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# What Happens After an Earthquake

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# What Happens After an Earthquake

## **Abstract**

"What happens years after a natural disaster strikes a country? How do the communities resume their "normal" everyday lifestyle?"

Posting about the 2014 earthquakes in Nicaragua and what it means for teachers and students from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/what-happens-after-an-earthquake/>

## **Keywords**

In All Things, Nicaragua, earthquake, education, disaster response, El Colegio del Poder Ciudadano  
Experimental México

## **Disciplines**

Christianity

## **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

# What Happens After an Earthquake

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 [all in allthings.org/what-happens-after-an-earthquake/](https://allthings.org/what-happens-after-an-earthquake/)

Kathleen Van Tol

Many children in parts of North America enjoy the occasional snow day. A snow day may be an inconvenience for the adults, but for most children it is something to look forward to with happy anticipation. Snow days can be marked with enjoyable activities such as sleeping late, drinking hot chocolate, and building snow forts and snowmen. While it is true that large snowstorms can cause terrible traffic accidents and power outages, snow days are generally viewed almost as holidays and children feel cheated if they don't get at least one snow day a year.

The children here in Nicaragua do not get snow days, but they do occasionally have earthquake days. While the children may still enjoy getting time off from school, earthquakes do not bring with them the same types of enjoyable activities that snow days do. Earthquake days are filled with the frightening thought that an earthquake has occurred and another might be imminent. Characteristics of earthquake days range from the merely inconvenient, such as no electricity or running water, to the hardships of damaged or destroyed buildings, loss of life, and constant fear of the next tremor.

In the spring of last year, Nicaragua was affected by several earthquakes. Many buildings were damaged and school was canceled for weeks while one tremor succeeded another. Families were advised to sleep outside rather than risk the danger of being asleep when an earthquake hit, the strength of which could possibly cause their home to collapse with their loved ones in it. When typical daily activities were finally allowed to resume, it was discovered that many school buildings were no longer safe and could not be used.

El Colegio del Poder Ciudadano Experimental México is one such school in Nicaragua. This school is the second largest school in Managua and has approximately 3,500 students. After the earthquake, it was necessary for the students and teachers to move to a temporary location on the grounds of a nearby school while repairs were being made to their own school buildings. A year later, they are all still meeting at this temporary location. The fortunate teachers share a classroom space with another teacher or gather their class under a canopy, which provides shade from the sun and protection from the rain. The less fortunate gather their students under the shelter of some trees.

As I walk around the campus, I notice that despite the chaos, most students are attentive and engaged. Still, the situation is difficult. In the shared 1st and 2nd grade classroom, which is tiny by anyone's standards, there are 35 first graders and 42 second graders as well as a first and a second grade teacher. The room is crowded with chairs, making it impossible to walk around. There are no tables or desks as there would not be space for them in this very cramped room. It is very warm, perhaps as a result of so many little bodies or perhaps simply because Nicaragua is always very warm. The students don't seem to mind the heat or the crowding. The teachers probably wish for a little more space, but they are both busy teaching their students and doing all the things that elementary teachers do in a day.

I also spend some time observing a high school English class. This teacher has 71 students in his class, which meets under a tree in the far corner of the campus. He has a chunk of white board from his old classroom, which he has propped up against the tree trunk. These students do have desks and so they are able to take notes on the point of grammar that the teacher is explaining. It is noisy with the traffic sounds of the nearby road, but the students have adjusted to this challenge and are focused on their work. One of the advantages of being in this far corner of the campus is that it is also far from the pulperias, or

tiny stores, several of which are set up right around the perimeter of the classroom area that has been created under the canopies. These little stores do a brisk business selling snacks and drinks to the many students and teachers on this campus.

Johanna is the school psychologist for El Colegio del Poder Ciudadano Experimental México and she has invited me to visit her school this day. Her office is now a few plastic chairs located under a tree. She moves the chairs throughout the day to follow the pattern of the shade that the tree casts. There are many other teachers also sitting in chairs under trees.

Because of the limited space and difficult conditions, students of the school are now on an every-other-day schedule. They are also on an abbreviated day schedule with classes dismissing at noon in order to avoid the extreme heat of the early afternoon. Teachers, however, are expected to report and be present for their normal teaching hours, even if they do not



Photo by Kathleen Van Tol. "One of the pulperias."

have students that day. Thus, many teachers find a chair and seek whatever shade there is to be found.

Johanna also takes me to see the work that is being done to repair the original school buildings. The government is taking this opportunity to bring about some improvements to the school as well as to repair the damage from the earthquakes. One improvement is the addition of bathrooms, an improvement which is being made in many schools across the country. Johanna also points out that ramps are being installed in place of steps and curbs throughout the campus. Finally, work is being done to renovate the two cemeteries that are part of this school campus. During the most recent revolution, this school was used as a hospital and the dead were buried here. The goal is to make these cemeteries more unobtrusive while still retaining a respectful memorial to the dead.

The plan was that these projects would be completed in a year. The goal was not met; however, great progress has been made. The month of May ushered in the start of the rainy season. Right now, the rains, although heavy at times, are still sporadic and generally do not last more than a couple hours. Soon, though, that will change. I hope that the students and teachers at El Colegio del Poder Ciudadano Experimental México are able to move into their renovated school before the hours-long, heavy rains become a daily occurrence.