

SALVANET

A Publication of Christians for Peace in El Salvador, CRISPAZ

Headed North: The Current Realities of Immigration for El Salvador

El Salvador is a country of migrants. According to Salvadoran government and UN sources, two to two and a half million Salvadorans live outside their home country. Because a large portion of these migrants travel without documents, it is difficult to find reliable statistics about how many people come and go and where they settle. What is known is that the majority, an estimated one to two million, have headed towards *el norte* – the United States.

According to international migrating projections cited in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report on El Salvador in 2001, the country will continue to report a net loss of 10,000 individuals per year. Why this constant flow of migrants? The trend of migration began to build momentum due to the repression and civil war of the late 1970s and 1980s. Momentum continued at the end of the armed conflict in 1992 as people found themselves in search of employment opportunities outside their country due to the poor economic conditions at home. At the same time, increasingly broad social networks facilitate migration by offering support for those settling abroad in finding places to live and work.

The process of obtaining a visa to enter the United States can take months, and most often ends with the applicant being rejected during their three minute personal interview which costs \$65. With hundreds of visa applicants interviewed every day, the requirements for approval have become increasingly strict,

forcing many people to choose the risk of undocumented immigration.

Those who travel *por tierra*, or by land, without legal documents to enter the U.S. confront many dangers. Many of these migrants contract a coyote, or guide, most of whom charge between \$4,000 and \$6,000 USD to help them navigate the route through Guatemala and Mexico and across the U.S. border. The money to pay the coyote may come from selling the family's land or possessions, or getting a loan from friends or family either here or already in the U.S. Nonetheless, not all migrants can afford to pay, and some venture the trip on their own.

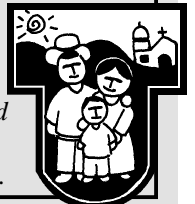
With or without coyotes, migrants are vulnerable to many potential hazards. They may be assaulted or robbed by groups that hide along routes frequented by migrants. Police and other officials often extort money and violate the rights of migrants. Women run a risk of being raped, either by assaultants, officials, or by the same coyote who is guiding them. Additionally there are the physical dangers of the intense heat and cold experienced while crossing the desert, lack of adequate food and water, potential drowning during river crossings, and accidents involving trains or other vehicles. Cases of migrants being abandoned in the desert by their coyotes have become more frequent in recent news reports, often resulting in dehydration and death.

September/October
2002

In this issue . . .

<i>National Reality</i>	
Current Realities of Immigration	1-2
<i>Wellsprings</i>	
Church and Immigrant Rights	3
<i>In Focus</i>	
Trying to Get Home	4
Train of Broken Dreams	5
<i>Global Connections</i>	
Immigration: Impact of Free Trade	6-7
<i>Crispaz Connections</i>	
A Mirror of Our Lives	8-9
<i>Letter to the Churches</i>	
Literacy for Reading Reality	10-11

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

All contributions are tax deductible.

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IMMIGRATION

It is impossible to know how many migrants die each year in their attempt to reach the U. S. Between 1998 and 2001, there were 1,113 registered deaths along the U.S.—Mexico border, the majority from dehydration in the desert. The majority of migrant deaths and disappearances are probably not registered. As more undocumented immigrants attempt to enter the U.S., the office of Immigration and Naturalization Services increased its budget to contract more Border Patrol agents and tighten border security. But rather than discouraging immigrants in their attempt to enter the United States, this strategy has only forced them to cross the border in even more remote and dangerous zones, resulting in even higher numbers of immigrant injuries and deaths.

Once in the United States, Salvadorans work at a variety of jobs. Women typically work in domestic services, such as house keeping and cooking. Men are usually employed as construction workers, gardeners, restaurant workers, or day laborers. Because most send a portion of their wages back home, Salvadorans working abroad are one of the principal supports for the nation's economy. Remittances sent to family members in El Salvador in 2001 amounted to \$1,900,000 USD, equivalent to 13% of the Gross Domestic Product. Dependency on income generated by compatriots living abroad means that U.S. immigration policy is definitive in the survival of the Salvadoran economy. The extension of the Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, following the 2001 earthquakes, gave an 18-month work permit to Salvadorans residing in the U.S. before February 13, 2001, regardless of their legal status. In September of 2002, President Bush extended the permission for another year, making the status valid until September of 2003.

Salvadorans working without legal status in the U.S. live with the constant fear of being apprehended by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and sent back to their country. *Bienvenidos a Casa*, or Welcome Home, a program run by Catholic Relief Services in San Salvador, receives Salvadorans who are deported from the United States and Mexico. According to recent statistics, they receive between 200 and 400 deportees each month, and a total of about 4,000 deportees per year.

