

# SALVANET

A Publication of Christians for Peace in El Salvador, CRISPAZ

## Local Economic Development in El Salvador

by Katharine Andrade-Eekhoff

"Economic Development" in El Salvador means different things depending on who you ask. It is often times measured by statistics that give a certain slant as to how well things are going. Gross Domestic Product, Gross National Product, level of unemployment, and rate of inflation all offer numeric indicators that provide a broad, brush-stroke view. But none of these figures in and of itself really describes what is behind the numbers. The figures do not provide information such as distribution of income (percentage of the population that earns the most amount of money as opposed to the percentage that earns the least amount). Nor do they tell us how much of the Gross Domestic Product is generated by the manufacturing of goods versus commerce and services.

From these figures we are unable to determine the quality of employment (salary, working conditions, prospects for advancement) or the impacts on the environment. These are indicators that provide a fuller picture as to how well things are going.

In El Salvador, local economic development has tended to focus on free trade zones for manufacturing (the infamous maquilas), promotion of tourism, and financial services. Recently, the National Program on Competitiveness launched a program to focus more competitively on certain market niches in terms of the global economy. These market niches include textiles, coffee, migrants, (this is a rather strange cluster) and handicrafts. It is the first time in quite some time that the government has recognized the importance of something

other than family remittances from the estimated one million Salvadorans living in the United States. It is worth noting that these areas, which have been analyzed as strong potential international market niches for El Salvador, do not include tourism or financial services.

Focusing on one particular aspect of this competitiveness

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March / April  
1998

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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.*



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

**SALVANET**, a project of CRISPAZ, is published six times per year.

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CRISPAZ relies on your contributions to produce this publication and to continue its accompaniment with the Salvadoran people through our communication, volunteer, and delegation programs.

*All contributions are tax deductible.*

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# ALTERNATIVE ECONOMICS

*Continued from page 1 . . .*

strategy, Salvadoran handicrafts, brings up another important aspect of local economic development: the intermingling of community and economic relationships. Many of the crafts produced in El Salvador are done so in specific communities that specialize in their production. They are small workshops that are many times family-owned and -run. Those that are larger and employ outside workers to produce the goods use local human resources. The families and the local workers earn a living from the hand-made crafts that they design. This income is usually spent locally on basic goods and services. Profits go back into the business or are spent improving the family's living conditions.

What this means is that most of the income generated from the craft work is multiplied because it is re-spent in the local economy. This expands the economic development benefits for the community. This is critically different from strategies that seek to create jobs through the free trade zones where outside investors provide the capital, import the machinery, export the products and then repatriate the profits to their home country. The economic development created from the free trade zones is simply one of paying the workers, which is important in and of itself, but it lacks the wider,

multiplier effects of smaller community-based businesses.

In a recent study in which I participated, I had the privilege of studying the community networks and relationships in five handicraft communities in El Salvador. The study showed that those communities which are able to export their products to the United States and Europe have a definite economic advantage over those that are not. Additionally, those communities which utilize more of the local networks and social relationships in their businesses have higher profit margins, more employees, and overall better community development indicators.

CRISPAZ participates in this process as well. As a part of our fundraising, crafts are purchased from local cooperatives and sold in the United States. But the purchase of these crafts does much more than just raise money for CRISPAZ. These sales are a significant source of income for the small, community-based workshops from whom we buy. These economic relationships have strong multiplying effects in the communities where the handicrafts are made. The purchase of crafts is an important way to support longer-lasting community economic development in El Salvador and a relatively simple way in which North Americans can offer support.✱





## Unfulfilled Peace Accords

“As combatants, we were only taught to handle a gun; now that we are demobilized, we must keep our arms crossed. The reinsertion programs have failed.”

—*Marcial Melendez, Association of Agricultural Producers, on a February 19 march of guerrilla and military ex-combatants to demand compliance with the Peace Accords.*

## Rate Hikes

“It is puzzling to me that political sectors are now rending their garments when it is they who have approved the law. They have studied it and they have been following it precisely because it is said that it must be removed from a political context”

—*President Armando Calderón Sol in reaction to the Legislative Assembly’s request to review rate increases proposed by the General Superintendent of Electricity and Telecommunications.*

## Economic Development?

“The fear is that when they take us out of here, other sales stalls will replace us.”

