

In January 2020 nine members of St. Aloysius Parish traveled to El Salvador as part of our Sister Relationship with the Christian Base Communities located in the Bajo Lempa region. Delegation members wrote reflections for the parish bulletin which are now compiled in this format.

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Reflections from 2020 Delegation Members to El Salvador

George Waldref

The transformative power of photos! During our visits to the Christian Base Communities or CBCs, I had the opportunity to take photos with an instant camera. The simple act of capturing a moment of joy and friendship was profound for me. Though my Spanish is very limited, the camera bridged that barrier and granted a trust and intimacy to each encounter. Most of these photos were gifts to children who didn't have cellphones, thus unable to do "selfies" with friends. On deeper reflection, I look to those youth of El Salvador as the fragile promise of these struggling communities. The CBCs have invested much in their young – music, dance, theater and education, to pass on cultural values and strengthen community ties. The years ahead will test their investment. Will they have stronger communities or more migration and fragmentation?

Edie Ward

I have read that when sharing pictures or adventures of your vacation to others, they generally are uninterested. There have actually been scientific studies that have discovered why. It turns out the problem is about context. These adventures are unrelatable unless you have experienced them. The same can be said about experiencing the Gospel from the third world perspective. You cannot imagine the disparity of privilege we experience in North America (simply by right of birth) unless you immerse yourself within the lives and homes of those who live this reality daily. For the fourth time I made this journey, listened to the stories of our Salvadoran brothers and sisters telling of caravans, immigration, and missing loved ones. Poverty, loneliness and ultimately the absolute faith that God continues to light their path. They continue to ground me in my own life and deepen my faith as I walk with them in solidarity.

Andrea Timm

¡Feliz navidad! While wishing someone a "Merry Christmas" after the season ended felt a little silly, there was something beautiful about bridging cultures, languages and generations through music. An example of this began one afternoon at the Romero Center when a few musicians gathered together and jammed while others watched. After a bit, we asked: "Is there a song that everyone here knows?" It turns out that 'Feliz Navidad' is quite popular in El Salvador and everyone in the room laughed and sang along. Days later, while visiting students with the Sisters of Providence's scholarship program, I picked up a guitar to play and a conversation about music began with a group of young students. One person joked, "'Feliz Navidad' round two!" and we sang "Feliz Navidad". A beautiful way to connect.

Logan Ward

Before going on this trip, I kept thinking about what I was going to see. Was I going to feel bad, guilty, or powerless? Well, I did feel that way, but not entirely. Within the distance, I saw an innumerable amount of grace, beauty, and optimism personified within every single person I encountered. Even though I learned that their past had been a tempest full of pain, they showed strength and love in how they live and will continue to live for years to come. While never forgetting their past, their past will never hold them back. The word "community" has never been so remarkably shown.

Dina Angelis

We were invited to a fiesta in the Christian Base Community (CBC) of San Hilario, complete with music, theatre, pinatas, games, ice cream and DANCING! My fellow delegates can attest that I had the best time dancing, as though I was participating in “Dancing with the Stars.” My smile gave witness to the immense joy I felt in my heart. As I reflected later that day, I was reminded of a childhood song “I’ve Got That Joy Down In My Heart,” which embodies the deep abiding faith, hope and love of Jesus the Salvadoran people have despite the injustices they continue to fight. The Salvadoran people have hearts afire in God’s joy. Because of them... *Yo tengo gozo gozo gozo en mi Corazon!*

Matt Thompson

Before we departed, the delegation had meetings where we learned about the history and current politics of El Salvador, prayed, and planned out the trip itself. Even after several meetings, I was still confused about what awaited me in El Salvador. I looked through our itinerary, but couldn’t figure out when we would be building houses, or serving food at a soup kitchen, or doing some “actual service.” Once we arrived I quickly realized that the Salvadoran people don’t need handouts. We weren’t building houses because they had already built their own. When we visited these homes, they were the ones serving us food. Salvadorans don’t live in devastating poverty because of some incompetence or bad decision; it’s because they were born in El Salvador.

Rita Amberg Waldref

I have had the opportunity to visit our Salvadoran brothers and sisters for 15 years—since 2005. It has been blessing upon blessing. My Salvadoran friends teach me about trust in God, about family, about living simply. They surround me with hospitality and love. They have introduced me to their holy ones, their Gospel models—living and deceased. These folks have transformed my life: Mino and Transito, Rutilio Grande, Lilian and Chamba, Fernando Llord, Juventina and her family, St. Oscar Romero. Because of my Salvadoran experiences, my world view has expanded and my faith life enriched. I am deeply grateful.

C Cullitan

Everywhere we go in El Salvador, we encounter statues and murals of a bespectacled man in vestments. This is Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez, or San Romero. You may have heard the story: A bookish man, appointed archbishop in 1977, he found courage to denounce the right-wing government's campaign of murders, torture, and forced disappearances, asked the US to stop funding these atrocities, stood with the poor, and paid for it with his life on March 24, 1980. For this the Salvadoran people acclaimed him saint and martyr. Yet because there was a political aspect to his death, his official cause for sainthood was blocked for years.

Our friends in the Christian base communities also live at the intersection of faith and political realities. When we visit, we are invited to enter that intersection. It can be uncomfortable to ponder the ways in which American policies have affected our Central American neighbors, but justice demands that we do it. Can we ask more of ourselves and of our country? San Romero, pray for us.

Evan Simmons

El Salvador showed me some of the nicest, industrious, and most compassionate people I have met. Julio fit this description perfectly. He works at the Fondo, a health clinic dedicated to its small constituency. He, along with the other community leaders we met, were making strides in their own fields to fight for social justice. I found the Salvadorans to be so loving and Christlike, but I was dismayed that the beautiful people living in their beautiful country were being strangled by overwhelming pre-existing conditions. Almost all of Julio's kids have left the country for better economic opportunities and safety for their families. Julio and his wife expressed their deep sadness that many neighbors are driven to decide between staying in El Salvador with their loved ones while possibly starving or scraping by in a lonely foreign country, the U.S.

However, I also experienced the pure joyous hope many had of the future. Julio, for instance, hopes to visit his family up north soon, and while he waits, he and his team run public service announcements and fundraise to make their families healthier for future generations.



The 2020 Delegation to El Salvador.