Increased security concern following the September 11, 2001 attacks has had a ripple effect on immigration policy. More stringent border controls coupled with fear in the immigrant community has made the situation more difficult for all immigrants.

Because many Salvadorans depend on family or community connections to establish themselves abroad, they tend to settle in communities with people from their place of origin. These communities help new immigrants with the practical challenges of finding places to work and live, as well as providing social and cultural links. The Ministry of Foreign Relations reports that there are about 245 associations of Salvadorans abroad, more than half in Los Angeles. These associations organize celebrations of traditional customs, such as patron saints' feasts and typical Salvadoran Christmas festivities. They allow immigrants to celebrate their cultural identity and share that identity with new generations of Salvadorans being raised abroad. These associations also work to provide material support for projects in their home communities, working to collect funds to improve infrastructure, promote human development, and provide emergency relief.✚

Church Speaks Out on Immigrant Rights

The Sixth Annual Week Dedicated to the Immigrant was celebrated from September 1 through 7 in various sites around the country. Each day featured events aimed at opening discussion and raising consciousness about the reality of the migratory situation and advocacy for migrant rights. The following is a summary of church leaders' participation in the week.

During the Week Dedicated to the Immigrant, the Church took advantage of different spaces to approach the issue from the Christian viewpoint, delivering messages to invite reflection and generate concrete actions of solidarity with migrants. "All of us are migrants, transients," said the president of Caritas of El Salvador, Monsignor Eduardo Antonio Alas, during Sunday's celebration of the Eucharist. "The earth is of the Lord, for this reason we cannot say that someone doesn't belong," explained the prelate, reminding us that the human being is only an administrator and not the owner of the earth. "God has not created borders, customs, or migration laws," the Catholic bishop emphasized.

"Unfortunately, the poor travel without protection because the laws accuse them, because in passing the border they become like the wretched, without identity, without rights in an insensitive society that doesn't share," pointed out Monsignor Alas. In the same way the leader reflected that many times these people are deported to their lands "like criminals, returning to where they left nothing more than misery and need."

The president of Caritas for Latin America, Monsignor Gregorio Rosa Chávez, during a panel forum carried out in the diocese of Sonsonate entitled "The Church facing the problem of Migration," proclaimed that El Salvador is a country "that expels its children," rather than giving them the opportunities necessary for development, it encourages them to abandon their homes and consider the possibilities of success in other countries, principally the United States.

Monsignor Rosa Chávez explained that in the face of this problem, the Church proposes to work for an integral human development. This includes three elements: social, economic, and environmental, and involves also peace, justice, and solidarity. In this way, said Monsignor Rosa Chávez, the church speaks of "Human Ecology" and advocates that priority be given to family well-being, and that there be access to dignified work. It urges that "globalization" be at the service of the people, that the poor be protagonists of their own development, and have employment, education, and health.

Finally, Rosa Chávez urged the different social forces to work to improve the conditions of the migrants who pass through our country. "We must treat those who pass through our country in the same way that we want our compatriots to be treated in other countries," explained Monsignor Rosa, because in the end, he said, we are the hands of God.✙

Suggested Reading

Odyssey to the North

by Mario Bencastro

Decades of civil war in Central America, coupled with the need for manpower in the United States, have made the Hispanic immigrant a fixture in modern American life. This is one such story: Calixto, who journeys north "with his stomach empty but his soul full of hope." Showing both the heartbreak and the humor of life in a strange culture, award-winning author Mario Bencastro creates a caring portrait of Calixto as he seeks not only work, but safety from unjust persecution in his homeland. Bencastro deftly allows Calixto and his fellow immigrants to tell their own stories as they struggle to survive in the restaurant kitchens, bars, crowded tenements, and detention centers that become Calixto's proving grounds.

Published by Arte Publico Pr, 1999, List price \$12.95.

Tortilla Curtain

by T. Coraghessan Boyle

Men and women with brown faces and strong backs who risk everything to cross the Mexican border and invade the American Dream are the Okies of the 1990s. Two of them, Candido and America Rincon, have come to Southern California and are living in a makeshift camp deep in a ravine, fighting off starvation. At the top of Topanga Canyon, Los Angeles liberals Delaney and Kyra Mossbacher lead an ordered sushi-and-recycling existence in a newly gated hilltop community: he a sensitive nature writer, she an obsessive realtor. From the moment a freak accident brings Candido and Delaney into intimate contact, the two couples and their opposing worlds gradually intersect in what becomes a tragic-comedy of error and misunderstanding.

Published by Penguin USA, 1996 List price \$14.00.

Trying to Get Home: *Triste's* Story

How did you come to live in the United States? What was that experience like for you?