—*Roberto Salamanca, owner of one of the food stalls protesting their eviction from behind the Benjamin Bloom Children’s Hospital as a part of San Salvador Mayor Hector Silva’s “Citizen Tranquility Plan.”*



## 1999 Presidential Campaign

“At this point in my life, there are personal factors which are more important than accepting a candidacy.”

—*San Salvador Mayor Hector Silva in explaining that he is more interested finishing his work in the mayor’s office than accepting a position as presidential candidate for the FMLN.*

“We have considered giving our support to Mr. Flores as a candidate, but he will actually be a candidate only when the General Assembly names him.”

—*Minister of Education Cecilia Gallardo de Cano on the naming of Francisco Flores as ARENA’s “pre-candidate” for the 1999 presidential campaign.*

“We need someone with social sensibility, who considers people to be human beings and not numbers; who believes that the economy should be at the service of human beings.”

—*Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador, Monsignor Gregorio Rosa Chavez on his qualifications for the presidential candidate.*

## Kidnappings

“I was not present in any meeting of the General Command in which the topic of the kidnapping of any person was discussed and if I was not present, I would have learned about it and this is not the case.”

—*Joint Coordinator of the FMLN, Franciso Jovel, before the Judge of the First Penal Court of New San Salvador regarding accusations that FMLN officials were involved in the kidnappings of two San Salvador businessmen.*



Source: *Proceso*

## Salvadoran Crafts Provide Important Connection

by Carol Davis, CRISPAZ Board Member

“You mean I could go to El Salvador?” That’s what someone asked me when I was talking with him at the Bread and Roses Memorial Festival in Lawrence, Massachusetts, last Labor Day. I was selling crafts from artisan cooperatives in El Salvador and Guatemala at an outdoor fair and began visiting with a gentleman who asked me if I had ever been to Central America. After I responded that I had taken several educational trips since 1990, he proceeded to tell me about his nephew who writes to him from Guatemala where he is in the Peace Corps. I showed him my scrapbook/photo album and even pulled out a map to pin point where his nephew was working. After talking about my experiences and photographs I said to him, “Why don’t you visit him?” He looked at me with a surprised expression like it had never entered his mind and he said, “You mean, I could go there?” I don’t think the possibility had ever occurred to him, and it was exciting to see the anticipation on his face when he left.

A few years ago, I was steam-pressing a wall hanging from Guatemala and the faint smell of wood smoke rose with the steam. It put me back

into the highlands of Guatemala where I was able to watch a woman weave on a back-strap loom.

Selling crafts for CRISPAZ over the past several years has been a great way for me to connect with people and talk about the Salvadoran reality. I am continually amazed by the number of people in the United States that have connections to El Salvador. Selling the crafts encourages conversations about

when someone lived or worked in El Salvador and what is currently happening. I’ve met people with adopted Salvadoran children who have brought them to the tables to admire and select something from their country of origin. I have also met people who participated in a CRISPAZ delegation years before. As a retired art teacher, I am particularly interested in and impressed by the simplicity and quality of the artwork. We all appreciate the crafts for their vibrant,

clear colors, but we may never think about how many hours of hand-work have gone into making and painting a cross or weaving material for a garment.

Supporting the artisans by selling their work at art fairs, diocesan conventions, solidarity events, and holiday shows has been a gratifying way for me to sustain my involvement and to pass on some of the artisans’ stories of their fight for survival.✚



*Kathy Brough and Carol Davis sell crafts in Chelmsford, Massachusetts*

**JOB  
OPENING!**

Christians for Peace in El Salvador (CRISPAZ) is looking for a: **Volunteer Program Coordinator.**

The San Salvador-based coordinator will coordinate the CRISPAZ volunteer program in the placement, support, evaluation and follow-up with volunteers; administrate the long-term volunteer program and facilitate the creation of a short-term volunteer program; ensure the CVP program mission while participating with other CRISPAZ staff on the El Salvador team.

*For more information, please contact our San Antonio, Texas or San Salvador office (address listed on page two of this publication).*

## The Present Threat of Solidarity

by *Jeanne Marie Ridders DeBorst*,  
*CRISPAZ El Salvador Team Coordinator*  
 & *Delegation Coordinator*

What is the threat of solidarity today? It is the same as always, the threat of the incarnation, of the divine becoming one of us and dragging us headlong into the holy. What if God entered into solidarity with us and called us her children? Do we recognize ourselves in this new relationship? Can we discover in God's solidarity with us that we are suddenly more ourselves in all our contorted humanity? We are loved to the point of no return.

