

SALVANET

A Publication of Christians for Peace in El Salvador, CRISPAZ

“We haven’t finished rebuilding yet”



A compilation of testimonies by Guillermo Cuéllar
Translated by Tara Mathur

Photo: Brigid M. Scott

Good afternoon... How are you...

First of all, I want to introduce you to my family: My wife, Felícita; Cande is holding Pedrito who is one and a half; Bertilda, our little girl; Salomón, our youngster who is 12; and me, Pedro.

So here we are, smiling despite our situation, we have been without a house since the first earthquake. Actually everyone in our community was affected. Not even one house is still in good shape. The mayor’s office, the school, the church, even the big house where Miss Rita lives. Everything fell down! Over there you can see the poor old woman who is 80, standing in the ruins of her house. And the worst part of it is that she doesn’t have anyone... It has really been a tragedy...

The second earthquake in February took

many of our children. Flor’s daughter... I don’t even want to think about it, it hurts so much. The kids at the school were crushed by the walls and the rafters... Poor things! They didn’t even have time to make the sign of the cross.

Our family thank God is okay. But the little one cries a lot, as if he were in pain. There are nights when Bertilda wakes up every fifteen minutes because she wants to sleep next to her mother, my wife complains of headaches, and I get these pains in my chest. It is strange because none of this happened before...

Cande hasn’t gone back to school yet because Felícita says that she doesn’t want them going back until the aftershocks have stopped. Sometimes it makes me crazy. She usually helps us out by selling pupusas, but she doesn’t

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April – June
2001

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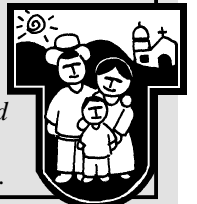
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CRISPAZ, Christians for Peace in El Salvador, was founded in 1984. We are a faith-based organization dedicated to mutual accompaniment with the church of the poor and marginalized communities in El Salvador. In building bridges of solidarity between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



CRISPAZ has five programs:

- † CRISPAZ Volunteer Program (CVP)
- † El Salvador Encounter
Delegation Program (ESE)
- † Communication Information
Network on El Salvador (CINES)
- † Summer Immersion Program (SIP)
- † Economics for People Fair
Trade Program (EPP)

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even want to do that these days. She just is moping around the ruins of our house with the litter of kids. I tell you, there are days that I want give her a spanking. But her mother tells me to be patient. Heaven only knows what is going to become of this girl... and of us!

And as you see me here, smiling as I greet you, I do not have stable work. In the mornings my son Salomón and I help rebuild the school. You should see the shape that it is in... all twisted and broken after that big quake! That was where the teacher, Carmen, died. She was buried alive when she went back into the school to get the last of the children that were still inside... She was so brave! The whole town went to the funeral and it was even on t.v.

But anyway... "Nothing bad lasts for a hundred years." Months have passed since the second earthquake and some things are getting better. International church groups have helped us. The mayor's office has organized an emergency committee. We have cleaned away all of the rubble and the main street was cleared by these huge tractors, rumor has it that they were sent by the Venezuelan government. Last week the housing project sponsored by our North American friends was finished. We had a big party, everyone was happy. A lottery will decide who gets the houses.

The truth is if it weren't for these charitable and Christian people, who knows where we would be. In the other areas where there was a lot of damage like Verapaz, Guadalupe, Apastepeque, Tecoluca, San Vicente, San Agustín, Santiago de María, Mercedes Umaña, Comasagua, and Candelaria there are still foreigners working.

Just around the bend in Comasagua there is a big group of doctors and soldiers with huge machines that the Venezuelan government sent to rebuild the town. They have already rebuilt the

market, the health clinic, a Catholic church and an Evangelical church, too. Right now they are working to rebuild the school and to repair the street that goes to the port. In La Libertad there is a gringo Priest that has organized all of the help, just as God would want him to. They say they are using calculators and even computers to do the census so that those who most need it get the help. Imagine... better than our own fellows!

But there are a ton of communities that haven't been so lucky. The government has been disorganized and they haven't sent any aid to the affected areas. They are spending all their time in political discussions and arguments, and that's not to mention those who just pocket the best of the donations.

Now the rainy season is here and there are so many families in the shelters, still using the same piece of plastic and cardboard that they were given... everything is moving so slowly... so slowly. They haven't even finished the provisional housing that was talked about so much on television. The people living at the Cafetalón refugee camp have been flooded twice with terrible rain storms. It is no wonder that there have been protests to demand assistance. The government responds by sending out the antiriot squad and even the children and the elderly have been beaten.