My family left El Salvador in 1981 because of the war. One of my aunts was living in the United States and offered to help us. My parents decided to go because they didn't see any future here. We flew from El Salvador to Mexico, and my aunt got a *coyote* for us. I was four. I remember us hiding, and I remember crossing a highway and my dad picking me up because I couldn't run anymore. And then after that, I didn't remember where I came from; I was so young, I didn't remember anything about El Salvador.

For my parents it was hard. They argued a lot; there wasn't a lot of money and they had to repay my aunt for the help she had given us. My dad had sold the house in El Salvador so we could leave; they sold everything, even their wedding rings. My parents always tried to do what was best for us. But as I grew up, I started hanging around with gang members, and I got into it, the gang life.

All I did was get drunk and go party, and I know I hurt other people. I wasn't using my head. One night in 1994 when I was drunk and running with the gang, I was shot. After that, I decided that I needed to change what I was doing. Three months later, I met a girl, and we started seeing each other. It was something that helped me to start leaving the gang. I started dedicating more time to the relationship. Then she told me she was pregnant, and that made me change my mind about the way I wanted to live.

I moved in with my girlfriend and her mom, but couldn't stop drinking, and we fought a lot. I got a job, since I wanted to be responsible and pay for my baby's needs. But when I got paid, I used the money to start drinking more.

You were arrested and charged with robbery, resisting arrest, and lewdness in a drug-related incident. How did the criminal justice system affect your immigration status?

I had my papers and was a permanent resident. The District Attorney and the public defender said that if I pled guilty to robbery, they would drop the other charges. I was confused, I didn't know anything about the law. I didn't really remember what had happened and didn't want to plead guilty, but they convinced me. I had no idea I could get deported.

After three and a half years in the penitentiary, I was released and spent two months in the immigration detention center. They asked me if I wanted to fight to reopen my residency papers. The public defender told me to say I wanted to get deported, and that as soon as I got to El Salvador I could work out my papers and be back within a year. So I listened to her, and they sent me to El Salvador. When it was time to leave, the immigration officials told me they had lost my phone

book and all my paperwork. They told me if I wanted them back, I had to wait another month. But I decided to leave because I didn't want to be detained any longer.

The last time I had been in El Salvador was in 1990 when we came back to get our U.S. residency papers together. We stayed with my cousin then, but that

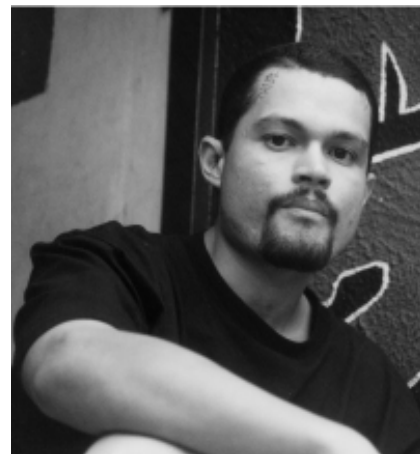
was 10 years ago, so when I came back I was lost. I didn't have any way to contact anybody.

I found a cousin of mine and lived with her for a little while, but it didn't work out for long. I ended up living out on the streets. The only way I knew how to survive was hanging around with the gangs. I wasn't into doing all the gang stuff, I just needed to know where I could sleep and not be alone. I didn't know what to do, and I started drinking again.

After a while, I decided to try to go back to the U.S. *por tierra* (by land) and I took off with another friend of mine. But when we got to Mexico, we ran into the police, and they stole our money. They knew we were immigrants without papers and told us to give them all our money if we didn't want them to turn us in. So we had to return to El Salvador, back to the streets.

Eventually, you decided to change your life and joined the Generation XXI youth movement in Mejicanos. But even after a year of sobriety, violence continues to plague your life. You were shot three times in an act of random street violence in April. How do you sustain your hope for the future?

I'm changing my life; I don't want to die from being an alcoholic. I've been trying to get back to the U.S. legally, but according to the law, I have to be outside the U.S. for five years before I can go back. I want to go back because my family is there, especially my mom and my child. The U.S. is my home; I grew up there and that's where I feel like I fit in. I love my country, El Salvador, and if my family was here, I think I'd rather stay. But I'm alone here. Right now I'm just passing my time until the five years are up. But now that I'm not drinking any more, I'm thinking with my head, trying to reopen my immigration papers so that when my time is up, I can go back and be with my family. ❖



Hugo Omar Barahona, also known as "Triste"

Train of Broken Dreams: Aurelio's Story

Aurelio Omar Rodríguez, at the age of 26, lost both of his legs in his attempt to migrate from El Salvador to the United States. Originally from Guazapa, department of Cuscatlán, Aurelio moved to San Salvador at the end of the civil war. He graduated from the Public Security Academy at the age of 19 and began working as a member of the National Civilian Police.