If we believe that God is with us, we cannot step aside from the sight of God walking on the streets of St. Paul or San Salvador. We would turn in wisdom to each other for the mirror our lives long for: a reflection of God. To stand beside the cross in the moment of crucifixion is an act of solidarity that parallels the act of God crucified in Christ. The cross is always present in the suffering of God's people, in El Salvador and in the United States. To stand in solidarity is to be in daily contact with suffering, with the violence of the cross. It is a permanent eucharist.

But why do the unjust prevail? And the guilty prosper? I stand beside the cross and at the same moment watch my hands as they pound the nails. What solidarity is this that God should call me his? In a moment of grace we see we are both crucified with Christ and we crucify him. We turn away and deny that God is known to us, that we have met God in the very people we love and even in those we don't. But, in critical moments we lose our footing, we stumble and search frantically for an escape.

Violence surrounds our every move. We wait in shadows until the threat passes and still our way seems unclear. Seeking assurance of our own safety, we while away hours in worry and inaction. Or we move without thought into the maelstrom, certain in some unconscious place that to actually consider would be to stop ourselves short of action. Eyes tightly shut, we enter the fray and think that we are living in faith.

But inaction and reaction are not our only choices in the face of violence and death. We fool ourselves if we believe that by staying away from suffering that we are safe. In fact, we are risking our very souls. During Lent we reflect every day on the constancy of God's forgiveness which moves us to love. That reflection does not leave room for inaction nor for blind faith that if we simply push ourselves into the violence that all will be well. Our own weaknesses are proof that action alone will not change the challenges we face. We cannot go unreflective into the violence of this present age. Nor can we stop short of the incarnation out of fear for our own safety. We are in search of the incarnation as we volunteer in accompaniment and solidarity in the midst of the suffering communities of El Salvador. We are challenging ourselves to repentance and to action when we come to listen to the stories of Salvadorans with open hearts and empty hands. We are freeing ourselves of chains that enslave us when we give, not out of excess, but out of what is essential, in support of what communities in El Salvador need.

Solidarity, God's presence with us, and our attempts to be present with God in her *pueblo* threaten our way of seeing ourselves and this world. But solidarity is always a threat to those who want to hide the truth. When we enter into relationship with the so-called "voiceless," we soon discover that they have a voice and that the voice speaks truths many choose not to hear. We are not exempt from this judgment. We choose over and over again not to hear. But, God longs for moments of incarnation, no matter how we resist. Two men fast for days calling our government to account for its actions, a woman walks down the street past whistles and cat calls to accompany a literacy class, we listen day after day to the stories of lost chances and lost love, and we make room for truth. In these gestures of solidarity, God becomes present.

There are those who call solidarity ridiculous, others say it's useless, and some, rightly enough, call it subversive. In all humility we can accept these accusations if we are clear that solidarity itself threatens the order of our own lives and of this age. This is necessary if we wish to experience the incarnation and build the reign of God.✝

## Café Salvador: The Taste of Justice

by Beth Gatchell

Reprinted from "Inherit the Earth," a publication of the Catholic Worker Community of Cleveland, Ohio

Maxwell House, Folgers, Arabica, Juan Valdez, maybe these are what you think of when you think of coffee, but it's more than the dark, steaming liquid in your cup; it's a way of life for thousands in Central America and it's an agent of social change.

Fair and direct trade are hardly reality to most small coffee farmers in our global economy where free trade, cheap labor and trickle-down economics rule supreme. Virtually gone are the days when you knew the farmer who grew your produce because he or she sold it to you from the stand around the corner.

Does anyone trade fairly and still connect the consumer with the producer? Yes! Equal

Exchange (E.E.), a Canton, Massachusetts, alternative trade coffee company is serving its farmers and consumers fairly AND making a profit.

In Cleveland, the Inter-Religious Task Force on Central America is building an economic justice campaign around one of E.E.'s alternative trade coffees known as Café Salvador. It is a coffee grown by peasant farmers living on cooperatives in El Salvador. E.E. pays its Café Salvador farmers almost twice the commodity market price for their coffee, and it is making a difference. How are they doing this? E.E. is shifting the dominant economic paradigm through alternative trade.

