

SALVANET

A Publication of Christians for Peace in El Salvador, CRISPAZ

Welcoming the New Year in El Salvador

by Jeanne Marie Ridders

Standing at the edge of the Pacific Ocean at the dawn of the year 2000, the waves wash sand over my toes. My tongue tastes warm salt in the air. I wonder what place tiny El Salvador holds in the world, in this historical moment, in this particular juncture in time.

People are reading the morning newspapers like they were guides to navigating a minefield. They hope that all the bad news might tell them how not to end up in the wrong place at the wrong time. A growing fear surrounds them: maybe El Salvador is the wrong place at the wrong time. El Salvador 2000 according to the media: economic confusion, political sterility, violence, families torn apart, corruption, empty religiosity, consumerism, everyone dreaming of getting out and going North.

But, the newspaper doesn't tell the whole story. It never has. There is a human story here, there is a God story. There are many stories: Grandma Conchita learning to read, women

union organizers' victory in reinstating 300 maquila workers, refugees from flood areas drinking clean water from a new well, cardboard communities slowly transforming into a neighborhood of cement block homes, families reconciling after years of forced separation, a mass at El Mozote. As we face the next years—a new period in the history of El Salvador and the world—the human stories and the God stories prove to be the more reliable guides to navigating the minefield. It is time again to tell the stories to new generations, to hear them again ourselves. We don't need the stories for nostalgia, but rather as a way to discover in ourselves the keys to facing new problems and the strength to pass through new rivers.

On March 24th of this year, thousands of people around the world will remember Monseñor Romero. Probably half of those people were not alive at the time of his martyrdom and many of us who were alive weren't aware of the significance. Yet we remember him, we bring his memory to mind, we honor it. We honor his memory by continuing the struggle, by looking for new injustices to denounce and new ways to denounce injustice. These are the challenges of the New Year: to face the reality of death that is so graphically outlined in our newspapers and at the same time embrace the life-giving stories of



January / February
2000

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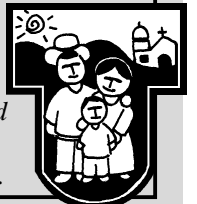
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CRISPAZ, Christians for Peace in El Salvador, was founded in 1984. We are a faith-based organization dedicated to mutual accompaniment with the church of the poor and marginalized communities in El Salvador. In building bridges of solidarity between communities in El Salvador and those in our home countries, we strive together for peace, justice and human liberation.



CRISPAZ has four programs:

- † CRISPAZ Volunteer Program (CVP)
- † El Salvador Encounter Delegation Program (ESE)
- † Communication Information Network on El Salvador (CINES)
- † Summer Immersion Program

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All contributions are tax deductible.

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CLOSE UP ON CRISPAZ

liberation and hope. It is well worth our time to read Romero's homilies again. There is no doubt as to the prophetic nature of his message, because it does speak to us today.

In CRISPAZ we face the New Year with a sense of real support from both the Salvadoran and the international solidarity communities. My recent trip to the United States proved to me once again that we are intimately connected by our experiences in El Salvador. It is a gospel connection, a connection of good news, of hope. CRISPAZ is growing and evolving in ways that we believe respond to the new realities. It is with a sense of humility that we come close to the tomb of Monseñor Romero and ask that he accompany us in this work today. Our volunteers, the summer interns, the delegations, the Board of Directors, staff and all of the people who have supported CRISPAZ in one way or another over the years have shown that we are in this relationship for the long haul. Think of what first grabbed your heart about El Salvador and you will know why this is a long-term commitment. Each person has a story of why they are here. These are the stories that form our collective biography of hope.

The work of building peace, of forming relationships across all kinds of barriers, and of practicing our faith is not simple work, or easy work. But, in spite of the difficulties, burn-out and even sacrifice, we all know when it has been worth it. We look around and we see a hundred people more dedicated than us, more radical, more serene, living more simply. It appears that the whole

northern faction of the solidarity movement tends to suffer from a collective case of low self-esteem. We berate ourselves for what remains undone and forget to celebrate what we have done, and more importantly who we are. And yet, when we meet up at Fort Benning, when we exchange e-mails at Christmas, when enter a house blessed by a Salvadoran cross, we recognize a very important bond. Those bonds are what will keep us human in this new century. Those bonds are what will give our children a community where they can belong. Indeed, there is cause for celebration.

January and February are passing quickly. Soon many of us will be gathered to celebrate the life and death of Monseñor Romero. We will see each other and celebrate our own lives and even thank God for the sacrifices we have made to become authentic humans in an inhumane world. The challenges are many, but the sources of strength and hope are close at hand. 2000 will be another year in which it is our privilege to tell the stories of how God passed through El Salvador with a message for the world. 2000 will give us another opportunity to introduce new people to the gift of walking with the poor. 2000 will give us new human stories to share that bear witness to the God of History at work once again in our lives.