Despite his steady job, Aurelio fell into debt, overwhelmed by the economic situation that leaves so many Salvadoran citizens in the same desperation. He worried about covering not only the needs of his wife and 18-month-old daughter, but also helping his single mother and his brothers and sisters. As his financial problems became more serious, he decided, like so many others, to try to go to the United States.

His first attempt was to get a visa through the U.S. embassy. After filling out the application and paying his fee of \$65, Aurelio waited for his interview on September 25 of last year. When the day arrived, his application was rejected by the consular officer in less than three minutes.

Aurelio was disappointed and disillusioned, but had made up his mind to leave. He decided to go *mojado*, or “wet,” the term used for those who travel over land to enter the United States without legal papers. He took a six-month leave from his job as a policeman and began to look for a coyote, or guide, who would help him navigate the borders, deserts, police checks, and other dangers of the trip, but those he found wanted to charge him at least \$4,000.

Aurelio couldn't come up with the money to pay a coyote, seeing that his financial situation was the very reason he needed to go to the United States. He tried to get loans and asked friends to help him, but found no support. He decided that he would make the trip alone.

When he left his family behind on December 27, 2001, Aurelio took with him only 250 colones, about \$29. In his backpack he carried a change of clothes, a sweater, a flashlight, a toothbrush, and his *cedula*, the national document of identification. He spent 150 colones, more than half of his money for the trip, on the bus ticket that would get him to Tecún Umán, the Guatemalan border with Mexico.

With now only 100 colones, or about \$12, he crossed the river into Mexico on a rubber raft crowded by other undocumented immigrants headed for the same destination.

By asking and following the others, he found the tracks for the train that would carry him through the length of Mexico to the border with the United States.

To board the train without being caught, he waited for it to start moving, and, once half of the cars had passed, grabbed onto a ladder on one of the platforms and hauled himself up. For two days and nights, Aurelio alternated between jumping trains, riding on the platforms, and hiding in the ditches and weeds along the train tracks.

Fear of being caught by the police kept him from venturing into the towns to ask for food. He ate one meal, some fried fish and a couple of tortillas offered to him by a woman living near the tracks.

At 5:30 in the morning on December 30, Aurelio made an attempt to jump a train heading out of the state of Chiapas. As he grabbed the ladder, his hands slipped, and he couldn't pull himself up. The train dragged him, and his legs were pulled onto the tracks where they were run over by the steel wheels of the train.

Mexican policemen found Aurelio by the side of the tracks, with parts of both of his legs amputated. They took him to the hospital in the back of one of their pick-up trucks when the Red Cross ambulance failed to show. Aurelio survived the accident and was hospitalized in Mexico for 17 days. On January 17, he was brought back to El Salvador with the help of several organizations.

Aurelio is currently recovering with his family. He tells his story so that others might understand the risks involved in choosing the path that he chose. He is hoping to write a book about his experiences.✚



Aurelio with his wife, Carolina, and daughter, Katya.

Immigration: the Impact of Free Trade

by Roberto Góchez, Center for Labor Studies and Support, CEAL

The current Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) do not negotiate trade in a way that contributes to equity, sustainability, or national development between and among the countries involved. These agreements subscribe to the logic of the neo-liberal model; thus, they limit national development policies, ignore the economic imbalance among the countries involved, and exclude any social agenda. Further, they elevate the rights of investors above domestic laws, leaving investors bound only by international trade laws.

The question is not whether to subscribe to a trade agreement or whether to isolate (one's nation) from the rest of the world. Interestingly, these have been the arguments used to disparage those who oppose the FTAs. The reality is that each country (in this case El Salvador) should look to improve the benefits it receives from the flow of trade and investment. Additionally, the country must find a way to insert itself into the international economy—it must look for trade agreements that are beneficial and it must look for ways to improve relations with the United States.

The real challenge is identifying those agreements that best contribute to national development, social equality, and socio-environmental sustainability. The design of the FTAs does not meet the hopes and expectations of most sectors of society because the majority has been excluded systematically from the agreements. These sectors receive little or no benefit from the FTAs, and in fact may suffer negative consequences as a result of the treaties.

The negative effects of the FTAs cannot be mitigated simply by adding a social clause (protecting labor, environment, or immigration). If the existing principles and standards of the agreements are left intact, the result of the FTAs will continue to be negative and exclusionary.