### Conventional Trade

To understand alternative trade, it is important to understand conventional trade. Small coffee farmers sell their coffee

to midlevel traders who process and export the coffee. In the U.S., the coffee is brokered, bought by

a coffee company, roasted, packaged, marketed and distributed. The layers of middlemen profit from each aspect of the coffee processing.

The conventional market system doesn't value the farmers or the growers of the raw product, the coffee bean. The farmers are little more than cheap labor in the eyes of many midlevel traders and coffee companies.

Small farmers depend upon midlevel traders (known as "coyotes" because of their ruthlessness) to export their coffee because they do not grow enough to export directly to U.S. coffee companies. Because farmers have the single option of selling to midlevel traders, the coyotes can exploit the farmers and often do by paying them less than the minimum wage. A farmer can do little to protest since the coyote can stop buying from that farmer on a whim and go to someone else. Rarely does anyone enforce minimum wage in El Salvador or the rest of Latin America.

The meager wages seldom cover coffee production costs and the family's needs, forcing the farmer to take out a loan. In El Salvador it is nearly impossible for small farmers to get credit from private banks, so they depend on coyotes for credit (again!) at an exorbitant interest rate.

Farmers infrequently break the cycle of debt and poverty while they depend on coyotes.



The fare of coffee plantation workers is no better. They depend on plantation owners who are often eager to pay the lowest price. Thus, the cry for fare wages gets muffled by the strong arm of the coyote or plantation owner.

The conventional economic model does not value the farmers. Indirect trade obliterates a relationship between the consumer and producer and results in unfair wages. Lacking a consumer-producer relationship minimizes the role of the farmer (on whom we depend). When the farmer is absconded from the public view it makes it easier to treat him or her unfairly because no one knows about it. In exchange for hours of sweat and toil growing the coffee, they receive less than the minimum wage and are often treated as slaves.

### Alternative Trade

*Alternative trade* changes these inequities. Instead of a simple one time charitable donation to the farmers, alternative trade is a systematic change that does justice to the farmers, your business and the consumers. It reorders traditional business relationships by focusing on *direct trade, fair wages, democratic management, and sustainability.*

In El Salvador the twelve year civil war was waged largely because of egregious disparities in land holdings between the rich and the poor. Since the 1992 Salvadoran Peace Accords, 40 percent of Salvadoran coffee farmers have organized into

democratically-run cooperatives (co-op for short). Most co-op members have to rely on coyotes linked to El Salvador's "14 families" (the wealthiest people in the country who have a monopoly on coffee exporting) to export their coffee, but E.E. helps farmers buck the system through direct trade.

Some co-ops have been able to build their own *beneficios*, coffee processing plants, to process their coffee before exporting it. E.E. pays fair wages to farmers that produce Café Salvador by liberating them from their dependence on coyotes and trading directly with co-ops. The money paid to coyotes and conventional middlemen goes back to the farmers.

Fair wages have raised the standard of living of most Café Salvador co-op members above the poverty level. Some Café Salvador co-ops provide services like health care and education which either are not provided by the government or provided at unreasonable costs to the average small farmer.

The structure of E.E. is also democratic. It is a 15-person worker-owned cooperative business. E.E. sets limits on the returns to investors to make it possible to transfer financial benefits to the farmers. When E.E. receives the coffee beans, they roast, package and distribute the coffee from their headquarters.

But to go one step further, E.E. also connects the consumers with the producers. Unlike the conventional method of trade which seeks to disconnect and

obscure the farmers, linking the farmers with the consumers reconnects people with each other and their environment, enriches consumers' lives with the producers' stories, and lets the consumer know he or she has the power to make an impact on the world.

We all have an ability to impact the world by making informed purchasing decisions and by helping our friends and neighbors to do the same.✦

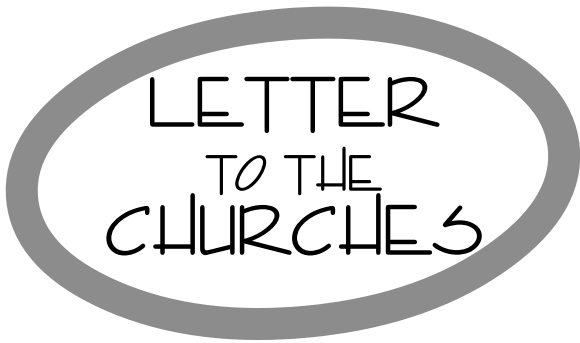


To find out more about Café Salvador, contact Equal Exchange at one of their two U.S. offices.

