragua are of a multiethnic nature and Spanish is the official language although there are recognized languages of original indigenous peoples such as English, Nicaraguan, creole, mesquite, Sumu, Garifuna and Rama.

Nicaragua is the second poorest country of the American continent, with a high level of internal inequality and high levels of vulnerability among a great part of its inhabitants. To explain the origin of poverty in Nicaragua is a complex task. To exemplify this there are general factors from past history (dictatorships and economic inequality) and from the present history (the war, the intervention of third countries,

corruption, natural disasters...). This outlook is generally mirrored by the communication media that show only the reality of vulnerable countries identified exclusively with poverty, hunger or misery.

**Costa Rica:** It is a Central American country whose capital is San Jose. Of the 4.29 million inhabitants in Costa Rica, 94% are a mixture of Spaniards and indigenous. Along the coast of the Caribbean a great part of the population is of African descent (about 3% of the total population). There are other ethnic groups that constitute about 3% of the total population; approximately 1% are Chinese, 1% indigenous and 1% other.

The census of 2011 indicates that 9% of the inhabitants of Costa Rica are immigrants. Of the migrant groups, the most important are those from Nicaragua. They began arriving around 1927, reaching a peak during the years 1995-2000, due to the political, social and economic conflicts of Nicaragua throughout its history. Migrants from the United States began arriving in the beginning of the 1990s and lastly, Colombians began a migration flow in the year 2000.

Costa Rica has a mixed economy that has suffered a strong evolution, passing from being principally agricultural to an economy of services. According to “el Índice de Competividad Global del Foro Economico Mundial”, in 2014 Costa Rica held third place among the major

economies of Latin America and the Caribbean, following Chile and Panama.

It is one of the strongest democracies of the world. It gained worldwide recognition by abolishing the army on December 1, 1948. This abolition was made permanent in the Political Constitution of 1949.

**Panama:** This is located in the Southeast of Central America. Its official name is the Republic of Panama and its capital is Panama City. By its nature it is a country of crossroads. It was converted early on as a point of encounter of cultures coming from the whole world. It is the geographical setting of the Panama Canal, a work that facilitates transportation between the coasts of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and significantly influences world commerce. Now with the recent inauguration of a wider canal, it offers a greater transportation of cultures. Its geographic location actually offers the world a wide platform of maritime, commercial, real estate and financial services, among them the “Free Zone de Colon”, the largest open zone of the continent and the second largest of the world.

Panama is the second most competitive country of Latin America according to the “Foro Economico Mundial” with the greatest economic growth. Nevertheless it is a country where the wealth has not reached many corners of the country, especially to the indigenous population. Just as Costa Rica did, Panama abolished its army on February 10, 1990.

## 2. Ecclesial Setting

**Nicaragua:** The church has always been on the side of the poor and needy of the country. Many resources and moral support are received by the population from the clergy and religious in a situation of profound crisis. Nevertheless the hierarchy in general opts for a distinct class of people and is often identified with the governing class making the work of the most committed difficult in many ways. A plurality of 45.9% of the Nicaraguans identify as Catholic and 30.8% identify as Evangelical.

**Costa Rica:** It has a tradition of religious tolerance that permits within the country the growth and free practice of a great variety of religions. It possesses a rich and diverse culture, both ethnically and religiously, which is a product of the immigration of people from all the continents. 80% of them practice religion here; this is why Costa Rica has such a religious diversity. 69.7% identify as Catholics and this is the official religion of the country. Costa Rican Catholicism has a significant role in the social works and struggles of the country.

**Panama:** It is the second most Christian country of Central American with 93% identifying as Christians. The Panamanian society is profoundly Catholic and there is a smaller number of Protestants (17.6%). This contrasts strongly in comparison with the other Central American countries. In other countries while the majority is Catholic there is a large portion of Protestants. Panama is preparing for “World Youth Day

2019” which is giving a boost to Catholicism in the country.

## 3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

In the Central American Region we work in three distinct countries, each one forming a distinct district. We all are working together in our missionary endeavors that help us achieve unity and balance. The region has 9 parishes among the three countries, two in Nicaragua, two in Costa Rica and five in Panama.

### Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
<b>Parish</b>	23	60.6	43.6	57.5
<b>Education</b>	0	0	0	5.0
Schools	0	-		
Universities	0	-		
<b>Formation/ SVD Vocation</b>	2	5.6	5.2	12.5
<b>Administration/ Support</b>	4	10.5	10.2	10.0
<b>Other Apostolates</b>	7	18.9	7.7	10.0
JPIC	1	-		
Bible	2	-		
Communication	1	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Others	2	-		

### Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	1	2.7	20.5	0
Retired/Sick	0	0	2.6	0
Others	0	0	10.2	5.0

### Principal Apostolates

**Parishes:** The majority of the confreres of the CAM region are working in parishes that are on the outskirts of the cities, some are small towns and others are in the countryside.