Aware of these concerns, it is important to consider the possible effects of the FTAs on immigration, not all of which may be obvious. (TARA: only outline point “a” relates to immigration, the other is a critique about imbalance among signer nations. Maybe we should take out the outline letters)

a. The first negative impact of the FTAs is their exclusion of the issue of immigration. The agreements do not consider immigrant rights, nor do they include policies that would legalize emigrants who have left for another country. There are no rules about immigration for economic reasons. The FTAs do not even establish mechanisms to guarantee just treatment of migrants. And they definitely do not offer people the free movement or “national treatment”¹ that is offered to the large companies.

This means that under the FTAs, the rights of large companies carry more weight than the rights of immigrants. A Free Trade Agreement with the United States that follows this pattern and fails to incorporate immigration concerns would be particularly serious for El Salvador, given that one of this country's principal exports is people—those who leave looking for a better life.

b. The FTAs do not account for the inherent imbalance between the different countries that are involved. Rather they apply “National Treatment”¹ and reciprocity between very unequal countries. This gives an advantage to the more developed countries, the transnational companies, and to the national oligopolies² in the export sector. This can have very negative effects on employment and on the quality of life.

The FTAs limit each country's ability to regulate the flow of trade and investment because any prohibition or regulation requires a great deal of political policy work that may be defined as an impediment to job creation. For example, any of these policies may hasten the demise of the national system of production and have a negative effect on employment: The prohibition of fulfillment requirements for investors, companies and foreign service providers; the establishment of regulations of origin that do not demand any level of national content; the exemption of local presence for the foreign service providers; the customs tax deduction; and the complete opening of public purchases to foreign capital.

As they are currently structured, the FTAs will create some jobs. However, this may not be enough to

¹ “National Treatment” treats transnational businesses and local/domestic businesses as equals.

compensate for the loss a country will endure upon applying reciprocity in trade concessions and standards.

If the FTAs do not establish obligations for capital, some sectors will take advantage of the opportunity to attract investment, reduce costs, and make themselves more competitive. This may result in the deterioration of environmental conditions, labor practices, and social services.

These declining conditions could result in increased migratory flow. This problem will be compounded by the fact that most developed nations protect their economies by restricting migration from underdeveloped countries.

c. The FTAs have not established funds to address, minimize, or repair the damage in those countries or sectors that are affected negatively by these changes. A transfer of resources from the benefited sectors to the affected sectors would be key in order to redistribute the costs and benefits of the FTAs in a more equitable way.

Under the FTAs, and especially the customs tax deductions, the conditions of crisis, poverty, and exclusion in rural areas will become more noticeable. This will result in a worsening of current migration from rural areas to the cities and to the United States.

d. In a proposed Free Trade Agreement with the United States, establishment of a clause that facilitates migration for business people would be a direct discrimination against Salvadoran emigrants. This is one way in which benefits are awarded to a sector that is already in an advantageous position (business people), while the emigrants (who are more vulnerable) are abandoned and subject to the arbitrary laws of other governments.♣

² Oligopoly: A market condition in which sellers are so few that the actions of any one of them will materially affect price and have a measurable impact on competitors.

What is the SIP?

SIP= Summer Immersion Program

The CRISPAZ Summer Immersion Program provides interns with an intensive learning and service experience in a poor community in El Salvador.

What do SIP interns do?

Interns live with Salvadoran families and accompany them in their daily life and work. Possible opportunities include:

- Work in a day care center
- Help facilitate youth activities
- Work on an organic farm
- Accompany a pastoral team
- Work with union organizers

Apply now!

Dates for the 2003 SIP Program are

June 1 to August 15

Participation Fee: \$1500 USD

Application Deadline: February 1

Acceptance notification by March 15

We expect interns to fundraise for their expenses.

Some scholarship funds may be available.

For more information, call our Boston office at 617-445-5115 or e-mail the El Salvador staff at pazsal@integra.com.sv.



This year's SIP participants: (top l-r) Callie Kozlak, Ben Krause, Chris Ortman, Sydney Frey, SIP coordinator Erin Yost, Susan Kleiman; in center, Salvadoran partner Tita Miranda; (bottom l-r) Anna Hoekstra, CVP coordinator Miranda Buffam, Kelli Oborn.

Un Espejo de Nuestras Vidas: A Mirror of Our Lives

The following are reflections from participants in this year's Summer Immersion Program. On the opposite page read about who they are and what they did this summer.