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# from El Salvador

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

(2 Corinthians 4:7-8)

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

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*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.*

## John Paul II and Fidel Castro: A Hopeful Encounter

John Paul II's visit to Cuba and his encounter with Fidel Castro was a historic event which would have been unthinkable just a few short years ago. This was not a chance meeting. Rather, it was an encounter which addressed the heart of the problems (as they were expressed with complete freedom by John Paul II and heard with complete normality by Fidel Castro) and also addressed the external organization: the Eucharist, impressive choral music, and the participation of the masses. Contrary to what the press would have us believe, it in no way resembled "a Church coming out of the catacombs." Nevertheless, this encounter was forty years in coming. The central characters—John Paul II and Fidel Castro—offered their charismatic personalities and firm convictions. But most of all the encounter provided a historic dynamism, for there is an element of "fatalism", or perhaps better said, "providence" in seeing John Paul and Fidel Castro shaking hands and smiling.

\* \* \*

But it all began in a very different way. In 1959 neither the revolution nor the Cuban Church was prepared for what was about to happen. The Cuban Church was the daughter of its times, and it did not have Vatican II, much less Medellín, to help it understand that Christian faith had to be seen, at

the very least, as a social revolution. The Cuban Church, like many of its contemporaries, saw faith as something other-worldly. For that which was "close at hand," the Church was content with charity and social service. A God that wanted radical world transformation of poverty and unjust structures did not enter the picture. Neither did the revolution understand religion as an essential

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**The Pope proclaimed  
the blockade to be  
"unjust and immoral."**

---

human dimension that exists beyond ecclesiastical organization and its mundane interests. Also a daughter of its time, the revolution understood religion as it was presented by dogmatic Marxist manuals: the opiate of the people and unscientific. In this context, conflict was initially expressed at an ideological level. But this soon resulted in a power struggle between the Catholic Church, Cuba's oldest institution, and the new revolutionary power. Little by little changes did occur. The Church began to feel, however slightly, the influence of Medellín. One year after Medellín, in 1969, the Church denounced for the first time the injustice of the block-

ade against Cuba by the United States that had started eight years before. In 1986, the National Cuban Ecclesiastical Encounter (ENEC) presented the national and ecclesiastical realities and acknowledged the benefits of the revolution and the socialist society, recognizing them as God's actions. However, this did not lessen the sharpness of the denunciation. In 1993, the bishops signaled that "some irritating policies should be eradicated."

There was also a change on the part of Fidel Castro. Once again Medellín was the liberating factor as it offered liberation theology and committed Christians who gave their lives for justice. Religion no longer found reason to be the opiate of the people. Christians had demonstrated that they loved the poor and that they were committed to their liberation. Their God was a God of justice. (Where there is greater historic understanding it is often thanks to Medellín, liberation theology and the martyrs. They have unblocked the way to God for many who search for justice, a way blocked at times by the church.) This resulted in greater religious freedom, formally sanctioned by the IV Congress of the Communist Party in 1991.

As these internal changes occurred, there were also international geo-political changes. The fall of the Iron Curtain made a socialist Cuba simply unviable. In this context, curiously enough, Fidel Castro needs the Pope. For the Church this is a unique opportunity to demonstrate its leadership and power in the world.