So, my dear friend, now with the rain the problems everywhere have become even worse. Landslides, mudslides, flooding. And there is no one to look out for us. I don't see the government doing it. International aid is starting to fade. And if all of this weren't enough, right now as I was talking to you there was another tremor. It was strong! We all went running out to the street. We are all in shock because we don't know what is going to happen and we haven't finished rebuilding yet.✚

Mass Celebrates 21st Anniversary of the Martyrdom of Monsignor Romero

“The glory of the Lord will shine above these ruins.”

Monsignor Romero

By Guillermo Cuéllar

Translated by Jeanne Rikkers

Candelaria is a typical town in El Salvador. Dirt roads, adobe houses, barefoot children. Main Street is barely wide enough for the passage of one vehicle. The rays of sun and dust permeate even the soul. A town forgotten in time and now fatally buried under the rubble of two earthquakes.

It is there that we congregated this year to commemorate the 21st anniversary of “Saint Romero of the Americas”.

A handful of busses lined up in caravan at the only entrance to the town, now more narrow and dusty due to landslides. Pilgrims from various origins found our way to the cool shade of trees and in a

matter of a half an hour there were thousands of us crowding the central park.

“The Church that does not commit itself to the poor, is not the true Church of Jesus Christ” These words were written on a giant banner and tied to trees by a youth group from a parish in San Miguel.

Women from the village had crowned the altar with izote flowers and palms where fifteen priests had gathered to celebrate the mass.

The songs began. The air became vibrant. Monsignor Ricardo Urioste gave the welcome in the name of the Oscar Romero Foundation.



“We have come to the very place that Monsignor Romero would have chosen. In the midst of campesinos, amongst the poorest, amidst the victims of the earthquakes”.

The people received the message with one heart.

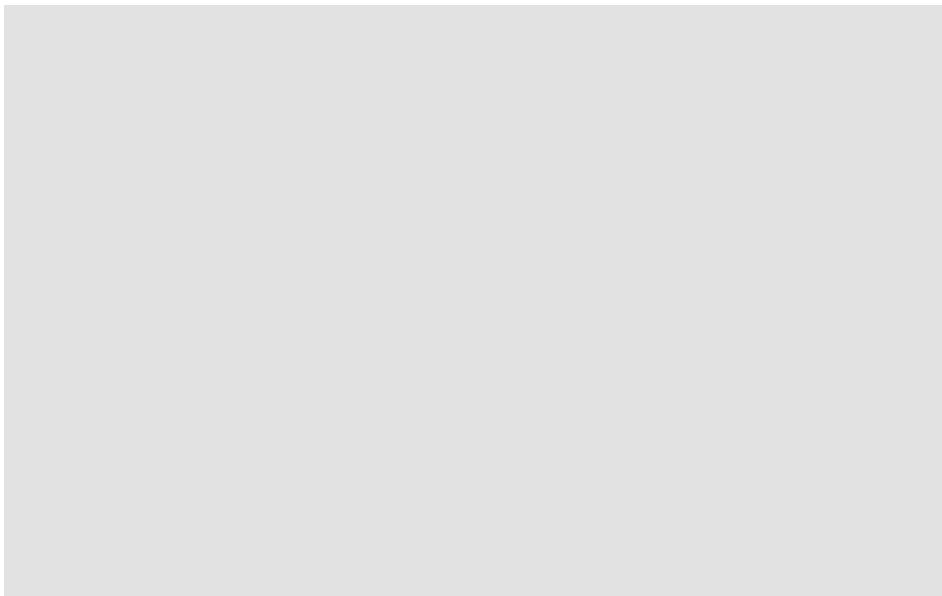
“Monsignor would have been here denouncing the bureaucracy and corruption in the distribution of aid that has come from the international community for our brothers and sisters”.

The people responded to the valiant words of the Pastor with thunderous applause as they had in the days of Monsignor in the Cathedral.

During the offertory children came forward carrying rubble from their homes, offering them up to the God of Life. An old man raised the model of the home as a sign of the most heartfelt aspirations of the people.

“Monsignor Romero lives!” cried the people in one voice as they began to leave. That morning Candelaria gathered strength in the memory of Romero for her spiritual rebuilding.✝

Photo: Guillermo Cuéllar



A view of the people gathered in Candelaria central park.

The Feet of Christ

From march 16th - 25th, 2001 Purcell Marian High School traveled with 10 students and 5 adults for a 10-day Encounter, under the leadership of CRISPAZ in El Salvador.

In these pages we want to share two testimonies. First you will read the testimony of Claire Mugavin, one of the students participating in CRISPAZ' El Salvador Encounter Program. On the next page you will read the testimony of Tito Sánchez, one of the adults that travelled with the students.

When I was in El Salvador this past spring, I witnessed a beautiful, yet simple gesture that showed great respect for God: In the chapel where Archbishop Romero was killed, a young girl kissed the feet of Christ as she passed by the altar. She showed such reverence for God.

It reminded me of the many times that the living Christ kissed me throughout the trip.