The sun sets on the Pacific Ocean. There is nothing like a Pacific sunset in El Salvador to remind us that "*todavía cantamos, todavía pedimos, todavía soñamos, todavía esperamos.*" (We still sing, we still ask, we still dream, we still hope.) Happy New Year.



1999

The Year in Review

28

January
Ex-guerilla leader Joaquín Villalobos implicates FMLN political leader Shafick Handal in the kidnapping of Kerim Salume. Handal denies accusations that he or the Communist Party (PC) played any role in the kidnappings.

9

February
The Public Healthcare Workers' Union denounces a supposed plan to privatize the service and to carry out massive layoffs in the Ministry of Health.

7

March
ARENA candidate Francisco Flores becomes president with 53% of the vote.

8

President Bill Clinton visits El Salvador. He confirms the establishment of a bilateral investment treaty.

9

May
The FMLN holds its National Convention in which they decide upon a total renovation of their leadership.

2

June
Ex-director of the State Intelligence Organization Mauricio Sandoval is named Director of the National Civilian Police.

24

President Flores announces his "Economic Reactivation Proposal" confirming the application of an added value tax on agricultural products and medicines and says that salary increases for public employees will be impossible.

13

July
Unionized schoolteachers in the National Association of Salvadoran Educators begin a labor stoppage demanding salary increases.

12

August
Ex-patrol members, organized under the Movement of Integrated Labor Organizations (MOLI) and the Association of Salvadoran Agricultural Producers (APROAS) protest demanding indemnity for services they provided during the war. As a result of police intervention, two protesters are killed.

15

It is revealed that ARENA gave 10 million colons (\$1.15 million) to 5,000 members of APROAS as "Mitch" relief. The money was given just days before the presidential elections.

23

San Salvador mayor Héctor Silva confirms his intentions to participate in the 2000 elections, but only if he is nominated on a coalition ticket.

6

September
After 100 days in office, public opinion offers President Flores a 5.3 (out of 10).

9

The Legislative Assembly approves 34 reforms to the Penal Code and Process.

16

The National Association of Judicial Employees began an indefinite strike.

28

The National Emergency Committee declares a "red alert" due to 18 days of non-stop rain.

1

October
The Ministry of Health informs that the rains affected 11,500 people in six departments of the country. The loss in crops totals almost 25 million colons (\$2.9 million).

2

ARENA announces Luis Cardenal as its candidate for the mayor of San Salvador in the March 2000 elections.

15

Public Health Care union leaders begin an indefinite strike demanding 92.9 million colons (\$10.7 million) for salary increases and threaten to take the strike to a national level.

1

December
A confrontation between the police and striking health care and judicial workers leaves one person unconscious and 7 more wounded.

8

Eight political parties in the Legislative Assembly confirm their decision to carry out a political trial against Human Rights Ombudsman Eduardo Peñate as a result of irregularities in his office.

Getting to know the CRISPAZ team . . .

Our efforts to experience mutual accompaniment with the Salvadoran people and to continue to educate ourselves and our brothers and sisters in the United States happens thanks to the work of a unique group of individuals both in El Salvador and in the United States. Together with a supportive and committed Board of Directors who come from all parts of the United States and El Salvador, the following individuals are working fulltime to fulfill the CRISPAZ mission.

El Salvador Staff . . .



JEANNE MARIE RIKKERS

is the CRISPAZ Programs Coordinator in El Salvador. Originally from St. Paul, Minnesota, Jeanne has been living in El Salvador for seven years. In addition to her work with CRISPAZ, she enjoys spending time with her three kids, reading, visiting a local prison, attending the martyr commemorations and eating pupusas! About her work, Jeanne says "I love that CRISPAZ provides people with opportunities to humbly try to transform their lives and the world."

ELIZABETH HERNÁNDEZ

MARTINEZ, Administrative Assistant, is originally from Ciudad Delgado, San Salvador. She has been working for CRISPAZ for one year. She likes working with CRISPAZ because it works with people who are often times forgotten by the government and because the work is carried out in a way in which all people are treated equally, regardless of their social class. Outside of her work, Elizabeth likes to spend time with her two sons, to read about national reality, and is in the process of learning English.



PEGGY ONEILL, SC, is from New Jersey and has been living in El Salvador for thirteen years. She has recently joined the CRISPAZ team in El Salvador in the role of spiritual accompaniment. She lives in the Suchitoto zone and is involved with a variety of projects.

She teaches at the UCA's School of Theology, works with the Inter-Novitiate Program and with the Augsburg College program in El Salvador, and she works with a variety of projects in the communities in her area. About her work with Salvadorans, Peggy says that "they have taught me to live a spirituality of resistance and creativity. I want to continue to accompany them from the motivation of a shared faith in a God of liberation and freedom. They have convinced me that religious life is about living on the margins. I am bumping into the real each day here. These people have made me want to be bold. They have birthed in me that passion Jesus had for the reign of justice."