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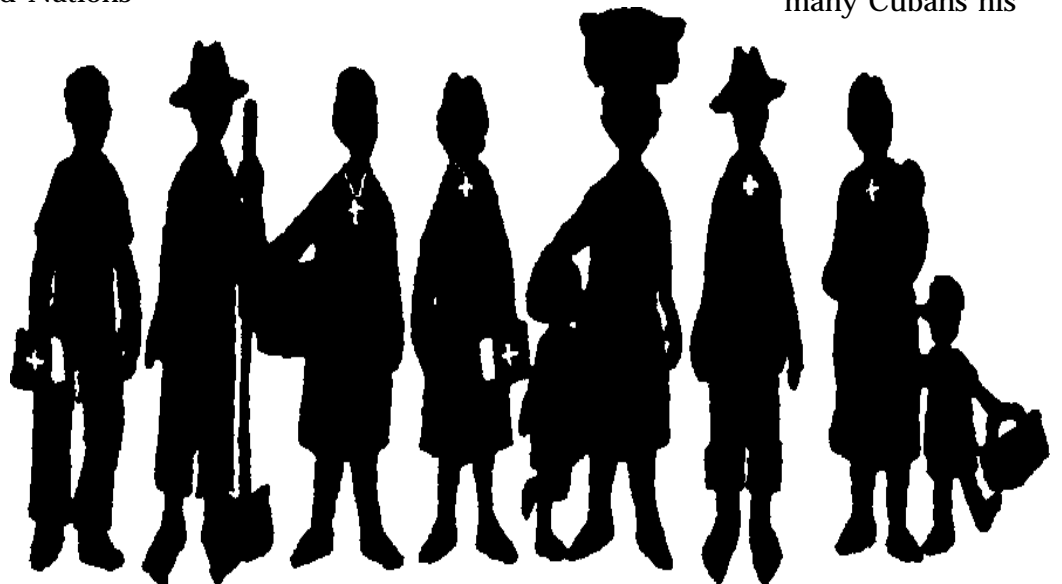
In the airport Fidel Castro showed respect and admiration for the Pope and thanked him for his visit. The occasion provided a good platform—better, even, than the United Nations—to strongly denounce the economic blockade. The eyes of the world were on Havana. The Pope (who is praised by western countries for his decided anti-communism) came out on Castro's side regarding the blockade. In his response, John Paul showed respect for Fidel Castro and announced what he would later go on to develop: "that Cuba

would open to the world and that the world would open to Cuba."

In the days that followed, their words became stronger. In the presence of high governing officials, the Pope denounced the evils of the country. He demanded freedom for the people, observance of human rights, freedom for political prisoners, and parents' rights to education. He demanded radical changes in family values with a severe condemnation of abortion. He called for the end to atheism of the State. There remains no doubt that the Pope proclaimed with his usual courage—taking advantage of the freedom that Fidel Castro had promised him—all that was wrong in Cuba. (Though he did not speak with such severity to other leaders of the West also responsible for grave evils.)

Though there were repeated denunciations, there were also positive commentaries. One such example was found in John Paul II's words to young people when he encouraged them not to fall into the pseudo-culture that comes from outside the country and which is rooted in consumerism and the triviality of existence. Another such example was his frequent condemnation of the U.S. economic blockade. Upon saying good-bye at the airport, the Pope proclaimed the blockade to be "unjust and immoral." Finally, John Paul II made a universal denunciation of capitalist neoliberalism which subordinates human beings to the blind forces of the market while the centers of power burden poor countries with an unbearable weight. He also denounced those countries that impose unsustainable economic programs and create wealth for a few by impoverishing the majority.

The Pope was very clear with his words. For many Cubans his



presence and his words offered both a catharsis and a sign of hope. This was achieved without the creation of a tense environment. Fidel Castro, out of devotion or out of necessity, behaved with exquisite appropriateness during John Paul II's entire visit. At the mass in Havana he seemed to enjoy exchanging the sign of the peace with bishops, religious, and laity. John Paul II also displayed respect for the personalities and symbols of the revolution. At the end of the mass he made the unusual gesture of coming down to greet Fidel. And in the airport they walked together to the plane.

\* \* \*

Who won? This is the question that is now being asked. Though it is a natural question and while it is true that both figures like to win, the question is inappropriate. The better question would be: What was won by the people, the men and women that live, hope, and suffer in Cuba? And what has been won for the world of the poor across five continents? Further, the question remains as to how this encounter can be used to move the world in a more just and humane way.

In Cuba there have been some steps on the road toward reconciliation. But this should not be seen as a redivision of the power between the Church and the revolution. Rather it should be seen as a convergence of the best revolutionary ideals and achievements with the best of the Church: the Gospel of Jesus and his witnesses in history. It is not a president and a Pope that are at stake. It is, rather, what each of them symbolize: the good and the humanizing.

Perhaps it seems strange that we speak of the possibilities of revolution. But it would be near-sighted on our part not to do so.