These three months have been the most educational of my life. Not only did I learn about Salvadoran culture and the Spanish language, I learned more about the following: myself, God, relationships, love, people, faith, children, soccer, economics, death, violence, peace, hope, compassion, justice, crying, laughing, flies, washing clothes by hand, buses, dust, rain, heat, frustration, cold, animals, hammocks, sweat, tortillas, pupusas, community, anger, joy and humility (not in any specific order, although humility really sticks out). What I learned from my first days in Hacienda Vieja was that this was not about what I was doing or if I was useful or if I was supposed to be there, so much as how I was living there. Was I listening, was I caring, was I participating in daily life, was I accompanying the people? I learned a lot from the children in the kindergarten, who, although at times did not understand things, were willing to ask the questions necessary to understand or accept the mystery of not knowing. -- Anna Hoekstra

This has been one of the most memorable experiences of my life, and despite a couple of bumps in the road, I wouldn't trade it for anything. I have learned so much from the people here about hard work, perseverance, and the things that really matter most in life. Of course, there are some things I probably won't miss too much - bathing out of a giant oil barrel, eating the same thing every single day, sleeping with a giant mosquito net all around me, having guys make strange noises and whistle when I walk by, etc. But there are a whole lot more things that I will miss - the breathtaking views all around my community, the kindergarteners saying in unison every morning "Buenos Dias Señorita Susana" with big smiles on their faces, the looks on my students faces when they finally understand what I'm teaching them, the late night chats with my host mom, etc. I have been so blessed to have been taken in by my community and loved as a daughter, sister, teacher and friend.

-- Susan Kleiman

As I prepared to leave my community of La Florida, the best part was being able to visit many of the homes where I worked over the summer. To spend a couple hours talking with Doña Jesus de la Paz as she told me about her never-ending back pain and the joy that her flower garden brings the community, to share an anona (some kind of strange fruit) with Don Felipe as he told of his nights being tortured in the war and then shared how much our friendship meant to him, to watch the sunset with Chloe and Lindford remembering the summer and talking about the changes that are coming. For me, an experience this rich leaves you dying to share it with everyone but timid to try for fear of not doing it justice, of somehow losing a grip on the moments, and leaving the other person confused and perhaps even offended. But I want us all to share with each other even though it may be awkward or challenging. One thing I learned from El Salvador is that we are all people, but the only way to realize that is if we talk to each other. If we can't see every person as our neighbor, then how will we ever find the courage and the sacrifice to love our neighbors as ourselves?

-- Benjamin Krause

My time in El Salvador was enough to rock me out of my middle-class life and force me to look at the rest of the world. We are in a very chaotic, violent period today. We are enlightened, but people still starve. We are modern, but 2 billion of us don't have clean, running water. We are civilized, but many are killed every day. As a woman with resources to earn a professional degree, I am part of an elite, privileged minority. Do I hold power? Yes, I hold plenty of power. Jesus says in Luke 12:48: *From everyone that has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.* As citizens of the richest and most powerful nation in the world, much has been given to us; what will we do with it? What will I do with what has been given to me? What will I do with what I know? Gandhi once said that *"love is the strongest force the world possesses and yet it is the humblest imaginable."* I want a society where people are loved, safe, and well-fed and where the earth can preserve its equilibrium. It is a huge task. But those of us in power, and yes that is us, must start to lay down that power, open our eyes not only to the world around us but to the person next to us, and LOVE.

-- Kelli Oborn

Jesus says in Luke 12:48:
"From everyone that has
been given much, much
will be demanded; and
from the one who has
been entrusted with
much, much more will be
asked." As citizens of the
richest and most powerful
nation in the world, much
has been given to us; what
will we do with it?

Every morning there was so much life all around me. It was just another day for the Salvadorans, but for me it was a new day with so many lessons to be learned. In two and a half months, I learned about the current economic and political conditions, Salvadoran war history, statistics, tortilla-making, and more Spanish. I saw a lot of shanties, factories, people selling food in the street, old school buses, smog, green mountains, trash, and people living in indescribable conditions. I heard a lot of stories about infidelity, family members who have passed away, the war, sick children, drunks in the street, crime, and la lucha de vida (struggle of life). I was able to be an outlet for my friends. We sat and they shared their stories of life with me. Don Manuel told me before I left, "Tu eres un espejo de nuestras vidas." "You are a mirror of our lives." I know that God called me there, and now She calls me back here to carry out the reverse mission of sharing the experience of the incredible human spirit and truth I discovered in the Salvadorans. Going to El Salvador was challenging, but now I face a bigger challenge, applying that same human spirit I discovered to the way I treat people and choose to live my own life.

-- Callie Kozlak

Sydney Frey came to the SIP after spending a semester studying in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua with the Center for Global Education. During the summer, Sydney lived in the community of El Zapote, Cabañas, and accompanied ecological workshops in the nearby community of Santa Marta. She attended afternoon pottery workshops and got to know some of the youth active in the Committee Against AIDS (CoCoSi). Currently, Syd is studying a semester in Cuba. In January, she will return to Fairfield University in Connecticut to complete her degree.