JAY GUTZWILLER is from Cincinnati, Ohio and joined CRISPAZ as the delegation leader in June 1999. Jay says that he has "always felt a strong sense of solidarity with the people of El Salvador because of its violent history, the unfathomable suffering the majority of Salvadorans experienced, and the role the popular moving with CRISPAZ opportunity to live amazing people and allows me to face life-changing experiences of all ages when they come on a delegation. It is in witnessing these selfless, dedicated people in the impoverished communities that I truly discover what it means to live the message of Jesus today. CRISPAZ has provided me with a wonderful faith community in which to share in the process of spiritual growth." In addition to his work with CRISPAZ, Jay likes to visit communities outside of San Salvador, visit the Quetzaltepeque prison, and go dancing!



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TARA MATHUR

is the editor of *Salvanet* and she coordinates CRISPAZ' handcrafts project. Tara is from Wichita, Kansas, and has been in El Salvador for four years, initially as a long-term volunteer and then later as a staff person. Tara says, "I appreciate so many things about my life in El Salvador. But I am especially grateful for the Salvadorans who continue to accompany me through the painful and joyful process of having my 'shell of ignorance' broken open and for the opportunity to live a simple lifestyle full of wealth."

LONG-TERM VOLUNTEERS IN EL SALVADOR . . .



YON HUI BELL, from San Antonio, Texas, has been working in El Salvador for two and a half years. She works in the Suchitoto zone in the areas of popular education, literacy and community schools. She is currently focusing her energies on the development of a rural library and community center together

with a group of community members. Yon Hui says that she enjoys working in El Salvador because "I have found a community, a place where I can be of help but also have real friends. I feel constantly challenged—I can never 'forget' the poverty and violence that exist in the world."

MARY FRANCES ROSS has been working with the *Maria, Madre de los Pobres* (Mary, Mother of the Poor)

parish clinic pharmacy since April 1999. She is not only the pharmacist, but also pharmacy's only staff person. Regarding her experience working in the parish she says "I enjoy the people. In the face of often devastating poverty they have incredible faith, joy, and a wonderful sense of community." Originally from Michigan, Mary Frances has also found

companionship, fellowship and understanding through her relationship with the CRISPAZ team.

US STAFF . . .

STAN DEVOOGD, who is in charge of CRISPAZ Promotions and Development, has been working for the organization for five years. He enjoys his work with CRISPAZ and says, "I like the fact that we are a community of faith reaching out beyond ourselves to learn and serve . . .

CRISPAZ helps me stay connected with people in many parts, working on what really counts in life and that is promoting the abundant life as promised to all in the scriptures." Originally from Canada, Stan also works for the Presbyterian Border Ministry. He enjoys spending time with his wife and three children and fixing up their house.



LORETTA GEUENICH is from Adelaide, South Australia and has been in El Salvador for about a year. She works in Suchitoto as a support to a coalition of women's organization in her region. The coalition works to facilitate communication and networks among the participating organizations. Loretta chooses to work in El Salvador "because some slender thread pulled me here, challenging my ego and warming my heart with quirkiness and I didn't seek to quash the expression of passionate living and being. Here I encounter a global sense of reality in my day-to-day life that I was struggling to find in Australia."



PAUL DARILEK oversees a team of water-well drillers. The team is drilling wells in different Salvadoran communities and they have primarily been working in "Bajo Lempa" zone of Usulután. Paul is from San Antonio, Texas and has been in El Salvador for two and a half years. He appreciates his involvement with CRISPAZ and the experiences of working in El Salvador. Why does he choose to work in El Salvador? Paul says, "It is the best job I can find!"



JENNIFER COLLINS is the Office Manager of the U.S. office in San Antonio. She joined CRISPAZ in May 1999. In answer to the question of why she chooses to do this work, she says, "I think it chose me! After seeing first hand the effects of US policy in Central America and Mexico, I knew that I wanted to work with organizations with a social justice mission, a grassroots approach, and a focus on Latin America. I want to take part, even in a small way, in something that forces people to stop and think, that invokes alternatives, and that encourages people to become a part of something greater." In addition to her work with CRISPAZ, Jennifer is involved with networking among similar organizations working across borders and she enjoys reading, writing, traveling, and spending time with friends and family.



communities in El Salvador. In building bridges of solidarity between communities in El Salvador and those in

Meeting the Victims, Falling in Love

by Dean Brackley, S.J.