Democracy, freedom of citizens and other achievements that the Pope demanded were, in their day, revolutionary ideals. The Church, until Vatican II, all but condemned revolutions or viewed them with distrust. To share goods fairly and "the priority of work over capital" (something that was reiterated by John Paul II) have historically been the fruits of socialist ideas and revolutions. It seems unfair to forget Cuba's achievements in social services, health, and education, all of which are superior to those offered in other Latin American Countries. We do not have to repeat, nor must we forget, the mistakes, some of which are terrible, of actual socialism, including Cuban socialism. The Pope has clearly denounced them and they should be remembered by the western world. But it would be unfair and impoverishing to ignore that which is mystical about the socialist ideal. This is necessary if there is to be true reconciliation in Cuba and if human solutions for our countries are to be found. God willing, John Paul will make reference to Cuban achievements.

The Church, for its part, has much to offer. It can offer itself as a place of encounter for everyone: Christians, men and women of other religions (who abound in Cuba) and non-believers. But above all it can offer the mysticism of the gospel: honor, truth, compassion, and mercy. It seems to be a Utopia, but it is the true and authentic power of the Church. If the Church honorably recognizes its own limitations and sins just as it should recognize those of the revolution, reconciliation will be made easier, now and through history.

Cuba has overcome the tendency to "demonize" its opponent. Perhaps what remains to be overcome are the signs that everything good is in one place and everything bad in another. How the revolutionaries overcome this is something that they have to figure out. But as Christians, we believe that creation, not just the Church, is the work of God. This means that in all of creation, not just the Church, lie God's seeds (as the early Christians said).

From a perspective of faith in Jesus Christ, reconciliation is both necessary and possible. It is a way in which each of us can encounter justice, compassion, and the joy of God. We must put in the midst of all of these things the poor of the world.✠

## Message of Peace

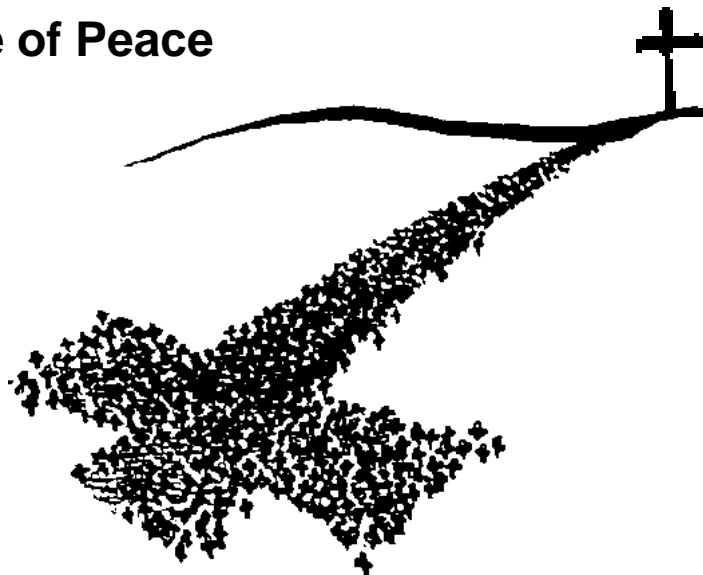
On Tuesday December 16, John Paul II presented his customary message offered for the Church's celebration of World Peace Day on January 1. Given that the content of the message has a clear relationship to our country, we offer the following reflections.

In his message, the Pope reflects on the marginalized, the poor, and all victims of exploitation as "people who experience in the flesh the absence of peace and the heartrending effects of injustice." The message invites us all to promote justice.

One way of doing so, according to the message, is by respecting human rights. Without respect for human rights, there is neither peace nor justice. It is important to note that the message says that it is unacceptable to use "culture" as an excuse to conceal human rights abuses. Nor is it permissible for Christians to adhere to doctrines that impoverish human dignity which in turn limits "economic, social, and cultural rights."

Taking into account that at least half of our population lives in poverty, it is not inappropriate to once again carefully consider whether or not we are respecting human rights. This is especially true if we consider that "situations of extreme poverty, wherever they may be, are the greatest injustices. Their elimination should represent a priority for all."

On the theme of economic rights, the Pope insists on what he calls the "globalization of solidarity." Globalization of the economy is neither just nor appropriate for a world in the process of humanization if it does not consider the common good of all peoples and nations and, at the same time, the dignity of each individual. "Globalization that leaves no one in the margins" is an unavoidable "obligation of justice." In this context, the external debt is "a great difficulty that should be confronted by the poorest nations." The Pope is an enthusiast of a "coordinated reduction" of said debt.



