

In January 2019, 7 members of St. Aloysius Parish traveled to El Salvador to visit members of our Sister Community in the Bajo Lempa region. Delegation members wrote reflections for the parish bulletin which are compiled below. For more information, please contact Rita Amberg Waldref: 313-7003 or rwaldref@dioceseofspokane.org

Reflections from 2019 Delegation Members to El Salvador

George Waldref

Discussion of Migration amidst a “Border Wall” Shutdown - One would think the stronger enforcement at the U.S. – Mexican border during the last few years would send a clear message to those thinking about crossing the border without proper documentation. Yet, for the hardworking men and women of El Salvador, the dream of providing a way out of the grinding poverty and pervasive gang threats is a more powerful incentive.

During my visit to villages of the Bajo Lempa area, I heard numerous men & women talk frankly of their desire to make the dangerous and expensive journey north. Is a beefed-up border wall the answer? How about spending a fraction of that amount on a “Marshall Plan” to provide grassroot job training opportunities to those in impoverished communities in Central America? Wouldn’t micro loans and seed money for the enterprising be a better investment than higher barriers & bigger detention centers?

Reanna Thompson

I went to El Salvador to learn, listen, and show solidarity. We were frequently told ‘you have to remember.’ I learned one semester’s worth of history in 8 days. People do not need to understand the concept of resilience to practice it.

We visited the burial site where 600 Salvadorans were massacred; men, women & children. You have to remember the army attacked them because they were poor and *probably* supported the guerrillas. The witnesses of these atrocities had the courage to feel the trauma again by sharing what they lived through. They remember.

Children performed a skit of the massacres. You have to remember, they were busy living, washing clothes at the river, making tortillas, working the land. You have to remember the United States gave the Salvadoran army \$1,000,000 a day for almost 12 years. These funds were used for munitions and training to massacre their people.

You have to remember civilians, missionaries, nuns, and priests were murdered because they had the audacity to help the poor. I felt the solidarity. I took the dark journey into their past and listened to their pain, sorrow, and hope for the future. I saw resilience everywhere. I will remember.

Gloria Lopez

The trauma of war - a golden cornfield, a grassy knoll, a holy church juxtaposed with the ugliness of terror, death and abandoned home sites. I looked down at my feet, I HAD BEEN WALKING ON HOLY GROUND ALL WEEK. It is holy ground where ever my brothers and sisters live, walk and struggle to heal and survive.

In some communities the eyes of the children had begun to shine again and so had their parents, but the shadows linger. In other communities the shadows are strong. Plays, songs, music told the story of their culture, experiences of war, celebrate life and embrace hope.

As I walk in solidarity with the hurting and bring hope here in Spokane, I will always remember in my heart the Salvadoran people, rich in courage, strength and hope.

Mary Ackerman

The People - My Mind, My Spirit, My Heart. They are there in El Salvador. This trip taught me to live better. I was humbled to meet so many loving hearts. Love is the universal language spoken there. I love how the people there surrender into life as it is for them. Their hearts are thrown wide open and their smiles beam through. Their life is hard, and yet they are so happy. They live in poverty, remembrances of the war. And, yet, there is hope.

I was so delighted to meet with the women helping women program. Seed money is put up, and women are given the opportunity to start their own business. Met one delightful woman, who trained to be a masseuse. Another woman, was making her own ice cream. She had to walk 1 ½ miles to her post in order to sell, and then back again. This is love in action. This trip was so memorable and rewarding for me. To the people there, I bow deeply and say thank you, thank you, thank you.

Dean Duncan

For me, a trip to a country like El Salvador is a bitter sweet experience. The sweet part is spending time with the faith communities and seeing how they put their faith into action by taking care of one another. It puts one in mind of the early Christian communities that St. Paul wrote about. The Salvadorans freely offered welcome to the stranger and gave us a sense of the importance of developing a loving community. The decade of upheaval caused immense suffering that still lingers, but it gave the people a Saint in Oscar Romero. This man spoke for his people and offered them hope.

The not-so-sweet part is seeing how hard the people have to work for the bare necessities. One can work hard to gain skills or an education and find there are no job opportunities waiting for them. We witnessed how readily people would take advantage of the opportunities to start a small business when offered start up funds and some training. Instead of building walls it would be wonderful if we could help build bridges of opportunity for these people. Oscar Romero followed Jesus's message of caring for the poor. This should be the same message for all of us.

Keiko Von Holt

We had a few home visits. On one visit a mother told us that one of her sons left home, headed North, seeking a new life. He could not take the life in the village anymore. In this poverty, people work very hard. The teary-eyed mother has not heard from her son since he left—whether he made it to his destination, got caught, or is in jail.

The country is beautiful, people who live there are beautiful. As a painter, I wish I could have stayed in one place long enough to finish a picture. When I returned home to the U.S. I realized that we are blessed with an abundance of material goods—and how very wasteful we are.

People in El Salvador cling to a ray of Hope that some day the soldiers on the street corners and in the plaza will go home—and the true meaning of Peace will return to the country and in people's hearts.

Rita Amberg Waldref

Thirty-nine years ago today (March 24), St. Oscar Romero was killed in the chapel of Divine Providence Hospital where he was celebrating Mass. He was martyred because he was "a voice for 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 that targeted those who wished only to provide for their families and live without fear. St. 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 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.

I feel extremely blessed to walk in St. Romero's steps when our delegations visit El Salvador each January. 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 2019 Delegation to El Salvador.