Waves of foreign delegations have come to El Salvador during recent years. The pilgrims deplane a little anxious, vaguely dreading what awaits them. They know that the people are very poor. They have heard of massacres and bombings of the past and the hunger and sickness of the present. They fear, half-consciously, that these poor people will lunge for their wallets, or that when they, the visitors, arrive at their first poor community, they will suffer a massive Irish-Catholic—or Jewish or Methodist—guilt-attack and at the very least they will have to sell their VCR when they get back home.

As happens with most of our fears, it doesn't turn out that way. On the one hand, the visitors spend much of their time in El Salvador wondering why these poor people are smiling. The people are glad they came and receive them with open arms. On the other hand, if the pilgrims listen to the stories of flight from the army, torture and death squads, and, since the war, of unspeakable hardship and premature death, the victims will break their hearts. And *that*, after all, is the main reason the pilgrims have come. It is an experience of extraordinary richness, if the visitors muster the courage to take it in.

The encounter stops the visitors short and focuses their attention. "My God!" they cry, "half their children die from preventable disease. The powerful steal from them at will. There is no justice. And what has *my* government been doing here in my name?" The poor bring the visitors face-to-face with evil; and the visitors respond with horror. Not that the poor are all saints. (Hardship brings out both the best and the worst in people, the D'Aubuisson's and the Romeros.) They just obviously do not deserve what they have had to suffer. The injustice clashes strikingly with their humanity.

This presses in upon the visitors, and it can shake them to their roots. As the poor draw deeper into their own reality, the newcomers pass from observers to participants. The more they allow the poor to crash through their defenses, the more unsettled they feel. They begin to see their own reflection in the eyes of their hosts, and they say to themselves, "Hey, these people are just like us!"

They sense a gentle invitation to lay down the burden of their own superiority (of which they are mostly unaware) and identify with these humble people, despite the differences between them. They begin to feel smaller and more "ordinary". A sweet shame comes over them, not bitter remorse but more like the shame one feels when falling in love. The visitors feel themselves losing their grip; or better, they feel the world losing its grip on them. What world? The world made up of important people like them and unimportant poor people like their hosts. As the poet Yeats says, "things fall apart"; the visitors' world is coming unhinged. They feel resistance, naturally, to a current that threatens to sweep them out of control. They feel a little confused—again—like the disorientation of falling in love. In fact, that is what is happening, a kind of falling in love. The earth trembles. My horizon is opening up. I'm on unfamiliar ground, entering a richer, more real world.

We all live a bit on the periphery of the deep drama of life, more so, on average, in affluent societies. The reality of the periphery is thin, one-dimensional, "lite," compared to the multi-layered richness of this new world the visitors are entering. In this interchange with a few of their representatives, the anonymous masses of the world's poor emerge from their cardboard-cutout reality and take on the three-dimensional status of full-fledged human beings.

Actually, there are more than three dimensions here. The eyes of the victim beckon. They are like a bottomless well in which something infinite draws me on. In their welcome, peace sweeps over me. I feel almost at home in this strange place. Although an accomplice to the world of important people like me and unimportant people like them, I feel accepted, forgiven—even before I have cleaned up my act with them or billions like them.

After reflecting on these issues for some years, it only gradually dawned on me that I belong to a peculiar tribe. The middle-class cultures of the North are newcomers to world history and have only existed for about 200 years. We're not all bad people; we're just a tiny minority under the com-

mon illusion that we are the center of gravity of the universe. The poor can free us of this strange idea.

Don't get me wrong. The middle-class cultures have made extraordinary advances in civilization. True; many came at great cost to the despoiled nations and races. Still, these are historic achievements. And I'm not even talking about ambiguous technological progress. I mean the spiritual, cultural and political breakthroughs: the unheard-of opportunities, political liberties, democracy, the critical consciousness of the Enlightenment, and all that. No need to demean these gains. The problem for us is that the new freedoms and economic security have distanced the non-poor from the kind of daily life-and-death struggle that has been the daily fare of the poor of all times right up to today. Maybe 90% of all the people who ever lived have struggled every day to keep the household alive against the threat of death through hunger, disease, accidents and violence. By distancing the non-poor from the daily threat of death, the benefits of modernity have induced in us a kind of chronic low-grade confusion about what is really important in life, namely life itself and love. Besides, superior technology and the communications media induce us to think of our culture and perspective on life as the norm, and basically on track. The encounter with the poor stops us short; it recollects us. When we come out on the other side, we realize that the marginalized are actually at the center of things. It is we, in Washington and Paris, who are on the fringe.

These people shake us up because they bring home to us that things are much worse in the world than we dared to imagine. But that is only one side of the story: If we allow them to share their suffering with us, they communicate some of their hope to us as well. The smile that seems to have no foundation in the facts is not phony; the spirit of *fiesta* is not an escape but a recognition that something else is going on in the world besides injustice and destruction. The poor smile because they suspect that this something is more powerful than the injustice. When they insist on sharing their tortilla with a visiting gringo, we recognize there is something going on in the world that is more wonderful than we dared to imagine.