The Pope points out other serious injustices as well. Corruption, the grave plague of our time (and our country), is supported by a culture that legalizes such behavior and by our lack of moral conscience. Lack of credit for the poorest of the poor subjects them to greater exploitation. This is the result of the "shameful plague of usury." In the face of violence against women and children, the Pope proposes an intense educational campaign focused on dignity and the right to protection that these sectors of society should enjoy. The campaign, says the Pope, should be accompanied by the creation of legal measures to stop such forms of violence.

Finally, the Pope makes a call for the construction of peace with justice as the work of everyone. He emphasizes that shared solidarity is the preferential path for this arduous work. In this context, the Pope invites us to delve more deeply into the culture of the Gospel that favors service, truth, and justice over the "temptation to use easy, illegal means towards a false mirage of success or wealth."

To read this message and at the same time to think about El Salvador should be required of every Christian. The message provides a point of reflection for each person of good will. As the Pope says, "from the justice of each one, peace for all is born."✙

—José M. Tojeira

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Yearly subscriptions to *Carta A Las Iglesias*, a bimonthly publication in Spanish, can be obtained for \$30 by writing to: Centro de Distribucion UCA, Apartado Postal (01) 575, San Salvador, El Salvador, Centro America. Make checks payable to: Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas

## CRISPAZ Supporter Participates in November Action to Close the School of the Americas

by Ann Eno

Unless you live nearby, it's not easy to get to Columbus, Georgia. Six of us from Massachusetts discovered this on November 12 when we missed our connecting flight from Atlanta and had to wait for ages before flying in a small propeller plane through a rain-storm into Columbus. We were proud of ourselves and our determination to get to where we wanted to be. And then we heard what others went through to get there: from Alaska!, California, Idaho, Minnesota, and all over this huge country. Day by day, hour by hour, the numbers grew, until Sunday morning, November 16 arrived marking the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the murder of the six Jesuits and their co-workers in El Salvador. By then the numbers had become impossible to count. There were hundreds of people gathered near the entrance to Fort Benning, hundreds more on either side of the road outside the base, hundreds more on the lawns nearby and in the median strip of the road. Each and every one of them was demanding that the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA) be closed. Each person there—and by police estimates there were 2,300 or more—knew the terrible history of this “School of the Assassins,” as it is called in Latin America. Its bloody history of teaching torture and intimidation has been graphically described in manuals that the Pentagon was forced to release last September. In the fifty years the School has existed, more than 60,000 Latin American soldiers have been graduated, later returning to their countries to terrify, rape, and kill the poor and many of those who work for the rights of the poor.

At 1:00 p.m., the singer began to intone the names of the victims and the crowds called out: *¡Presente!* Drums sounded a funeral cadence and, in a silent proces-

sion of two by two, we crossed the property line drawn and guarded by members of the military police. Each one of us carried a white cross with a victim's name and it was for that person and for all of our sisters and brothers maimed and murdered by SOA graduates that we walked. After we were all arrested, processed, and released—a process that took almost five hours—we learned that the number who chose to disobey “army orders” to respect the property line far exceeded the dreams and prayers of the planners. The planners had hoped that 100 would cross the line, but when the last person crossed the line, the total was 601! This, as a friend of mine said to the press back home, was a major event! And, it was! And everyone there who came from near and very far away knew the profound inspiration and energy that come from gathering together to do all that we can to “speak the truth to power” and close the doors of this terrible, terrible school.✚

### Close the SOA Activities in Washington, DC

- ▶ White House Rally, Lafayette Park (Penn. Ave. at 16th Street NW)  
Sunday April 26, 12 noon - 5 PM
- ▶ US Capitol Vigil & Lobby Action (East Center Steps)  
Monday & Tuesday April 27-28, 10 AM - 6 PM

### Check out the SOA Watch Website

For more information on the closing of the School of the Americas, go to <http://www.soaw.org/>.

*For more information, contact:*

School of the Americas Watch, P.O. Box 3330,  
Columbus, GA 31903-0330, (706) 682-5369  
SOA Watch - DC Office, 1719 Irving Street NW,  
Washington, DC 20010-2612 Phone/Fax (202) 234-3440

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