Christ kissed me through the abuelas in mass at the sign of peace; I encountered Christ kissing me in Jardines de Colón when a young girl named Stephanie kissed my hand as I was sick; Christ welcomed me with a kiss visiting the youth group "Generación 21".

But what does it mean to kiss the feet of Christ? The feet are the neglected part of the body, yet they carry the heaviest burden.

In many ways, we are taught to kiss Christ's feet. Do we kiss the poor: The living feet in the body of Christ?

I felt I could better express these thoughts through a poem:

I stand before you, Lord,
small as I am,
reaching our feet.
They are the feet of the thousands.
Wrinkled and dyed brown,
a coffee color invented by the sun.
The earth lies between each toe,
Like me, you go barefoot,
open for all the world to see
the beauty that lies in feet, well-used.
Bleeding feet with open wounds.
Club legged ankles and broken toes
that never healed.
Grime streaks paint my arches
from walking in dirt paved barrios.
the calle has been long,
the dust thirsts for your tears.

I stand at your feet, Lord,
The neglected and lowly part of your
body.
The feet that carried the cross.
Your feet were nailed, too.
Ours feel the pain of long labor,
sharp glass,
the bite of Creation,
blisters from too-tight shoes.

Your feet serve us well
we walk to mass
we gather in community
we fetch water
we run and play
barefoot

You made them perfectly,
to be sunned
to be dirtied
to be sweaty and smelly.
Our feet take us to You.
the You that lives in the bottom
at the foot of your kingdom,
at the foot of our rebirth.
You live in the feet of your people.
We follow your footprints
on step at a time
though we have no shoes,
though we have bleeding sores,
though we have not washed.
And when we have not eaten,
a second set appears
and helps us trudge on
every
step
of
the way.

Lord, we are at the foot of your kindom.
Teach us to walk in solidarity.
Help us be Simon to the living Christ.
To the feet that bear such cruel
crosses every day.

Claire Mugavin.



My Trip to El Salvador

By Tito Sánchez

Photo: Eulalio Gómez

My trip to El Salvador coincided with some important events that helped me to understand El Salvador and the United States much better, and it clarified the goals of my life, as I will explain briefly.

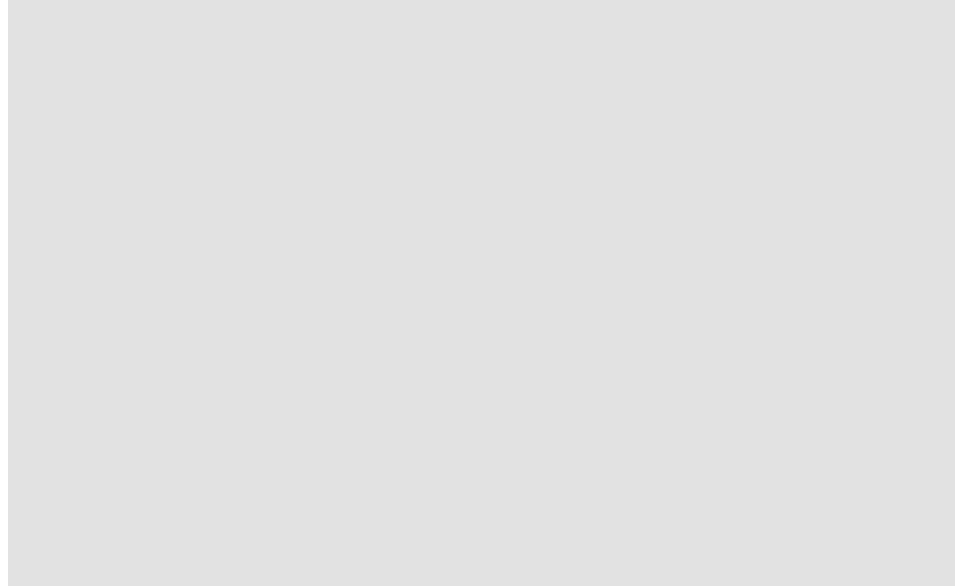
During my staying in El Salvador for 10 days from March 15th to March 25th, there were some important events or celebrations that called my attention.

One was the visit to the church where Romero had been shot. Sister Rosa gave the most powerful sermon that I have ever heard, it was so simple, powerful and humble at the same time.

We asked her many questions that had to do with Bishop Romero as a martyr and practically made saint by the people of El Salvador, while in my opinion the church's ways are still behind in the process.

Her answer was always that Bishop Romero had many similarities with our Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross and the religious people in power didn't make him a saint either. After that she told us what Romero said before he was shot: "I will be killed but I will rise again in my people."

Then she told us that not only Salvadoran people were his people, but even us, a group of high school students from the United States and a few teachers who just went there to "see". Just as John's disciples approached Jesus and asked him where he stayed, and he answered: "Come and see". They saw and their lives were totally transformed.