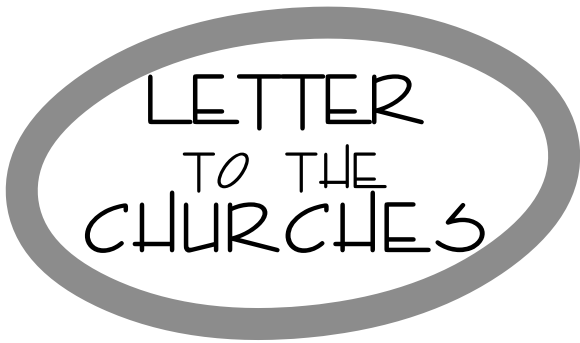


Delegation participants play games with children in a rural community.

It seems that the victim offers us the privileged place (although not the only place) to encounter the truth which sets us free. The poor usher us into the heart of reality. They bring us up against the world and ourselves all at once. To some extent, we all hold reality at arm's length—fending off intolerable parts of the world with one hand and intolerable parts of ourselves with the other. The two go together. As a rule, our encounters with the world place us in touch with internal reality, as well. In particular, when the world's pain crashes in upon us in the person of the victim, the encounter dredges up from within us the parts of ourselves that we had banished. The outcast outside us calls forth the outcast within us. This is why people avoid the poor. But meeting them can heal us. We will only heal our inner divisions if we are also working to heal our social divisions.

The victims of history—the destitute, abused women, oppressed minorities, all those the Bible calls “the poor”—not only put us in touch with the world and with ourselves, but also with the mercy of God. There is something fathomless about the encounter with the poor, as we have said—like the opening of a chess game with its infinite possibilities. If we let them, the poor will place us before the abyss of the holy Mystery we call God. They are a kind of door that opens before that Mystery and through which God passes to get at us. Clearly we need them more than they need us.

Small wonder that people keep returning. Something has happened, a kind of falling in love, I think.



from El Salvador

We are persecuted but never abandoned;
struck down, but never left to die.

(2 Corinthians 4:7-8)

□ INFORMATION SERVICE OF THE PASTORAL CENTER, CENTRAL AMERICAN UNIVERSITY, SAN SALVADOR □
EDITED ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Letter to the Churches is a bimonthly publication of the Archbishop Oscar Romero Pastoral Center, Central American University (UCA), San Salvador. These are letters of flesh and spirit, written from one Salvadoran community to another and from the Salvadoran Church to the Universal Church. The following are excerpts from this publication.

The UCA Martyrs: Ten Years Later

On November 16, 1999, the UCA commemorated the 10th anniversary of the martyrdom of the six Jesuit priests and the two women. The “National Reality” section of Letter to the Churches offers the response to four questions that continue to be on the minds of Salvadorans: What happened ten years ago? What is the country’s situation ten years later? What is currently happening with the Jesuit case? and, How is Salvadoran society carrying on the memory of the martyrs?

What happened ten years ago?

Ten years have passed. And the people continue to ask: *What happened that November 16?* We tell the story as it is remembered by Spanish journalist Carmen Cortina.

On the morning of November 16, 1989, those of us who were covering the war in El Salvador behaved unprofessionally. We broke all rules, we were in denial, and we were insulting. Archbishop Monsignor Arturo Rivera y Damas also had a lump in his throat. Face to face with the bodies of six Jesuit priests and two women, he cried out, admonishing the act and making evident his great indignation. That day the war took a great turn.

Almost all of the political and union leaders had left the country. The few that remained did not think twice about taking refuge in one of the embassies. Ignacio Ellacuría was the only public figure who dared to enter the country from Spain on November 13. His brother, José Antonio Ellacuría, remembers that there was no convincing Ignacio not to return to El Salvador at that time. Ellacuría said that if President Cristiani called for his death, he would be the one that was directly responsible.

Cristiani’s involvement in the massacre has never been clarified. However, it was proven that a group from the Atlacatl Battalion Special Forces violently

entered the priests’ residence at the UCA and began to shoot them one by one. The two women were the wife and daughter of the university gardener. That night, terrified by the offensive, they had asked to stay with the priests. They died in an embrace. Jesuit Rolando Alvarado, Ellacuría’s last assistant, said, “Before traveling, Ellacuría phoned his community at the UCA. He wanted to know their opinion. He wanted to share the risk with them.” And as I listen to him speak, I remember the eight bodies that were strewn across the back garden of the Jesuit residence, six of them with their brains destroyed. And I remember Ellacuría’s brown housecoat and his expressionless face. I remember Ignacio Martín-Baró, author of eleven books. And Segundo Montes, father of those displaced by war, he himself displaced from life. I remember Amando López, witness to the Nicaraguan war and a victim of a different war (or perhaps the same war). Juan Ramón Moreno, lover of the art of ordering books and creator of the most important theological library in Central America. I remember Joaquín López y López, the only one who was born in El Salvador. And Julia Elba and Celina Ramos, silenced witnesses.

