

In January 2017, 9 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.

For more information on our Sister Relationship, please call Rita Amberg Waldref, 313-7003.

Reflections from 2017 Delegation Members to El Salvador

George Waldref

On return from my 11th parish visit to our sister community in the Bajo Lempa region, I reflect on the young leaders who inspired our discussions about the future of this community. Most of these faces are familiar to me. Their parents have led their Christian Base Communities (CBC) since the end of the civil war in 1992.

Fr. Pedro, a Belgian priest who died in 2015, was the catalyst in the CBC formation. Sr. Elena and the Pequeña Comunidad sisters continue to support the CBCs, but much of the day-to-day organizing is in the competent hands of 20 & 30 year olds. They lead soccer clubs for children & community dance, theater and service groups— with only limited supervision from more senior advisors. Their efforts play a key role in building community and keeping youth out of gangs.

Edie Ward

Reflecting on my time spent with our sister community in Tierra Blanca, the most poignant emotion it evokes is a sense of homecoming. This was my third trip with the delegation, and this time my son came with me, so it was though I was seeing it with new eyes.

Our Salvadoran friends embody the scripture through the perspective of the third world where basic human rights have been long denied. These are Christians who have lived in poverty and have been powerless. They now understand that they were living under the will of man/government and not the will of God. This unique experience continues to deepen my faith and renews my spirit.

Patty Gaul

This was my first time to go to El Salvador with the delegation. I was struck by the sense that we are indeed the Mystical Body of Christ; we are truly one. We were there in solidarity with these small communities who are struggling to craft out their lives in the aftermath of their terrible war. Their lives are not easy by our standards, but they are so full of joy that I found daily that I was blessed by them. Their hospitality comes from their beautiful spirit and faith. I indeed felt that “we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.”

Hunter Ward

I was excited that I would get another stamp on my passport . It makes me look adventurous, but this passport stamp felt different. I had no idea what to expect while visiting El Salvador. Books and movies aren't real. The stories I learned, the pictures I saw, and the aftermath of what happened has told me more than what I think reading a book could do. Which is good if you dislike reading books like me. Everything there had surprised me: the wonderful hospitality the poor provided, the warm weather, and the corruption that embodies the country. I usually only enjoy unique experiences just once, but a future trip sounds even more unique. I would love to visit again after college.

Verity Caruso

Being part of the St. Aloysius delegation to El Salvador was an experience of love, friendship, and an acceptance which stirred my soul. The warmth of the people, the curiosity and laughter of the children, the fellowship with my fellow delegates, and the heat of the Salvadoran sun, were the perfect cure for the winter blues I felt before I left. A well planned, full schedule provided opportunities to meet people at their homes, work environments, and sacred sites with emotional histories. We learned of struggles and successes; encountered frustrations and optimism. It is a trip I will not soon forget. I highly recommend it.

Bob Stirling

I had the honor of being part of the 2017 delegation to El Salvador. I am a former Peace Corp volunteer who served in the Solomon Islands. I thought that experience would prepare me for my trip to El Salvador.

El Salvador had a brutal civil war where thousands of people were killed with the full support of the United States. The ruling government targeted the Christian faith based communities, claiming they were part of the rebel movement. In spite of the history, Salvadoran people are filled with Christian love and joy. I found myself apologizing for my government's role in their oppression. The people I met were very forgiving and could separate citizens from the actions of their government. I felt blessed to be part of the delegation.

Todd Xavier Rothrock

It has truly been my privilege to have participated in 4 of the past 6 delegation trips to El Salvador to visit members of our sister community in the Bajo Lempa region. During these visits, I have come to know many of those we visit, sharing in just a glimpse of what they live on a day to day basis. I have found them, from the youngest to the elders, to be people of incredible faith, hope and love. Even in the midst of their struggles and poverty, they seek the positive in everyone they meet. Their incredible hospitality in welcoming our delegation year after year is an example I aspire to follow. I am so grateful to be able to share their story with our community.

Dean Duncan

This was my second trip to El Salvador and it was even more profound than the first. One is always changed by living with people and hearing their stories. When you see how hard people work for so very little, you become more aware of your own overabundance. One is able to recognize that those who flee North to find a better life are seeking exactly what we have. One understands more the complexities of what happens when you head North. But what price is paid for that better life? Often families are broken, kids grow up without their father or are raised by grandparents. It was probably the same story for many of our parents and grandparents. Still, in a just world the call of our faith is to share what we have and to welcome the stranger.

Rita Amberg Waldref

I have had the privilege of visiting members of our Sister Community in El Salvador for 12 years.

Why am I so committed to this relationship? It's the people and lessons learned.

Sr. Elena is from California and has ministered in El Salvador for over 30 years. She broadens my vision of Church and has become my mentor in ministry. **Juventina** teaches me hospitality and warmth. **Rosy**, a young adult in her 20s, is working on a college degree so she can help her Salvadoran brothers and sisters. She gives me hope and joy.

Chamba and **Lillian** are a young couple who recently lost their twins during the 8th month of pregnancy, the result of a health care system that forgets the poor. They suffer quietly with dignity. I am humbled.

Truly, our yearly visits to El Salvador are about relationships formed and continued...