Anna Hoekstra, from Grand Rapids, Michigan, spent her summer in La Hacienda Vieja, Cabañas. She worked mornings in the kindergarten and three afternoons a week played with the women's soccer team. Anna also helped organize a community clean up day with the local youth group. She is staying on as a long-term volunteer with CRISPAZ and is studying Spanish and investigating different environmental projects in El Salvador. Anna has a degree in environmental studies and hopes to work in a community where she can use her skills and experience.

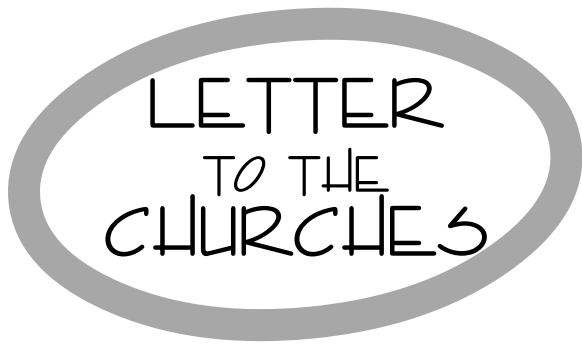
Susan Kleiman worked in the kindergarten and taught English classes to 7th through 10th graders in La Ciudadela Guillermo Ungo in the Suchitoto zone. During the summer, she played in a softball tournament as a member of the 9th grade girls team and spent her mornings before class training for a marathon! Susan is currently a sophomore at Georgetown University and plans to spend next summer studying Spanish in Quito, Ecuador.

Callie Kozlak spent the summer in Agua Escondida, La Libertad, worked in the kindergarten from 8 to 11 each morning. Callie also attended meetings of the Christian Base Community in her community. In June, Callie visited a community in Morazán with the Fundación Hermano Mercedes Ruiz (FUNDAHMER), a CRISPAZ partner organization. Callie is a junior at Boston College and has already had the opportunity to share her experience with friends and family members.

Benjamin Krause, a senior at Xavier University, worked with the Permaculture Institute in La Florida, La Libertad. Ben was trained in the principles of permaculture and helped construct rainwater collection tanks and composting worm bins. Ben learned about community organization and accompanied a women's project constructing chicken coops. He spent evenings playing soccer with young men in the community. Back in the U.S., Ben is trying to bring fair trade coffee to Xavier's campus.

Kelli Oborn was placed in the community of San Rafael, Cuscatlán. She spent June and July working in the office of the Association for the Development and Defense of Women (APDM) in Suchitoto and accompanying the youth group of San Rafael, sponsored by the Emmanuel Baptist Church. She shared some of her experience with her husband, Shane, during his visit in July. Kelli hopes to return in the future and has already decided that her Masters thesis will focus on El Salvador! She is a graduate student at the University of Minnesota.

Chris Ortman lived in Jardines de Colon, La Libertad. He accompanied the community's pastoral team, literacy class, youth group, housing construction project, and a microcredit project. Chris also worked with the Fundación Hermano Mercedes Ruiz (FUNDAHMER) nutrition project one or two mornings a week. Chris will be completing his studies at Xavier University this year and hopes to return to Latin America after graduation.



from El Salvador

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.

Literacy for Reading Reality: A Community Perspective on Free Trade Agreements

From the Zonacosta Community Bulletin:

An illiterate person is someone who when they open a book they see a bunch of figures hooked together, and looking at them say: "Who knows what this means. I cannot decipher these figures". But once this person goes to school and learns to read and write they begin to understand little by little.

The same thing happens with reality illiterates. They see the news on the television, they listen to the news on the radio and read news in the newspapers and in the end they see, listen and read without understanding anything and they say: "Who knows what they are trying to say with all this, there are a whole bunch of stories but I can't decipher how they are hooked up". That's why it is so important to begin literacy classes in the communities to read reality, to have schools that teach us how to understand what is happening in our reality, what happens to us and then we can't understand it. We have to understand what is happening to us. That's why we proclaim the urgency for reality literacy.

The first phrase we want to teach is from Colin Powell, United States Secretary of State who on January 24, 2002 pronounced: "Our objective with the FTAA is to guarantee that North American corporations have control over a territory from the Artic Pole to Antarctica, free access without any obstacles or difficulties for our products, services, technology and capital, throughout the hemisphere."