The death of Ignacio Ellacuría had been announced. In fact, this was true for almost all of the priests in El Salvador, especially the Jesuits who were the first religious congregation to experience the violence. In February of 1977, Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande headed

the list. His assassination was stained with political slogans in favor of the peasant and student movements that had begun to gather strength in those years. And in addition to these demonstrators there was a different group, those who called for the Salvadoran people to “be a patriot, kill a priest.”

From the very beginning, Ellacuría was against the violence. For that reason he began to look for an alternative. He never believed in the war. He condemned the injustice, but he always believed that the war demanded too much from the country. He did not tire from proposing alternatives and making his opposition to the violence public. The FMLN did not look poorly upon Ellacuría despite the fact that they were fighting for a military victory. The last time that I saw him we were both on a flight from San Salvador to Managua. It was September 1989. Later I learned that he went to speak with (FMLN military leader) Joaquín Villalobos. Ellacuría voiced his opposition to the military offensive. But despite his request, the FMLN went ahead with the offensive. Beforehand, Ellacuría was asked to please leave the country. Of course he did leave, but then he returned. And he was assassinated. “El Salvador suffered a great loss with his death,” says Rolando Alvarado, although he recognizes that the deaths also helped to speed up the peace process.

A few days after the crime, a general from the Salvadoran army told Father Francisco Estrada, who replaced Ellacuría at the UCA, that the death of the Jesuits would cause more damage to the Armed Forces than all of the war together. “So, why were they killed?” asked Estrada. “In El Salvador, all of those who interfere are killed. The consequences are measured later,” he responded. But the

Armed Forces were not the only group to receive a blow from the assassination of the Jesuits. The offensive and the crime shook the

We affirm that their death was not in vain—it helped to put an end to the war and above all it was the seed of truth, compassion, justice, and fraternity that grew into a small tree that continues to grow.

strategists at the Pentagon. The military aid sent by the U.S. since the beginning of the war had not served to break the FMLN, but rather to arm an army that did not follow the rules of the game. Ten years later, the U.S. agreed with Ellacuría by deciding that negotiation was the only way out of this decade of horror.

In asking the question as to whether or not the crime was an error, there is no consensus. But everyone recognizes that the massacre had been announced. “Ellacuría is a guerilla, cut his head off.” “We should get him out here and kill him.” These and other threats were heard on the chain of radio stations, broadcast by the government just a few hours before the offensive began. Ellacuría was still in Spain where he was being given an award and \$5,000, money that was stolen by the military officers who assassinated him. The voice of Salvadoran Vice President Francisco Merino accused Ellacuría of having poisoned the minds of all of the students of the UCA. I am told that the person who was in charge of the chain of radio stations at that time, Mauricio Sandoval, is currently the chief of the National Civilian Police.

What is the country's situation ten years later?

Many now ask if the Jesuits died in vain. What is the country like now? Are things better or

worse? We affirm that their death was not in vain—it helped to put an end to the war and above all it was the seed of truth, compassion, justice, and fraternity that grew into a small tree, which continues to grow. The vigil held on November 15 was just one expression of that. But we turn to the country's current situation to recognize the importance of remembering November 16.

Many things have changed in El Salvador, but it is evident that the historic, radical proposals for social change continue to be subordinate to the tragedy of poverty and barbaric violence. On a political level, the conversion of the armed left to a formal democracy has also meant the acceptance of neoliberalism in its most perverse manifestations. The left has become nothing more than a passive actor in a socio-economic order controlled by those with economic power. The right, no longer facing any real resistance, has dedicated itself to doing what it most enjoys: amassing large fortunes, taking advantage of all of opportunities within their reach. Even worse, some of their members—who were responsible for or accomplices to assassinations, disappearances, and tortures in the past two decades—now have the gall to champion democracy. With the help of a corrupt judicial system, they have wiped clean the slate of the past and opened a new account, as if their crimes had never caused damages that must be repaired. It is only through such reparation that Salvadoran society can regain its dignity.

After the signing of the Peace Accords, the institutional terror and death mechanisms have changed, though not radically enough to assure that they will never again be reactivated. Institutional spaces that do not operate with complete legality or under the

control of Salvadoran society continue to exist. The framework of the democratic institutions—from the political parties to the justice system—is very weak. This allows for illegality to infiltrate state institutions.

Individuals and groups that once existed to exterminate others (those they determined to be subversive and communist) have a decisive presence not only in the public arena, but also in dark circles that are the legacy of the recent past. All the while, they recite their credo of democracy. They are political analysts, commentators, directors of radio and television programs, and business people. But when we look more carefully at their activities, they are not as clean and honest as they appear to be, just as in the past. They long for the time in which absolute impunity ruled and they would like to return to the past. They think that they are exempt from the law: they challenge the judges, hide information, and defame their adversaries. All in all, they are a threat to the institution of democracy.