The chapel where Bishop Romero was killed.

Jesus resurrected
and the stone of the tomb
was rolled over.
The stone of our sins
must be removed also
if we want to come out
and rise from our old selves

This is my experience and those of my group; we went to El Salvador and we "saw" then we understood much better what life is about: doing something meaningful for others, allowing the kingdom of God to advance and being instruments of God's love, wisdom and justice in this world.

It's not a coincidence that we went to El Salvador during the 21st anniversary of Romero's assassination and it's not a coincidence that during this time of the year we celebrate Lent as the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as Jesus is risen and alive in his people, so is Romero in his people—those people who care about others, who work for peace and justice, who search for the truth, who are concerned about the common good for others.

I do not think that it is a coincidence that during this time we celebrate also the feast of St. Joseph on March 19th. I am sure Romero learned from Jesus but he can't forget that Jesus was taught first by his stepfather Joseph, a just man, who represented God and other people, who really loved the Virgin Mary.

Jesus resurrected and the stone of the tomb was rolled over. The stone of our sins must be removed also if we want to come out and rise from our old selves made of malice and wickedness. We should allow coming out the new self-made of sincerity and truth. Because where there is truth there is freedom and where there is freedom there is the spirit of God.✝

Jardines de Colón: A Community rebuilding effort

By Brigid M. Scott

Yesterday afternoon I attended a lively fiesta in Jardines de Colon, located in the department of La Libertad about 24 kilometers from the capital, and nestled below the Pan American Highway. It was a celebration in recognition of the construction of the first thirty temporary houses for damnificados, or those left homeless by the earthquakes.

CRISPAZ funded the construction of thirty houses in Jardines de Colon, and has been working in collaboration with FUNDAHMER, the foundation that you may recognize as the former CEBES.

Following the first earthquake, the leaders of Jardines organized and formed various committees. One team went from family to family conducting a community-wide census, noting individual family data as well as structural damages.

Initially this data was used to distribute food and other emergency supplies; later it was one of the tools

under the guidance of a volunteer technical expert.

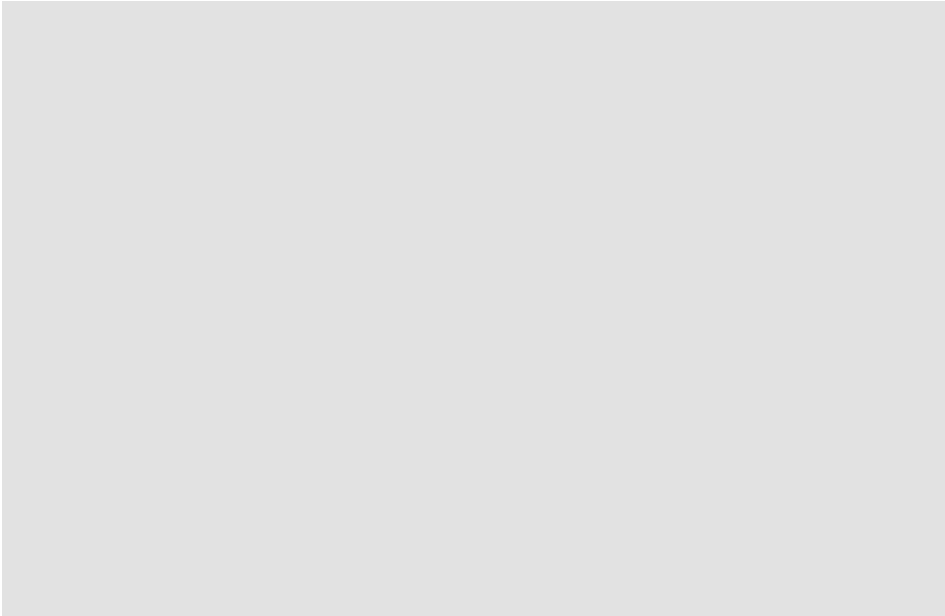
After the final design was selected, the more difficult task of choosing the recipients of the first thirty houses took over. Where do you begin? And how do you do it without creating divisions in the community?

Our FUNDAHMER colleagues provided a comprehensive but useful set of criteria for the committee's consideration: Was the house completely destroyed? Was it uninhabitable? Does the family have any income, including remittances from relatives in the US? Does the family own the land? Is the family actively involved in the life of the community? Would the family be able to supply at least one member to be part of a small work brigade

used in deciding which families would receive rebuilding priority. Surprisingly, there was no dearth of design plans for temporary houses, and the pros and cons of each were carefully considered

in the rebuilding of a cluster of houses? These criteria left plenty of room for thought and discussion; but in the end, facilitated the process of prioritization.