This phrase alone helps us understand a lot about what we hear, read and see in our reality. In El Salvador there is constant talk about reactivating the Cutuco Port, restoring the Coastal Highway, reactivating train service and how much we need a peripheral ring or beltway in San Salvador. All of this work will generate employment that will result in beautiful highways, less traffic jams and we will appear to be a modern country, advanced and prosperous. But we continue not to understand if we cannot read Colin Powell's phrase: in reality all of this is for North American corporations that want, without any obstacle, to transfer their products from the north pole to the south pole.

The news about benefits from the FTAs (Free Trade Agreements) buzz in our ears. It appears that, like magic, from one day to the next we will be a developed country. But what can El Salvador do with free trade? The only thing we export is misery. Almost three million Salvadorans are in the United States of North America and the majority are there illegally. They left for necessity, for misery, and that's the only thing we can export and it continues to be illegal. The only thing they take with them are a few snacks for the road so they can arrive alive. So we continue without understanding the reality. Only if we can read Colin Powell's phrase we know that this agreement is for his products.

We hear and we see that trade tariffs (customs taxes) must be eliminated from countries' borders. Sounds good, but we do not know who that favors. Seeing

that the poor do not produce anything for exportation, we are not favored at all. There are some Salvadorans that import many things, like transgenetic seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and more. They could be favored, but we ask ourselves: why, if these Salvadorans are so rich—they already own everything—why do they want more benefits? The rest of the corporations are from other countries and they will benefit. And we continue not understanding what the great advantage will be. Only if we have read Colin Powell's phrase can we understand that it's his corporations that will benefit by not having to pay taxes to El Salvador. Taxes that could be used to pay for medicines and teachers for the poor.

That's also how the famous "maquilas" and "free trade zones" (where companies do not pay taxes) come to us, they come to occupy the hands of the poor that are still here because they have not yet been able to emigrate. They pay these hands a salary of hunger and take advantage of free trade. There are people in our country who now know where the beltway is going to pass and are buying up the land so that more maquilas can be installed there later, on this magnificent highway with its splendid access.

In light of the fact that everything is a function of Colin Powell's words, no one is thinking about investment for production. There is no product that produces as much profit as illegal emigration by necessity. In 2001 illegal emigration produced more than two billion dollars in family remittances. These green bills come to the bankers who absorb them like water to the thirsty.

So, we want more emigrants and for those who have not yet understood this message we can offer them the delight of the maquilas. Or wasn't it Francisco Flores who said he wanted to convert our country into a huge maquila to solve the problem of unemployment? For the moment we are happy that our compatriots in the North are going to be able to stay longer since there will have to be more factories built in order to absorb so many hands of the poor with minimum salaries.

But in reality literacy there are more words to learn. The following question will help us. What instruments will be used to carry out the FTAA? The instruments are the WTO (World Trade Organization), the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund). These organisms provide the funds, or better put, they provide loans for us to do what they have decided, mortgage our countries even more and charge the interests due.

Nevertheless, there are a few things that are not contemplated in the FTAA plan. For example: health care for the poor, education for the poor and dignified work for the poor. And these are the things the poor feel. Dengue continues to affect us like an epidemic. While they discuss whether the deaths are from negligence or administrative mistakes, there continue to be more victims. There have been more than 1,500 cases of classic dengue and 120 of hemorrhagic dengue and 7 children have died. And this happens at the same time that there is a contingent of Cuban doctors and medical technicians, with all their experience, offer to come here free of charge to combat dengue and are denied entry. The poor feel this because it is their children that die. And we haven't even talked about the major cause of infant mortality which is diarrhea. And while the Omsbudperson for the defense of human rights, Beatriz de Carrillo, speaks out about the right to health care and denounces the growing privatization of health care as denying that right to the poor, she receives anonymous death threats and is threatened by high officials (published in an interview in Channel 12's "Interview of the Day").

In the last few weeks four youths were assassinated in street fights. We fill the jails up with youths because we want the youth that kill to be considered adults. That way the sentences will be more drastic! And education! Soon we will have more jails than schools for the youth. But that could also offer better security to Colin Powell's corporations. ❖



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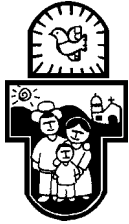
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What's that red slip in my CRISPAZ mailing?

We are in the process of a periodic cleaning of our mailing list. If you received a red notice titled,
We will miss you. Will you miss us?

it means that we have not heard from you in the last two years.

Although CRISPAZ has no membership dues, we rely on contributions from people like you who support our programs. We are happy to share our materials with anyone interested in solidarity with El Salvador. But we want to know that our resources are being used.

So we need to hear from you or we will remove your name from the mailing list. Complete and return the red slip in the enclosed envelope. We would appreciate any contribution that you'd care to make, but returning the form is enough to keep you on our list so you will continue to receive *SalvaNet* and our other updates.

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