There are also those that say we no longer need to bring up the past and that if we keep touching the old wounds, they will never heal. On the surface, perhaps this is true. Nevertheless, history continues to configure present reality both at a structural and symbolic level. Many of the institutional perversions of today—for example, those that have the National Civilian Police trapped—are closely related to perversions of the past. Many of the criminal practices of today—kidnapping rings, narco-traffickers, extortionists—are not that far from the practices that proliferated among the military, political, and business sectors in recent history. Many of the values of the current national culture—egotism, power, and domination—were incubated during the long reign of military authoritarianism.

In order to remember the Jesuits of the UCA and all of those assassinated for their commitment to justice, it is necessary to critically analyze current reality.

What is currently happening with the Jesuit case?

There was a trial and a court of anonymous conscience declared the seven material authors who confessed to the massacre innocent. Colonel Alfredo Benavides and his assistant Yushy René Mendoza were the only two who were convicted. On April 1, 1993, both left the jail where they were being held. General amnesty—which was qualified by then Jesuit Provincial José María Tojeira as an offense to justice—offered freedom to both. These are the facts, but many continue to ask if the case of the Jesuits has

really been closed. With this question, they ask if at any time there will in fact be justice for the thousands of cases of torture, assassination, disappearance, and massacre.

The Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS), the UCA, and the Jesuits do not want to close the case. More than two years ago, the Jesuit case was presented before the Interamerican Human Rights Commission of the OAS. “The process is now in a confidential stage in which the Commission has asked for determined items from the Salvadoran government,” affirmed the director of the Human Rights Institute of the UCA (IDHUCA). He hopes to receive the Commission’s opinion by February, though he is skeptical of the outcome. The director has denounced the Salvadoran judicial system for being controlled by small, powerful groups.

These are the steps that have been taken to uncover the case of the Jesuits. What can be done in the future with these and other cases? The only thing to be done is to contest the 1993 General Amnesty Law. The Pinochet case has reopened the themes of “justice” and “legislation.” Legislation must be revisited if justice is to prevail. We will see what can be done.

Revocation of the amnesty. The decree of amnesty has been an attempt to forgive and forget, turning its back on the Salvadoran people. The case of the Jesuits is a crime whose authors—both the material authors who went to court as well as the intellectual authors who escaped justice—reap the benefits of “forgive and forget.” Amnesty violated the law by returning these individuals to the service of the State just after they committed the crimes (Art. 244). And it violated international law because amnesty had been granted for crimes that must be prosecuted and sanctioned and whose processing and penalty cannot be subject to conditions. This is the case for crimes of war and treason.

Amnesty is nothing more than a claim to power in a State of Law, but this is no conciliation. An attempt to reestablish the seriously violated law, taking into account the existing amnesty, means that we must obey the following ideas, which are derived from national and international law:

1. The Constitutional Court of the Supreme Court must declare the amnesty to be unconstitutional (Art. 183).
2. When faced with a concrete case, Salvadoran judges must declare the Amnesty Law inapplicable (Art. 185).
3. When faced with a concrete case in which there is a conflict between international human rights rules and treaties and the amnesty law, Salvadoran judges must favor the first.

4. The Interamerican Human Rights Commission, whose supra-national nature means that its decisions must be followed by El Salvador (as a signatory of the San Jose Pact) must declare amnesty to be a violation of the Pact and order its repeal in order to reestablish respect for human rights in El Salvador.

The possibility also exists that the Interamerican Justice Court, which forms part of the system of international American human rights protection, would intervene if the Commission were to present the case or if the case is brought forth by the State of El Salvador.

5. Any State that maintains a solid democratic institution must apply the principal of universality in prosecuting crimes of treason. The State must force the intellectual authors to submit to judgement and, in the application of international rules, they must leave the Salvadoran Amnesty Law to the side.

How is Salvadoran society carrying on the memory of the martyrs?

It depends of course. The Christian communities remember Monsignor Romero, the martyrs of the UCA and their own martyrs with enthusiasm and commitment. This calls to mind the vigil. The powerful, the armed forces, the oligarchy, the banks, the government, the legislative assembly, and many political parties have, for ten years, ignored the martyrs and wish that they would remain dead forever. But by doing this, they impoverish themselves and the country.

With regards to the media, the situation varies. First we will mention what today is an aberrant example, but which was common practice in years past. On November 11, the newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* published a special piece about the 1989 guerilla offensive. The subtitle of the article read "The Assassination of the Jesuits." It had no relationship to the theme that was been developed and yet it was printed in bigger and bolder print. It read, "Ignacio Ellacuría, considered the ideologue of the left, and five other Jesuits were killed on November 16, 1989 on the campus of the UCA, which was considered to be one of the 'FMLN sanctuaries' during the armed aggression."