**Biblical Apostolate:** The biblical apostolate is carried out in the biblical centers that offer different Bible courses, classes in biblical formation and popular workshops to different parishes and vicariates of the dioceses in the three countries. In each of the countries there is an SVD bookstore that distributes biblical materials at a reasonable price with the intention of bringing the sacred Bible and other materials to the greater part of the population in Central America.

**Ministry with Chinese community:** The apostolate among the Chinese community consists in the administration of the sacraments, catechesis and spiritual accompaniment. It is a work that is being carried out among Catholic families that have emigrated from their native land. From the foundation of the region the congregation has

supported the local church of the Archdiocese of Panama in this effort.

### Characteristic Dimensions

**Mission Awareness:** The mission secretary along with the SVD lay missionaries and the SVD members continue to work in the parishes supporting the formation of groups in their faith and promoting the profile of the parish.

**Biblical Apostolate and Communication:** Our biblical center in Managua offers Bibles and publications at reduced cost, as well as offering courses and biblical workshops. In Costa Rica, we have an SVD bookstore that is growing and distributing our Bibles throughout the country.

In Panama we are in the process of setting up a Bible center that would offer service to the entire northern area of Panama City. Panama also works with “Dios Habla” that records videos of reflections on the daily readings, in conjunction with the Western Province of the USA.

**JPIC:** Our parish in Upala, Costa Rica, has always been a zone of migrants since it has a border with Nicaragua. There are many migrants that cross this zone and the parish offers them the best cooperation possible.

In the city of David, Panama, we maintain a children’s dining facility for marginalized children of the ethnic indigenous groups, Ngabe and Bugle. Our parishes are characterized as having more farming communities than indigenous.

## Priorities among Congregational Directions

### **First Evangelization and New Evangelization:**

Even though the countries of Central America are considered Catholic countries, there is a great indifference to the faith and participation in the life of the Church. For this reason the majority of the parishes have a program for the new evangelization according to the base ecclesial communities as *Alfa* (a method of evangelization), neighborhood meetings, “Lectio Divina”, division of the parish for greater pastoral attention and a program for ongoing mission in each parish.

**Family and Youth:** The family ministry is one of the focuses of our mission in the Region. Given that the family is a beloved value of our people, there must be steady attention given to it, caring for it and protecting it. Responding to the problems of today’s families is very complex. Our missionaries accompany families by way of different movements such as “Matrimonio para Cristo”, “Pastoral Familiar”, Marriage Encounter and the Christian Family Movement, family counselling and others. These are ways of promoting family unity and the experience of new life in Christ.

### **Social Justice and the Eradication of Poverty:**

The option for the poor has been a priority of the Region. Most confreres are dedicated to this ministry by means of dining facilities for children and elderly, scholarships for students, help for the construction of homes, programs for the rehabilitation of alcoholics anonymous,

sports for the youth, food donations for the poor, cooperatives, the program “Barrio seguro” and more.

## Collaboration with the Local Church

We are proud to have one of our confreres as bishop of the diocese of Penonome in Panama. Some of our confreres form part of the Presbyteral council in different local churches and one works as the president of the Conference of Religious in Panama. The contribution of the biblical apostolate to the local Church in the three countries is significant. Our parishes respond to the needs of the local Church by working in the margins of society.

## SVD Lay Partners

We have three groups of SVD Lay Missionaries that are committed to the mission and are found in each of the countries of the Region. They share their faith and life with the most vulnerable of society. Primarily they animate the parish groups according to the four Characteristic Dimensions of the congregation. The SVD Lay Missionaries have a monthly formation meeting and a retreat during Lent. During Holy Week, Christmas and Carnival season missions are carried out in some SVD or diocesan parishes. New missionaries assigned to the region are accompanied by these lay SVD collaborators in their process of enculturation, learning the lan-

**SVD Lay Partners share their faith and life with the most vulnerable of society.**

guage and accompanying them to get their legal residency in the county.

#### 4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishops	1	0	0
Clerics	34	35	20
Brothers (final vows)	1	1	0
Scholastics	2	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>25</b>

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	45.8	43.5	40.3
Nationalities	15	14	10

**Spirituality:** During the district meetings and regional assemblies, we have Eucharist celebration and spend some time in spiritual reflection.

Every two years there is a retreat together and annually there is one organized by the districts.

**Community:** Community life and sharing by the confreres take place at the spiritual retreats, the meetings of the districts, outings and SVD feasts. We highlight our internationality and interculturality in our meetings and sharing. We want these traits to be the characteristics of our Central American Region.

**Finances:** The CAM region depends almost entirely on subsidies from the Generalate. Nevertheless only two of the parishes in Nicaragua are subsidized, the others are self-sufficient.

**Formation:** For the time being we have a house of formation in Nicaragua for initial formation at the propaedeutic stage. Postulants and novices are sent for their formation to Mexico. The CAM Region continues to be open to receive students for the OTP who desire to have their experience here.