Photos: Brigid M. Scott



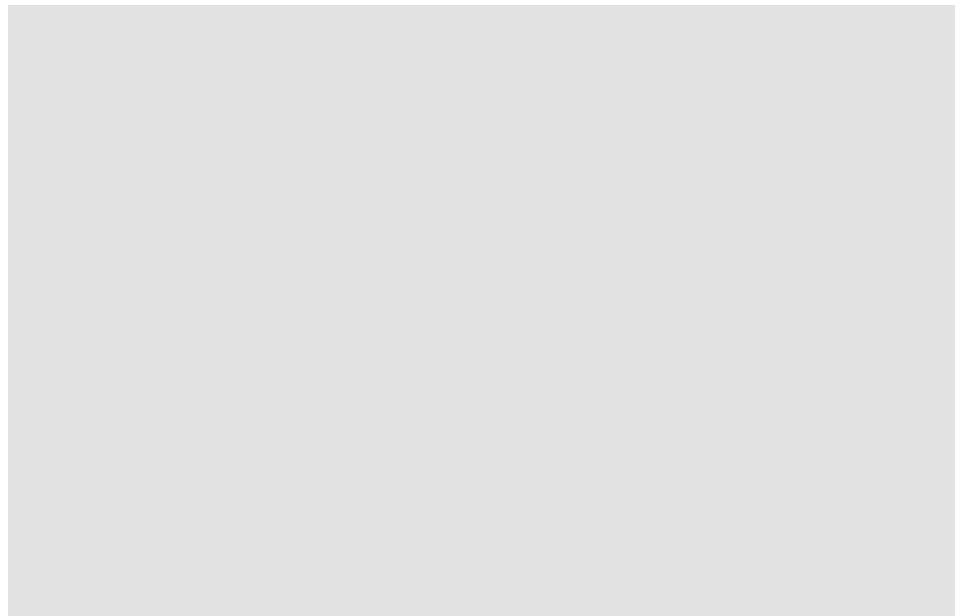
The process of building thirty new houses is a modest first step, but to the hundred plus Jardines families who patiently await the construction of their houses, it symbolizes the mustard seed of hope.



The process of building thirty new houses is a modest first step, but to the hundred plus Jardines families who patiently await the construction of their houses, it symbolizes the mustard seed of hope; but to the community at large, it has provided a glimpse into what collaborative teamwork can accomplish.✚

With that phase done, the actual construction began during *Semana Santa*, or Holy Week, and this initial rebuilding phase was completed by the end of April.

Sunday afternoon's events were truly joyous, and provided a brief respite from life's harsher realities: although the rainy season is less than two weeks underway, the urgent need for sturdy shelter has already been demonstrated.



What is happening with the children in El Salvador?

by Guillermo Cuéllar
Translated by Tara Mathur

Two years after the rape and assassination of Katia Miranda

April 4 marked the two-year anniversary of the assassination of 10-year-old Katia Miranda. It is not an isolated case. There are thousands of girls like her around the country. Nevertheless, this tragedy stands above the rest due to a particularly aggravating set of circumstances:

- 1) The young girl was raped just a few meters from where she had been sleeping, surrounded by members of her own family.
- 2) The primary suspects are members of this same family.
- 3) The Salvadoran justice system has not yet been able to resolve this case.

The Human Rights Institute of El Salvador's Jesuit University (IDHUCA), the "Olof Palme" Foundation, and the Coordination of Women's Organizations (COM) organized an intensive campaign to denounce the alarming rise of intra-family violence against the children of El Salvador.

The campaign included a time for reflection, a "popular" music concert, a press conference, and a march in the streets of San Salvador, all of which happened during the first week of April.

To conclude the campaign, these three groups formally requested that the National Congress declare April 4 the "Day against sexual violence towards children" honoring the memory of Katia.

UNICEF analyzes failure to comply with the Rights of Children in El Salvador

"Children and young people are marginalized from important decisions and political projections in the El Salvador of this new century." This is the concluding statement of the most recent study carried out by UNICEF in El Salvador.