The tendency that is revealed in this statement is obvious. It speaks of the "ideologue of the left" without mentioning that Ellacuría and the UCA were also critics of the FMLN. And it does not mention the

fact that those who made such claims came from a very specific sector of Salvadoran society: the Armed Forces, who planned and executed the assassination, and the upper class, who endorsed and justified the crime.

Their tendency is also revealed by the fact that this statement was included in a report supposedly written about the offensive. The aim? To associate the Jesuit assassination with the FMLN, the same thing that was done by the material and intellectual authors of the crime. This makes the assassination justifiable. In the end, it is concluded that Ellacuría and his team (just like Monsignor Romero) "got involved with politics."

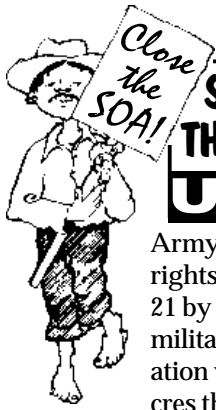
But this was not the only perspective that was offered. Also found in the *Diario de Hoy* was a column written by Salvador Samayoa on November 11, which praised the martyrs and spoke of them affectionately. "I loved them all very much and their death hurt me at the depth of my soul As a Salvadoran I was hurt by the loss of people of such good heart, talent, and generosity, people who will undoubtedly be missed in the building of a better country and a more humane society." To Ellacuría, he dedicated the following words: "Ignacio was an extraordinary man . . . he used complete independence in his criteria . . . he was a free spirit. His intelligence was superior."

On November 14, the *Prensa Gráfica* newspaper published a report entitled "One Such Ignacio" in which Ellacuría's former students shared their memories. The coverage offered by the *CoLatino* newspaper was openly sympathetic with the commemoration and the coverage offered by *El Mundo* was scarce but neutral. In the audiovisual realm, Channels 12 and 33 supplied good coverage of the commemoration.

The balance is important. The UCA martyrs are present in the media, though not as much as is needed. The powers that be are against them, but their truth shows the way. Now we must take the most important step: we must thank the martyrs for their contribution to Salvadoran society and take up the reigns by adopting the great values and institutions that they left behind.

The poor once again offer their response to the silence of the powerful and to the malevolence of the *Diario de Hoy*. Their answer was found in the thousands that walked with candlelight in hand to announce where it is that they continue to find light ten years later.

Yearly subscriptions to *Carta A Las Iglesias*, a bimonthly publication in Spanish, can be obtained for \$35 by writing to: Centro de Distribución UCA, Apartado Postal (01) 575, San Salvador, El Salvador, Centro America. Make checks payable to: Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas



SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS UPDATE

November Protest at Ft. Benning

Calling for the shut down of the U.S.

Army School of the Americas, 4,408 human rights activists risked arrest Sunday, November 21 by crossing the line onto the Ft. Benning (GA) military base in protest of the School's long association with human rights atrocities and massacres throughout Latin America. The demonstration honored the six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter on the 10th anniversary of their murder in El Salvador at the hands of SOA graduates.

The line crossing was led by a solemn procession of protesters in black mourning shrouds and white "death masks" who carried full-sized coffins and white, child-sized coffins to symbolize the thousands of men, women, and children killed and "disappeared" by graduates of the military training school. As the names of the victims of SOA violence were called aloud, actor Martin Sheen and long-time peace activist and Catholic priest Daniel Berrigan led a wave of protesters across the line drawn on the pavement marking the entrance to the army post.

FAST 2000 to Close the SOA

In Washington, DC:

★Kick Off Rally - Sunday, April 2, 2000★

★Lobby Day - Monday, April 3, 2000★

At 2,000 Locations Nationwide:

★ Juice-Only Fast ~ April 6 - April 19, 2000★

Organizing packet with country fact sheets are available from SOA Watch.

For More Information

School of the Americas Watch, P.O. Box 4566, Washington, D.C., 20017-0566, (202) 234-3440
soawatch@knight-hub.com, <http://www.soaw.org/>

By and About the UCA Martyrs

Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría, et. al. *Companions of Jesus: The Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador*. Orbis, 1990. Essays by and about the UCA martyrs.

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Juan Ramón Moreno. *Gospel and Mission: Spirituality and the Poor*. Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, Ateneo de Manila University, 1995.

Kevin F. Burke. *The Ground Beneath the Cross: The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuría*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, forthcoming, 2000.

Selected Reading List



For a complete bibliography of English resources on the UCA Martyrs, Archbishop Romero, the four churchwomen, and the church of the poor in Central America, please contact CRISPAZ El Salvador: pazsal@netcomsa.com.

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