

In January 2018, 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 2018 Delegation Members to El Salvador

George Waldref

Three Gifts of El Salvador—After I was blessed at the weekend Mass before our departure, the most frequent question asked was, “What are you going to build?” My answer, as always, “we are building relationships.” While this might pose a challenge due to my limited Spanish, the cultural gap and brevity of our visit, I have formed strong friendships with the Salvadoran people. Pauline Martin, a U.S. citizen who has worked at the University of Central America (UCA) for nearly 25 years, shared three traits common to most Salvadorans, esp. in rural areas. One is putting people first, as exhibited in their cordial and outgoing nature. Second is their trust in God. This might be because their history of poverty, war and natural disasters have left them little else. And lastly, they enjoy life. All these characteristics make building friendships easier than in the norms of our culture. These people are truly rich.

Nola Hall

The Children—This is my third trip to our sister community in Tierra Blanca. I am still mesmerized by the smiles and bright eyes of the children. In 2009, I met a beautiful girl named Meribel. I saw her and her family again in 2010. This time, I brought pictures and was greeted with many hugs. On Sunday morning, we attended Mass in an outdoor area. Before the service, the High School students displayed projects they had been working on. Meribel, and her partner Daisy, were so proud to show me what they had been working on. One of the reasons for going with this delegation was to renew my friendship with Meribel and her family. This Mass and mini-reunion became a fitting farewell to El Salvador and my friends there. I departed with many heartfelt hugs and good wishes. This trip was extraordinary, a most memorable and rewarding experience for me.

Emmett Simmons

Happy and Grateful—It is impossible to explain in one hundred words what El Salvador is like. I can only make one observation in the hopes that it encourages others to take the trip themselves.

The people we saw, talked to, and lived with were filled with a love of God and a joy for life. Amongst all of the poverty in which they were surrounded, they were happy and even more amazingly, grateful for the gifts God had given them. It gave me perspective into what I considered struggles in my own life, and allowed me to step out of my own bubble and fully appreciate how much I am blessed. You do not understand how much you have been given until you see firsthand how little others have.

Michael Wright

"Don't live your faith in the clouds, but a faith with your feet here on Earth," Chamba says as he shows us the farm that is also his home. Chamba and his family raise chickens and grow vegetables, he plays guitar and has a elegant singing voice, all of which he shares with his community. The church is everywhere around us; it goes beyond the limits of the beautiful cinder-block chapel where we meet to celebrate the liturgy of the Word. "I see the face of Jesus in the people around me, we are all connected," he tells us with a smile. The community shares food and pools resources, they each donate \$0.25/month to keep the town's medical clinic open. Every interaction in their day seems linked to one another in joy, every action attests to their belief in God. Our brothers and sisters in the Bajo Lempa live a faith with their feet on the ground, and they freely lift each other up.

Alida Tei

It is quite challenging to reflect on such a deep experience in just a few sentences. That said, I was truly overwhelmed not just by the Salvadorians' humble happiness but also by their faith and holiness.

My own faith has grown deeper since that trip. My most humbling experience was the visit to La Quesera. We listened to the stories of that horrible massacre, where over 500 civilians were killed during the Civil War in 1981. How could entire families with toddlers survive for days, hiding in shrubs, and feeding themselves only with flowers? As they are well aware, they survived because of the Lord's will for them to move on and one day share their stories. Despite owning nothing besides their lives, they are simply grateful to be alive.

Annette Barfield

Since my return from El Salvador I am often asked how my trip was. My response is "it was eye-opening". It opened my eyes to a level of poverty I had never seen before. It opened my eyes to the history of the country, the repression of the poor and the civil war that resulted in the deaths of thousands of people in the 1970's and 80's. It opened my eyes to the sacrifice of those who dared to follow Jesus' example regarding the poor, including martyrs Archbishop Oscar Romero, the 4 American churchwomen, the 6 Jesuits at the University of Central America.

My eyes were opened to the results that cooperation can produce when people work together to establish co-ops that help sustain hundreds of families, or develop a program like *Programa Velasco* in San Salvador that helps families out of the cycle of poverty, violence and ignorance. I was blessed to be a part of this delegation and encourage others who want to "broaden their vision" to think about being part of a future delegation.

Trista Rodeen

We go to form relationships. We go to form community with people outside our borders.

We go to BE and to listen ...not to "do".

We go to deepen our own relationship with God by observing their immense faith during continuous set-backs (Chamba).

We go to experience the incredible hospitality shown in their people-centered world (Morena).

We go to be inspired from their endless hope that God-is-with-us (Tomi).

I go because I have friends there (Osmar).

I go because, even though neither of us can speak each others' languages, a big smile (Rosie) and a warm hug (Vilma) conveys care and concern for one another.

I go because Jesus is there (Mino).

I go because they have evangelized my soul!

Marge Schwede

What a tremendously eye opening, heart wrenching, faith filled adventure. These are a people, who against all odds, are surviving in solidarity and exemplary faith the injustices of the past and those that continue to plague their lives today. We heard many stories of surviving the war years. When asked how they survived they faithfully say, "by the grace of God." Yes, faith filled, gracious, joyous people, looking for a more just life. (They only desire) to be able to feed, clothe and educate their families and sustain their country through politics, gang problems and global warming. A very heart felt adventure getting to know a wonderful people!

Rita Amberg Waldref

El Salvador and Archbishop Oscar Romero—After 13 visits to El Salvador, I have been immersed into the life and death of Archbishop Oscar Romero, martyr and soon-to-be-canonized saint. Thirty-eight years ago this weekend (March 24, 1980), Romero was killed in the chapel of Divine Providence Hospital where he was celebrating Mass. He was martyred because he was "a voice for the voiceless" people who were being terrorized and killed by the military. Romero championed the dignity of each person, rich and poor alike. He begged the country's leadership to stop the repression/killing that targeted those who wished only to provide for their families and live without fear. Oscar Romero is still alive in the hearts and lives of humble Salvadorans. They remember his words: **"If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran People."**

When visiting El Salvador, delegates hear Romero stories that give our Salvadoran brothers and sisters hope as they continue seeking justice. We see photos of Romero in homes with dirt floors and in small tiendas/shops. Colorful murals of the Archbishop greet us in the countryside and city. In San Salvador, we are blessed to visit three Romero sites: the chapel of his death, his home, his tomb in the Cathedral. Holy ground, indeed.

For me, Romero's life and death describe Holy Week. His life/death is the Paschal Mystery personified in our time. Romero challenges me to live the Gospel more fully, to speak out on behalf of those suffering and living on the margins in my community and around the world. In my daily prayer, I seek his intercession to be a person of deeper faith and service to others.



The 2018 Delegation to El Salvador.