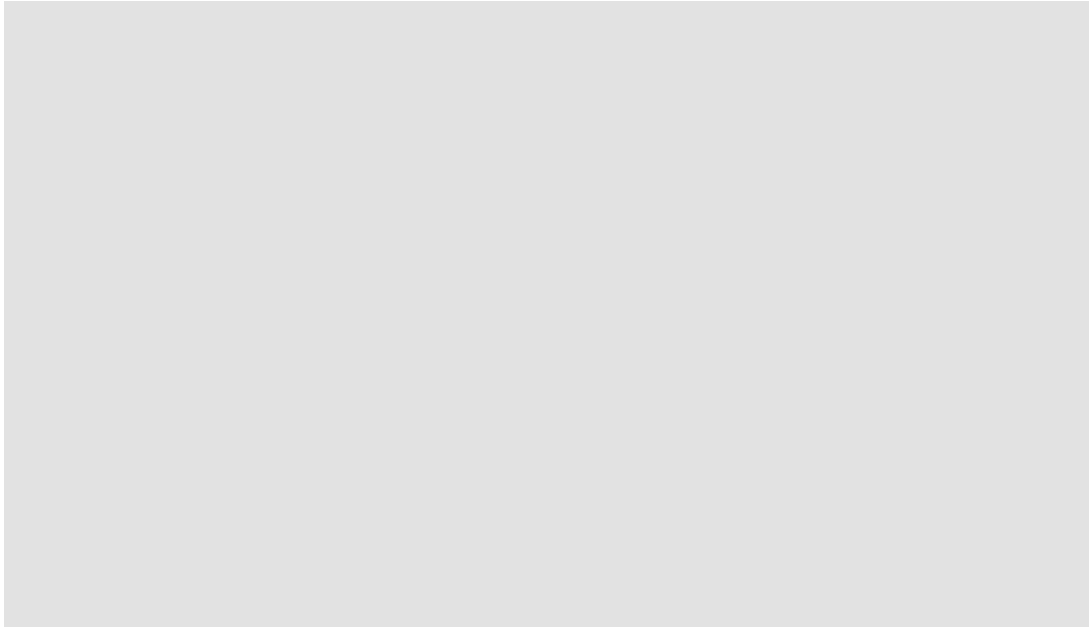
"The human rights of children: A pending task" is the title of the report that summarizes the study. This initiative was carried out in collaboration with Salvadoran experts in their field and was presented to the public in early May.

According to UNICEF, "the investigation hopes to stimulate reflection and action" on a topic that suffers from governmental and social negligence; to move towards establishing new rights for children and adolescents; to analyze the specific advances that have been verified thus far in the country; and to suggest concrete initiatives that are intended to modernize the internal legislation in accordance with the Convention of Children's Rights, approved by the United Nations on November 29, 1989.

"Children and young people are marginalized from important decisions and political projections in the El Salvador of this new century."

"Protection of children can no longer be addressed from a vision of philanthropy or charity. It has to do with the modernization of legislation and with the country's institutional mechanisms. Strategic development plans must include those who truly are the majority of the current population. This must be done in concordance with the new historic period of peace and construction of democracy in El Salvador," emphasizes the report.

Photos: IDHUCA



The “Olof Palme” Foundation carries out a study of children “after the earthquake”

One month after the second earthquake, the “Olof Palme” Foundation carried out a massive survey of children from 45 municipalities from those departments most affected by the earthquake: San Vicente, La Paz, Usulután, and La Libertad. 75% of the children who were surveyed were between the ages of 6 and 14 and belong to poor families with very minimal income.

Where do we find the children amidst the reconstruction plans? The results of the study reflect the perception of children with regards to this question.

Jorge Escoto, a functionary of “Olof Palme” who headed up the study, is committed to the idea that “the subjectivity of children has been beaten down since they have seen or directly suffered from the destruction of their homes, schools, and neighborhoods.”

With regards to their task at hand and their own contributions, given their own identities, children decidedly express their need to continue studying. “Now I need to learn more than before” says one voice among the thousands of children surveyed.

Certainly “63.9% do have the expectation that they will continue with school,” says Jorge Escoto, as if to offer a sign of hope amidst the defeatism that is reflected by most of the survey’s results.✚

66% perceive their homes to be uninhabitable.

56% consider their schools to be unusable.

47% complain of new pains connected to nervousness and general state of well being.

43% express that they cannot play in the same way because of the emotional shock that they and their families have experienced

58% perceive their future to be the same or worse.

Monseñor Romero's "hidden years"

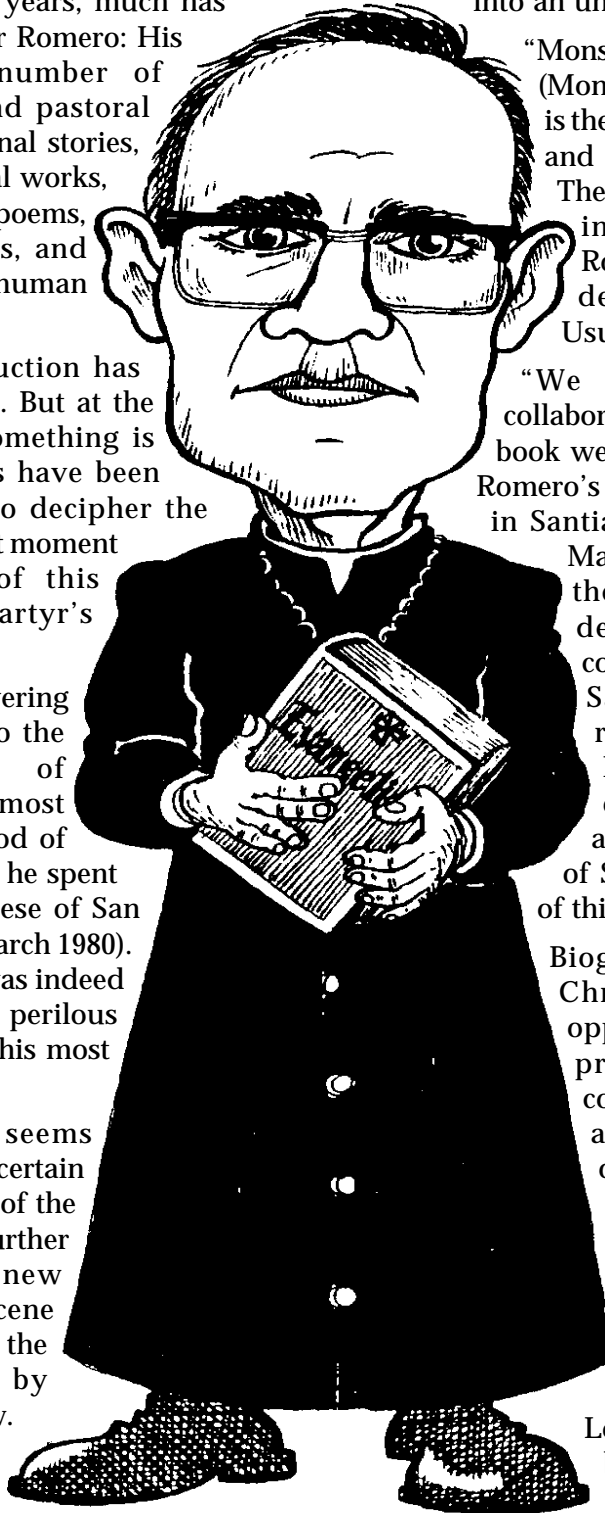
By Guillermo Cuéllar
Translated by Tara Mathur

During the past twenty one years, much has been written about Monseñor Romero: His diary and homilies, a number of biographies, theological and pastoral studies, a collection of personal stories, a movie, a couple of theatrical works, two sung masses, dozens of poems, songs, paintings, sculptures, and many other illustrations of human invention.

All of this abundant production has undoubtedly been necessary. But at the same time it seems as if something is missing. All of these works have been insufficient in helping us to decipher the fundamental mystery: In what moment do we find the origin of this Salvadoran Archbishop martyr's conversion?

We have been limited in answering this question due, in part, to the fact that this "boom" of publications has focused almost exclusively on the final period of Romero's life: the three years he spent as the head of the Archdiocese of San Salvador (February 1977 to March 1980). Such as it is remembered, it was indeed Romero's most inspired and perilous moment, but not necessarily his most significant one.

Two decades later, it seems reasonable enough to note a certain redundancy in these profiles of the pastor. This redundancy is further highlighted when a new publication comes on the scene that distinguishes itself from the aforementioned "boom" by offering us a new point of view. We are referring to a book that recently appeared in El Salvador that probes further



into an unexplored period of Romero's life.

"Monseñor Romero: ¿Años del cambio?" (Monseñor Romero: Years of Change?) is the title of this testimony documented and written by two Passionist priests. Their objective is to dig more deeply into the "hidden years" when Romero served as bishop of Santiago de María in the department of Usulután (1975 - 1976).

"We were witnesses and close collaborators during this time . . . With this book we hope to show . . . that Monseñor Romero's process of conversion began here in Santiago de María," say priests Juan Macho and Zacarías Diez. "It is a new thesis because everyone who has dealt with the subject of his conversion says that it happened in San Salvador as a result of the reaction that was caused by Father Rutilio Grande's assassination and other events that happened just after he arrived at the Archdiocese of San Salvador," argue the authors of this profoundly revealing book.

Biographers, theologians, or simple Christian people, almost no one opposes the verification of the true process of Monseñor Romero's conversion. It was a transformation as authentic as the one that is told of in the New Testament about Saul "falling off" on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 3-6).

In Monseñor Romero's personal evolution, two unspeakable and unthinkable acts take place. This is illuminated by author María López Vigil in the introduction of her book "Piezas para un Retrato" (Memories in Mosaic): "two laws of life and history are broken..."

1) “Nadie se quita a sí mismo de sus pies el suelo” , it is difficult to let go of security and accumulated certainty that is established over time in order to try out a different path, to open ones self to a new approach, new perspectives, new consequences.

As we grow older, it is natural that we begin to make decisions based on a set of understood criteria, using a belief system that we have refined over the course of our sustained walk through life. The audacious spirit to break old canons and undertake a new route is universal in young people. However, older adults tend to cling to those ideas that have been forged over the years. In more common words, it is practically impossible for an old guy, 60 years old, to turn around his way of thinking, especially during difficult times and situations. But... Monseñor was able to do this.

2) As one moves up the ladder towards the cupola of power, they find themselves further away from the grassroots.

However, having risen to the highest hierarchical position, Monseñor Romero found himself most able to be open and to walk with the common people.

How does Oscar Arnulfo Romero achieve this feat in his human condition? When and under what existential circumstance does this “abnormal” principal, that is so painful and at the same time gentle,

appear? The way in which these questions have been eagerly addressed are now completed by Juan Macho and Zacarías Díez’ studies and documentation. They offer us a complete and just model of the “most universal of all Salvadorans.”

“In this period Monseñor Romero regains his direct pastoral activity with the people. During this time a change begins to take effect in his theological and pastoral ideas, in his way of seeing and judging the Salvadoran reality... There were many transcendental events, that have not been recorded, and in the face of these Monseñor Romero made very concrete decisions... thus begins this admirable change, which is what all of his biographers write about and is the reason that he is admired by all of the Christians of the world.”

With the help of these Passionist priest we are able to glimpse the metamorphosis of the “Good Shepherd who gave his life for his sheep” and to admire the amazing milestones that are expressed by these inspired phrases: “In Santiago de María I really experienced misery”... “Once again I have come to preach and they have preached to me”... “Listening to these campesinos, one cannot doubt that God speaks on their behalf”... “The campesinos are more Christian than the priests”... “We priests should speak with the simplicity of the campesinos”... “The campesinos wish to be taught the good news, the rich do not”... “It is to our advantage to speak with sincerity when we talk with our people about the reality, about liberation”... “We are saddened and concerned by the selfishness with which they look for ways to neutralize a fair wage for workers.”

In the reading of this necessary and ambitious work, we take note of the “road to Damascus” which travels among the red and green mountains of Santiago de María; the villages relegated to the rural foliage; the soldiers waiting to attack along the paths; the plantations and coffee processing plants with their quasi-medieval systems; the “Episcopal palace” transformed into a shelter for whole families who have been exploited in coffee plantations. And for the umpteenth time we confirm that the answer takes root in the fact that “the poor, especially the campesinos and their daily reality of faith, struggle, misery and exploitation were what most helped Monseñor Romero to begin the change and transformation of his life.” They were the ones... that taught Monseñor Romero the good news, during the time when he was the Bishop of Santiago de María.✚

**“Then they sent me to
Santiago de María,
and that is where I really
experienced misery.
Children that die
right in front of you because
of the water they drink,
the campesinos who are
being worked to death
cutting coffee . . .”**

Oscar Arnulfo Romero

Join a delegation: 20th Anniversary of the Massacre at El Mozote

On December 12, 1981, close to two thousand poor farmers and their families were massacred in the town of El Mozote by the Atlacatl Battalion of the Salvadoran Armed forces. There were few left to tell the truth of what happened on that horrible night.

Twenty years later, the truth is out and you can be part the voice of that truth by joining the delegation commemorating the 20th anniversary of the massacre at El Mozote and celebrating the lives of the Salvadoran martyrs.

Dates: **December 8-16, 2001**

Cost: US \$75/ day. Cost covers transportation in El Salvador, housing, meals, translation and preparation for the trip. Air fare to El Salvador is not included.

**Deadline for joining the delegation:
November 1, 2001**

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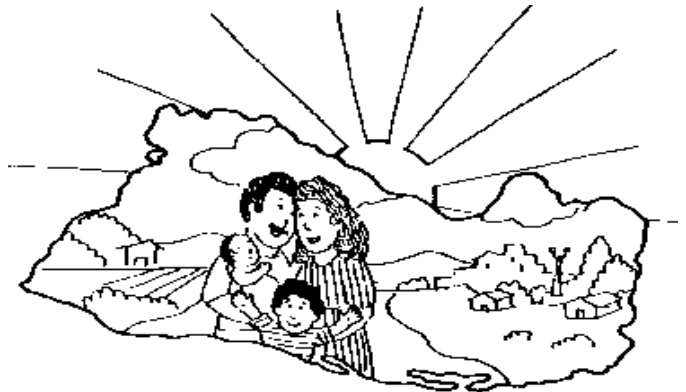
ATTENTION VOLUNTEER WANNA-BEES!

The CRISPAZ Volunteer Program has been filled for our September start date, but we are currently accepting applications for volunteer placements beginning on March 11th, 2002.

This is a long-term commitment involving one year of accompaniment and learning in a Salvadoran community.

For more information about the program including a complete list of requirements, application materials, and costs, contact us:

CRISPAZ USA: 617-354-9645, crispaz@igc.org
CRISPAZ ES: 011-503-225-7549, pazsal@navegante.com.sv



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